

# Sonic Modernities in the Malay World

# Verhandelingen van het Koninklijk Instituut voor Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde

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# Sonic Modernities in the Malay World

A History of Popular Music, Social Distinction  
and Novel Lifestyles (1930s–2000s)

*Edited by*

Bart Barendregt



B R I L L

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## CHAPTER ONE

### SONIC HISTORIES IN A SOUTHEAST ASIAN CONTEXT

Bart Barendregt

#### *A History of the Popular*

This is a compilation of papers written at various points over the last decade. Some of the chapters were first presented in 2003, as drafts at the workshop ‘Southeast Asian Pop Music in a Comparative Perspective’, organized by the Royal Netherlands Institute of Southeast Asian and Caribbean Studies (KITLV). Another set of papers has been selected from contributions to a launch event in early 2011 hosted by NWO (The Netherlands Organisation for Scientific Research) for the funded research project ‘Articulation of Modernity’. This project analyses the interplay between the production of popular music, shifting ideas of the modern and, in its aftermath, processes of social differentiation in twentieth-century Southeast Asia.<sup>1</sup> This event, a workshop held in Jakarta under the title *And the Beat Goes On...*, was a first venture into what has become the main tenet of our research programme: rewriting Southeast Asia’s twentieth century from the perspective of popular music makers, the entertainment industry and its ever changing audiences. Auditory history is also central to this volume. I want to thank all of those who have been involved in the above-mentioned meetings, and also those whose contributions did not ultimately find their way into this volume. This was certainly not due to a lack of insight or engagement with the issues, but rather the fact that they were addressing topics that differed from the main focus of this volume or had less emphasis on long-term transformations.

The study of the popular is vulnerable to a common pitfall; that is to say, more often than not such scholarship is obsessed with the contemporary, the now spectacular, the hip and the novel, at the cost of ignoring the very historical dimensions of such phenomena. Popular music studies

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<sup>1</sup> Parts of this introductory chapter are inspired by the initial proposal written for this research project, which was co-authored with Peter Keppy and commented upon by Henk Schulte Nordholt and Patricia Spyer. I am grateful to all three for letting me make use of their thoughts.

have been no exception, with the majority adopting a synchronic approach and dealing with the present state of things (Hamm 2004). While targeting historical depth here, we realize that the essays presented in this volume provide a necessarily incomplete view of how popular music and associated lifestyles in insular Southeast Asia have developed over the past century. Our project is ambitious in scope; it attempts to cover a whole century of music, starting from the first Southeast Asian recordings made in 1902/1903, all the way through to the mid-2000s. At the same time, it tries to offer a glimpse of the current state of the entertainment industry in part of the region (more on the choice and demarcation of the region below). But then, this book promises only a start and the appearance of more historically oriented analyses of Southeast Asian popular music are anticipated in the coming years.

We situate Southeast Asian popular music here in specific socio-historical settings, hoping that a focus on popular culture and history may shed light on how some people in a particular part of the world have been witnessing the emergence of all things modern. We are obviously not the first to do so, although our very focus on the modern in relation to the popular and new social formations may be perceived as innovative.<sup>2</sup>

A historical approach to popular culture has been manifest ever since the 'cultural turn' in history;<sup>3</sup> an interest which may be traced to early publications such as those of Hobsbawm (1959) on the *Jazz Scene*, its publics and the larger economy the music was part of. His and other works break with the 'drum and trumpet' history then current. They dismiss its sole focus on the political and the economic while neglecting culture, and leaving out ordinary people altogether. In its stead, a 'history of below' (cf. Samuel 1981) is advocated that prioritizes the local rather than the national, prefers the domestic over the public and the popular over the state. Clearly, an interest in popular culture and history also has its parallels, even forebears, in other disciplines such as sociology, art history, anthropology and literature studies, and may be said to have culminated in the early 1960s into the new field of 'cultural studies'. Hogart, Thompson

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<sup>2</sup> At this stage it is necessary to recognize the pioneering work of a number of historians working on the region itself, including the likes of William Frederick (1982) and especially Craig Lockard's (1998) *Dance of life*. Like the present work, Lockard targets a comprehensive view of the region that, in fact, is even more inclusive than ours here. However, his work specifically addresses cultural politics and is, overall, more concerned with artists and producers than with audiences and consumers, or the wider industry they are both shaping and shaped by.

<sup>3</sup> See Burke (2004) for an overview.

and Williams were interested in the tremendous postwar transformations of class-based English society and, in historically tracing these changes in the everyday domain, they tried to recover the experience and agency of a majority normally ignored in academic discourse. In their view, a study of 'plebeian', 'mass' or 'popular' culture made no sense, unless studied over a considerable historical period and thereby paying due attention to the larger structures they were part of, although opinions clearly differed over the extent to which the popular classes shaped or, rather, were bearers of such structures.<sup>4</sup> Questions about the extent to which man is able to make his own history increases once the focus moves to eras closer to our own (and in contrast to the seventeenth and eighteenth century working class cultures often studied by these early 'popular historians'). With the huge shifts in (media) technology and the rise of cultural industries from the 1920s onwards, popular culture is at once very different from the commonly shared practices preceding it.<sup>5</sup> Some of these transformations have been chronicled by later cultural studies scholars such as John Storey (2003), who shows how the concept of popular culture, once invented in the late eighteenth century, went through various stages and has been adapted to different means and for various political agendas. But overall, historical studies of the popular still tend to be few in number, Eurocentric in character and mostly focus on specific time frames. In addition, much of what today lives by the name of cultural studies has become notoriously ahistorical. There are favourable exceptions though, and the work by authors such as Grossberg, Gilroy and Lipsitz strongly emphasizes the importance of looking into history when studying the popular. Grossberg's (1992) *We gotta get out of this place*, for example, illustrates how rock music may be treated as a way into relations of culture and power in postwar USA. A historical study of rock culture, a genre conventionally depicted as transgressive and subversive, may help to understand it as part of the particular American liberal consensus model so prevalent after the war, in which

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<sup>4</sup> For a discussion of various approaches to structure and agency in these cultural studies, see Hall (1980).

<sup>5</sup> The term 'popular' originally designated the notion of 'belonging to the people'. Various authors have problematized the notion; among them Peter Burke (1981) who states that once the people or the popular are deemed to become everyone minus an elite, we run the risk of homogenizing our analytical categories, thus shaping a singular popular culture that seemingly works for all. Raymond Williams similarly acknowledges the reifying power of concepts such as 'the popular' or 'the mass', which retain negative connotations of the low, the vulgar and thus relegate the majority of society to a mob status. A more neutral interpretation of popular culture, then, is that of 'widely appreciated', and 'away from a top-down perspective,' referring to people's own views (R. Williams 1976).

youths appropriated music to indeed challenge but also perfectly stay within the constraints of this ideological formation. Also Lipsitz' (2007) 'hidden histories of popular music' do away with conventional American historiography and its emphasis on the modern metropolis, nationalism and individual genius. In its place is a focus on rural communities, black subaltern conscious and other temporalities, spaces and subjects hitherto silenced in mainstream history. Furthermore, cultural-historical approaches have been taken up by music scholars such as DeNora's (1997) work on the social, organizational and cultural structure of Vienna's musical world during the 1790s, or the essays collected in the *Popular Music History* journal (since 2004). Worthwhile mentioning in this respect, is pioneering work of a more popular scientific character, including the works by Greil Marcus (1989) on 'pop's secret history' and John Leland's (2005) 'history of Hip', both of whom manage to show how a focus on popular music may indeed provide us with alternative readings of the past.

The idea for the current compilation is clearly inspired by some of the works mentioned above and sets out to do what has become the central tenet of our Leiden based *Articulating Modernity* project; studying Southeast Asian history by means of focusing on popular music practices. The times are a-changing, is an important motif of (also) many of the Southeast Asian songs described in this volume, and we strongly believe that these songs and sounds, the singers and musicians that performed them, the audiences they addressed, and importantly the musical life worlds they were simply part of, can tell us something the official history of the region often cannot. This introduction, then, serves to signal some prominent themes and trends in the historical ethnography of the popular in Southeast Asia's twentieth century and to connect the various essays to the volume's major topics: the modern, the popular and emergent social formations throughout the Southeast Asian region. Let us first explain why we think modernity as a discursive concept is so beneficial for our understanding of Southeast Asia's twentieth century.

### *Modern Sounds*

Modernity constitutes a dynamic field of practices and ambivalent understandings regarding progress, social change, novelty, technology, and human agency. Rather than an essentialized Euro-American model of modernity, from which other 'second' or 'incomplete' modernities derive, we aim here to track distinct genealogies of modernity, much in line with insights from the emergent field of alternative or multiple modernities

(e.g. Gaonkar 1999; Eisenstadt 2000; Hefner 1998; for more recent discussions, see Wagner 2012). However, in offering concrete case studies we hope to move beyond the sometimes meagre conceptualization of what the modern stands for in such alternative schemes.<sup>6</sup> We do so by studying modernity relationally and situationally within localized and time-bound debates (Geschiere, Meyer and Pels 2008), investigating what words were being used in daily discourse, what it looked like and especially what it sounded like to the men and women in the street and back at home. Similarly, popular songs ‘may be principally about personal feelings and relationships, but these may be conveyed by description and by analogy, in contexts relating to place and time, youth and age, aspiration and rejection, hope and nostalgia, peace and war, success and failure. They also draw upon the material world, whether it is one historically of bicycles or automobiles, telephones or typewriters’ (Oliver 2004:17).

This volume’s innovation lies in investigating the articulation of modernity through popular music in the context of two transitional periods in modern Southeast Asian history: from the late colonial state to recent nation states (i.e. 1920s-1960s) and from the heyday of authoritarian rule to emergent democracies (roughly 1970s-2000s), although the outcome of these transformations clearly differs from one society to the other. Conventional historiography of the region usually concentrates on particular periods. For Indonesia, for instance, this implies a segmentation of history into ‘the late colonial period’, followed by the ‘Japanese occupation’, ‘the Revolution’ and ‘Independence’. Recent history writing focused on Indonesia, the largest country under study here, tends to differentiate between the period of the New Order, followed in 1998 by a separate era called Reformasi. The problem with such compartmentalization is that it obscures complex processes of continuity and change extending from one era to the next, and it is too much driven by state formulated agendas.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Traditionally, Multiple Modernities scholars have been interested in variation and continuity, criticizing what they see as the acultural idea of convergence held dear by many modernization theorists. The latter, mostly following the work of Talcott Parsons, have stressed the fundamental difference between the key institutions of a premodern and modern formation, while being less interested in cultural or geographical variety as such. Volker Schmidt (2010) rightfully points out that, in fact, both paradigms focus on different (though related) phenomena, with adherents of the multiple modernities paradigm being better equipped to study the cultural variation that we also propose to do here, rather than looking at varieties within the political sub system as, unfortunately, most of such studies have done so far.

<sup>7</sup> An alternative approach was successfully practiced by the NIOD Institute for War, Holocaust and Genocide Studies project *Indonesia Across Orders* that focused on political and economic transitions from the 1930s to the 1950s (Lindblad 2008).

Recent historiographical work on Southeast Asia's twentieth century has not surprisingly started to problematize such nation-centred narratives, trying to capture border crossing ideas and including actors that may have been politically or economically marginal to the work of history but were by no means insignificant from a cultural perspective. The central thesis of such work is that for many Southeast Asians entering the postcolonial era, it is the appeal of 'modernity', more specifically 'modern lifestyles', rather than the sort of abstract notion the nation state usually is to many.<sup>8</sup> Joel Kahn (2001, 2003), for example, urges us to move away from the 'exemplary modernity' as formulated in governmental agendas or intellectualistic debates, instead paying due attention to alternative conceptions of modernity as they surface in the realm of the popular and the everyday. Struggles over the meanings of modernity, he argues, are nowhere as explicit as in the realm of the entertainment industry. In its constant urge to produce ever new fashions, lifestyles and markets, we find a glimpse of how and why people have taken up ideas of the modern, how it is made, unmade and remade, paying ample attention to how such reconfigurations may serve various claims and are constantly haunted by yet others.

Studies of fashion and gender in Asia show how people experimented with the new and modern just as early as Europeans did (Weinbaum et al. 2008; Schulte Nordholt 2009, 2011; Taylor 2012). Similarly, two fascinating accounts on jazz in East Asia by Jones (2001) and Atkins (2001),<sup>9</sup> do away with the myth of the appropriation of US jazz as just a token of belated modernity. Rather, they show that Chinese and Japanese artists and entrepreneurs experimented with jazz almost simultaneously with their peers in the West, thus localizing and authenticating what was considered by all means a modern genre. Focusing on popular music, then, may offer insights into the particular historical trajectories of modernity in specific urban settings, unravelling what Hildred Geertz (1963) dubbed in relation to Indonesia as the emergence of a new 'metropolitan superculture'.

Illiteracy rates in Southeast Asia were long high and it seems that through mass media, audiovisual technologies, the gramophone, radio,

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<sup>8</sup> That said, Southeast Asian nation states have generally been quite successful at monopolizing the meaning of what is to be considered modern or not, using amongst other things extensive development programmes, state-run media and iconic technologies to convince citizens to be part of what increasingly is a secular neoliberal future.

<sup>9</sup> See also Peter Keppy's forthcoming work on Southeast Asia's 'jazz age' within our Leiden project.

television, cinema, audiocassettes and CDs, music reached larger, more socially differentiated audiences – even across national borders – than print media did. Music, by its nature, is suitable for expressing new styles while simultaneously connecting the familiar with the new, the foreign with the local (Adorno, Leppert and Gillespie 2002). So popular music is made to sound modern through articulating different musical elements into novel forms. This can be by the use of new technologies, but also by hybridization. Philip Yampolsky, in his chapter to this book on colonial radio in the Dutch East Indies, argues it is especially the incorporation of elements of the European and American ('Western') popular music of the 1920s and '30s that then qualified a music as being modern. These elements may have consisted of specific songs or dance rhythms that were popular at the time, the common-practice harmony, or arrangement styles of Western popular music, but making Indonesian music modern by all means was to fuse it with Western popular music. A modern instrument meant Western instruments, and clearly many supposed that modernity was something triggered elsewhere. Talking about New Order Indonesia of the 1970s, Baulch still notes a similar equation of aesthetic Westernization with the novel and modern. Her contribution is one among many in this volume pointing at the sheer enthusiasm with which foreign ideologies and values have been adopted by Southeast Asia's popular music makers (although similarly enthusiastic others have, at times, tried to resist them; more on that below).

Music genres represent historical continuity and stability, and mark common training, aesthetics, techniques, skills and performance practices (Weintraub 2010:12). But equally, throughout the twentieth century, mediatization and hybridization of musical styles and genres triggered debates on what is regarded as authentic and traditional.<sup>10</sup> Sometimes the use of new technology led to what appeared to be completely new sounds, as is the case with the *pop yeh yeh* sound so prominent in 1960s Malaya and Singapore. In the aftermath of marked changes in the sound of English popular music of that time local music acts preferred amplified bass, drum and especially electric guitars, in what elsewhere was also known as *ku-gi-ran* (*kumpulan gitar rancak*, or 'upbeat guitar' bands). Both J. Tan (2011) and Pereira (2011), as well as Johan in his contribution to this volume argue that Singapore performers promoted themselves as the latest

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<sup>10</sup> See Weidman (2003) for an example on India; that such discussions continue into the present is attested by the studies of Baulch (2007) and Wallach (2008).

thing, and it is this self-conscious modernity that at that time was very much seen as the expression of a new culture. For example, new venues, changes in dress styles and other aspects of youth culture, new bands, new genres, and new responses are all a feature of music in Singapore during this period. At the same time, and we cannot overemphasize this, Singapore musical culture of the 1960s can be very much viewed as a modernized version of previously popular street entertainment and the amusement parks, as described, for example, elsewhere in this volume by Van der Putten. Most of the time, then, ‘the modern’ as an achieved, rather than inherent state, is defined by what it is not or what is now deemed obsolete, as Wallach also argues in his contribution. Musical genres do not operate in a vacuum and are constantly recreated and changing with newer and more modern styles being contrasted with preceding, more ‘traditional’ versions. But as Yampolsky rightfully remarks: in most cases no one actually seems to know what the original repertoire or style was. One knows only what people did within living memory, or what is thought to have been earlier practice. The concept of ‘authenticity’ may, therefore, be of little relevance to our studies of twentieth century popular music as it is the very same processes of hybridization, change and continuity that deserve our attention (see Van Zanten, this volume).

Next to hybridization and the appropriation of Western sounds and aesthetics, most contributions in this volume note the equation of both the modern and the popular with mass media, being the indispensable means of dissemination of popular music. A brief look at the emergence of Southeast Asian entertainment industries may very well explain why.

### *The Entertainment Industries*

Empirically, the study of the popular is one of pioneering creative artists who straddle conventional categories of ethnicity, religion, gender, generation and class, and of their audiences. Mobilizing cultural resources and networks, and exploring technological and entrepreneurial possibilities, these artists are at the forefront of popular culture’s production and redefinition. However, artistry alone will not popularize songs as it is capital, expertise and ongoing facilities that are central and a means that, until very recently, only an industry could provide. A music industry based on the marketing of recordings as mass commodities therefore plays a crucial role in popularizing music (see also Manuel 1993:4; Chun and Rossiter 2004). As early as 1902, representatives of the early

entertainment industry started to collect recordings by local performers in parts of Southeast Asia.<sup>11</sup> Western multinational gramophone companies aggressively opened up consumer markets in Southeast Asia, using local brokers to sell equipment and musical recordings. Such aggressive competition for popular music markets has endured and has its equivalent in today's rivalry between some of the world's largest cultural content providers aiming for a share in the profitable Southeast Asian market. Record companies may be notoriously conservative, but they are quick to react once they discover the potential of new markets. Laird (2011) has described the industry's initial reluctance to Singaporean adaptations of Western rock and roll. It was not until 1963 that any record company decided to release a record by a Singapore guitar band. However, from then onwards, the Singapore record industry boomed and between 1965 and 1969 over 120 different labels released local recordings; a figure not even including long established labels such as Columbia, Pathé, Odeon, or any of the numerous labels based in Malaysia, Indonesia, Hong Kong, and other neighbouring countries which were also catering for the Singaporean market. Elsewhere in this volume, Baulch describes how in the second half of the 1990s their heirs, Sony Music, Warner, EMI, BMG and Universal, all established offices in the Indonesian capital Jakarta, and encouraged the across-the-board adoption of a royalty system, which now governs contractual deals between recording artists and recording labels worldwide. Such globalization of popular music practices has changed the ways performing arts are experienced by many Southeast Asians today.

Whereas popular music cannot be seen separately from the larger political economy it increasingly became part of it during the twentieth century, its history is importantly one of innovative use of new technologies, technologies that are often pioneered by the happy few and those with sufficient access to social, cultural or economic capital. Driven by the new media technology of the gramophone and the arrival of new musical genres such as jazz, Latin music and local hybrid variants thereof, the very first popular music celebrities and local entertainment industries burgeoned in Batavia, Singapore and Manila of the 1920s (Möller 1987; Cohen 2006, 2011; Keppy 2008; Yampolsky 2010).

Unprecedented opportunities for disseminating new music, offering professional careers in entertainment and creating new audiences opened up in the 1930s with the radio, a topic also dealt with in Philip Yampolsky's

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<sup>11</sup> For more detailed studies, see Gronow (1981); S. Tan (1996); Suryadi (2006).

contribution to this volume.<sup>12</sup> Published studies of radio in the Netherlands Indies before World War Two have focused mainly on the politics of colonial radio: on the administrative structure of broadcasting and its political implications. While starting from such a struggle, Yampolsky examines in more detail the live broadcasting of music (and theatre) on the radio. He does so by focusing on one full year, 1938 (chosen simply because it is the year for which available documentation is most ample). A central question of his research is the extent to which government-backed radio broadcasting differed from that of private, and to what extent the private stations differed amongst themselves when it came to highlighting the arts. Yampolsky argues how radio, with its dependence on good musicians, was more strongly conditioned by its physical locations than were records. However, radio was also more flexible in exploring new talent. Nevertheless, radio tended to be surprisingly conservative in its interests, often aiming to maintain the prestige of particular 'high art' genres; while the gramophone industry simply sought what sold. Yampolsky's radio research also allows us to consider the position of radio, and in particular radio music, in the great issues that were in the air in the 1930s: modernity, nationalism, the relations between colonizer and colonized (with radio failing to bridge the gap between its Eastern and Western listeners) and the development of a pan-Indonesian culture through what had become the urban folk music of Batavia, *kroncong*.

Did radio and gramophone usher their audience into the modern age, Yampolsky rightfully wonders, referring to the big paradox of a new medium that was modern and made arts accessible to the many, yet the contents of which were sometimes utterly conservative. For sure radio and recordings changed the ways music was listened to and, as commodities, they were especially able to provide a new emergent Southeast Asian bourgeoisie with a prestigious, standardized, and often sanitized version of what hitherto had been available to the bohemian chic, or was otherwise hidden in the underbelly of Southeast Asia's entertainment quarters.<sup>13</sup> Radio catalogues and record sleeves emphasized the prestige and novelty of such recorded music and the advertising of records,

<sup>12</sup> On radio's early beginnings in Indonesia, see Mrázek (2002) and Lindsay (1997).

<sup>13</sup> Mutsaers mentions the connection of opium revenues and the entertainment world of *stamboel* and *kroncong*, as well as the bad press regarding morals among artists. As Mutsaers argues: 'Prostitution and money lending, attracted adventurers from all walks of colonial life and discouraged polite society from attending this home-grown form of entertainment' (Mutsaers 2013). For an Indian equivalent of such stigma attached to early twentieth century entertainers, see Farrell (1999).

gramophone players and radio sets on a par with other icons of modernity, such as soap, light bulbs and cigarettes, they similarly provided access to a new cosmopolitan world out there.

In an era of dramatic economic, social and political upheaval in which Southeast Asian societies were intensely transformed, mass media recordings helped popularize music. Not surprisingly, such recordings capture much of how these profound changes were imagined and perceived of at home and in the new-born public sphere these media were part of. New venues for performance and musical consumption developed in the period 1920s-1950s, where people socialized and relaxed: movie theatres, fairs and dance halls. Importantly, well into the 1960s, popular music in particular was music for social dancing. In his contribution, Jan van der Putten describes how, in colonial Malaya, Chinese transnational capital was largely responsible for the development of amusement centres where a wide range of entertainments – from Teochew operas to *wayang kulit*, boxing matches to ballroom dancing – was made available (supposedly) to everyone: entrance fee was only 5–10 cents, but extra fees applied if one wanted to watch a movie, theatre play or dance with one of the Malay ‘taxi girls’ waiting for customers of all social standing and background. These parks are considered to have been melting pots of different ethnic groups and provided entertainment to all cultures with their respective popular forms. More often than not, musicians performing at such venues had more than a single patron and besides performing at live ‘events’ they were also for hire and provided music to other sectors of the entertainment industry, such as the cinema orchestras or local gramophone companies featuring recording artists before the films were screened in cinema halls (S. Tan 1996). Wider circulation of cinematic contributions to the popular music industry and further exchange between these domains is a topic that merits further study,<sup>14</sup> but what we do know is that some of Southeast Asia’s main pop icons would move on to make a career in the local film industry. These include the likes of Roekiah and Rd Mochtar (of *Terang Boelan* fame, 1937), Rhoma Irama, Benyamin S. and Malaysian superstar P. Ramlee.<sup>15</sup> Because many of these musical movies

<sup>14</sup> For a present day study of the impact of Hindi film songs and local appropriations thereof, see David (2008).

<sup>15</sup> On the 1970s Betawi B-movies and songs of Benyamin S., see Hanan and Koesasi (2011). For Rhoma Irama and the world’s ‘first Islamic rock musical motion picture’, see Frederick (1982). Finally the life, films and songs of P. Ramlee are described in a growing number of studies, including those by Sarji and Johari (1995), Harding and Sarji (2002), Syed Muhd Kairudin Aljunied (2005) and Barnard (2005, 2009).

were filmed on location in Indonesia, Malaysia or Singapore, they provide us with a window on those places in particular time frames, and they also offer a glimpse of how the global aesthetics cinema brought in were profoundly localized in sight and sound.

Similarly, the topic of the development of the music industry in Malaya and Singapore in the 1960s, taken up by Johan here, provides a case study for examining the various changes and developments that were common throughout the entertainment industry internationally at that time, but more often than not had a very local impact. Johan's chapter illustrates the shift away from film as the once dominant technology of disseminating Malay music to the guitar bands so heavily plugged by an emergent local record industry. This transition to a large extent explains the reactionary comments of former film stars such as P. Ramlee, who soon was to be replaced by louder sounds and a less conservative Western oriented fashion. Ramlee's Malay traditionalism was not part of but worked in tandem with conservative state policy which condemned what it saw as foreign and subversive. The result is a complex but fascinating account of how both musical culture and changes in the industry influenced and conflicted with other significant forces concurrently sweeping through Asian society at a crucial time in the development of Southeast Asia.

As outlined, new media technology enables new ways of making music, connecting hitherto separate musical traditions and introducing new styles and sounds. In the 1970s, cheap cassette technology (cf. Manuel 1993) allowed musical entrepreneurs to re-engage localized forms of identity, offering a platform for ethnic and traditional genres that industries previously had ignored (for more on this, see below). Cassette technology also offered groups and individuals disenchanted with nationalist visions of modernity in Southeast Asia a means and platform to voice discontent. My own research on the use of cassette technology by Islamist revivalist groups such as the Malaysian Darul Arqam (1968–1994) is a case in point (Barendregt 2012). Through its home-based OVA studios the movement released hundreds of (video) cassette lectures, Malay language comedy, but also popular Islamic nasyid songs that helped spread the Arqam message well beyond its model villages. Again, there is no single trend here. Ethnic and religious niche markets may profit very well from such new affordable media technologies, but equally Baulch (in this volume) remarks how, in the 1980s, due to the advent of cassette technology, the trade in Western pop for some time became far more lucrative than that of local pop forms, as the latter included far higher production costs.

Western pop could simply be re-recorded as the production costs were borne elsewhere and thus, for a considerable time, put local pop on a second level.<sup>16</sup>

### *Changing Access, Listening Experience and Taste Makers*

Technology, then, importantly determines access, although this access may take an unusual shape in countries that until recently were considered merely to be downstream markets for other more powerful culture industries elsewhere in the world; markets that could only participate in modern forms of cultural expression by seeking resort to copying, piracy and other forms of 'cheap globalization'. Pirated products are widely considered to be destructive for musical scenes, such as was the case for Singapore in the early 1970s. Here, according to estimates, in some cases sales of legitimate releases were severely affected and up to 50 per cent of record sales by the more popular artists could be lost to pirates (Laird 2011). However piracy is not always and everywhere equally regretted by artists themselves, with today some of the most famed artists in the region, including *dangdut* singer Inul Daratista and Lampung based pop act Kangen band, deriving much of their success from such acts of piracy. Illegal content or, as Baulch prefers, 'unofficial (versus official) content' (cf. Heryanto 2008) is especially facilitated by new means of digital reproduction, sharing and distribution that have run rampant all over Southeast Asia. However, in her research for the Articulation of Modernity programme, Nuraini Juliastuti argues how many of these practices seen as harmful to and situated at the fringes of the industry, more properly can be defined as part of that very same industry (see also Baumgärtel 2012). They are to be approached as knowledge-seeking techniques and a prerequisite for the modern project so longed for by many young Southeast Asians. Even the industry itself increasingly approaches YouTube wanna-bees, mash up DJs and lip sync artists for something that it seldom does: innovatively contribute to popular culture. Some of them even get offered lucrative record deals by that very same industry. Hence, the pirate may become a gatekeeper and local taste maker.

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<sup>16</sup> And not until the 1980s did pop Indonesia became a more serious contender, commercially speaking, as those recording labels that had hitherto devoted their attention to re-recording Western pop recordings began to upgrade their interest in developing pop Indonesia repertoires.

Novel sharing and distribution mechanisms have enabled a thriving DIY scene in most Southeast Asian metropoles and especially student towns (Luvaas 2010; but see also Gjelstad, in this volume). Gjelstad hints at the sudden popularity of the *distro*, an abbreviation of distribution store, which is related to this significant shift in Indonesian popular and youth culture – a reorientation from hyper-commercialized brands to independent designers making T-shirts in limited numbers and distributing them to small shops. The designer, like the DJ, has become a new and prominent kind of artist on the Southeast Asian youth scene. Musically, this DIY scene seeks its inspiration in hitherto little tapped sources such as industrial, techno, Brit pop-like Indie music and other niche markets, although metal and punk rock music have a much longer tradition in most Southeast Asian countries that may be traced to the earlier democratizing workings of cassette culture.<sup>17</sup>

To a large extent, technology also determines the ways music has been listened to. From the early wax cylinder carried by the sonic explorers of the early twentieth century, to the bodily sensations caused by the public PA of mega acts such as Gong 2000 or Soneta described by Weintraub (2010), there have been some profound changes with music moving from the very public into the private sphere and back again.<sup>18</sup> When the first record players went on sale, music was an exclusive commodity, available only to the happy few. Radio, while still expensive, would in time broaden this reach, as did cinema and even more so cassette technology. Today, Southeast Asian music, as elsewhere in the world, is mostly listened to through digital devices such as MP3 players, phones or through platforms such as YouTube, MySpace or Spotify. What such changes do for the individual listener and in relation to other listeners remains largely terra incognita. In this volume, Lars Gjelstad describes how through playful cultural practice in their bedrooms and with their home equipment, boys are creating cultural identities based on cultural models of cosmopolitan nightlife offered by the local music bar they frequently visit. According to him, bedroom practices such as tape compilations, musical diaries or self-constructed dance floors have to be understood as moments in a wider ‘circuit of the production, circulation and consumption of cultural

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<sup>17</sup> Independent labels in fact date back much longer. Laird mentions a mushrooming of independent labels in 1950s Singapore, for example. On the Southeast Asian metal scene refer to the accounts of Yusof (2009), Wallach (2011) and Dairianathan (2009, 2012). On punk rock, see Pickles (2001) and Baulch (2007).

<sup>18</sup> For more on the impact of foreign technology on ways of listening in Java, see Sutton (1996).

products'. From the cafés, his young informants bring the music and its cosmopolitan atmosphere back to their private bedrooms. The taste and competence acquired in these informal spaces are then fed back into the cafés by way of dance performances and by requesting their favourite songs from local and national Top 40 bands.

Finally, the sheer materiality of media technology itself, such as the gramophone player, radio, and more recently MP3 devices and mobile phones, have throughout the twentieth century developed into indicators of the social status of its owners. As such, Baulch's essay refers to the recent upsurge of mobile content providers, which have lately emerged as the new independent players in the industry. Today, most revenues for popular performing artists are retrieved not from gigs, concerts or merchandize, but from the royalties on ring and ring back tones. Access, new ways of listening and social status converge here. The ring back tone is inexpensive and easily downloadable, even to those living in the rural hinterlands; it can be played and listened to in the private bedroom, but it is primarily meant to be overheard in public and thus serves to signal the owner's social and cultural capital.

One cannot overstate the importance of technology for the popular music industry, but one should simultaneously take care not to simply mistake one for the other. While recordings are an important means to discover what was popular in both the 1930s and 1960s, both Yampolsky in this volume and Laird (2011) warn that actually much passed unrecorded.<sup>19</sup> Media technology, then, is only one (very important) way in to the complex and very fragmented history of what is an ever emergent industry. Following the lead provided by Williamson and Cloonan (2007), it may even be more apt to speak of 'entertainment industries' in the plural. There is no such thing as a single music industry. There are, however, people working in a range of industries centred around music. In line with Small (1998), we are also inclined to include all aspects of 'musicking' here into our analysis, focusing not only performers, producers and audiences, but also on those involved in other popular music related sectors such as design, distribution and, not to be neglected, journalism and other taste making practices.

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<sup>19</sup> This does not even include gendered ways of consumption, a relevant but hitherto hardly researched topic. Wallach (this volume) stresses how *dangdut* performance is a mostly male domain. But *dangdut* is not just a performed music; it also exists on recordings that can be used in private listening encounters. In his research he found that ordinary Indonesian women frequently listened to *dangdut* cassettes, and, in fact, probably make up a majority of the consumers who purchase such cassettes.

Importantly, popular music cannot be understood as separated from the particular moral climate it was part of and wider discussion of what entails good or bad, high or low taste. In this volume, Jan van der Putten describes how it is likely that a cosmopolitan, hybrid and wild aura of cultural practices distributed through the 1920/30s amusement parks was incompatible with the more parochial and modest identity based on ethnicity and religion as promoted by the Malay intelligentsia and popular press. As an example, he quotes several articles from newspapers that were predominantly Islamic reformist in character and had their own particular cultural agenda, to which the popular arts and music had to be subjected. Today, print and more recently online journalism still fulfil a similar gate keeping function. In her contribution, Baulch refers to the tremendous success of *pop Melayu* in the early 2000s, much to the disdain of cultural critics and journalists who underline *Pop Melayu*'s lack of modernity as opposed to the more cosmopolitan sounds of pop Indonesia or, for that matter, Western pop. Pop journalism may even be formative in shaping audiences itself. Baulch thus shows how print media have played a crucial role in endowing literate Indonesians with considerable cultural authority to class-ify genres and, by extension, in building, and continuously reinforcing a myth of a 'middle class', reading public as a truth bearing public. The devaluing of some Southeast Asian and supposedly utterly un-modern genres, such as *dangdut* and *Pop Melayu*, may be understood as integral to such myth making.<sup>20</sup> At the dawn of the twenty-first century, the Southeast Asian entertainment industries are intensely changing and 'new modes of knowledge production' and new 'mediating ideologues' have emerged from the coinciding of socio-political changes with wider developments in the mediating technologies outlined above. One of them is the – to the industry increasingly important – figure of the A&R executive. Baulch recognizes that while new valourizations of such executives do appear to draw on older patterns of producing intellectuals hitherto known to the Southeast Asian entertainment industry, they are also increasingly facilitated by global patterns of staging production,

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<sup>20</sup> In a similar vein, Baulch (2010) examines how *Rolling Stone Indonesia* as a magazine addresses a predominantly 'male, discerning, reading public', with the magazine itself drawing directly from styles of journalism developed in the 1970s to engage a similar group. 'Rolling Stone's attempts to emulate this journalism may be read as a calling back into being the middle class subject whose features were considerably sharpened in the new political environment of the 1970s' she states. For other studies dealing (partly) with Southeast Asian pop journalism, see Siegel (1993, especially Chapter 8) and Scherer (2006).

patterns to which transnational recording companies are contributing. A&R executives, critics, journalists and other taste makers, as she concludes, engage developments in the media environment to propose novel formations of modernity.

### *The Making of Musical Lifestyles: Fans, Hierarchies and Transgression*

Music's commoditization by an entertainment industry does not in itself explain its popularity. In our Leiden based project we connect popular music with the emergence of new audiences recognized by distinct lifestyles, which in turn opens the possibility of exploring processes of social differentiation. The phenomenon of lifestyles has been an integral feature of modernity (see, for example, Chaney 1996). By providing audiences with fashionable styles, social identities are made visible and audible through the consumption of popular music. In this regard, most of the essays in this volume also aim to investigate the extent to which notions of ethnicity, religion, class, gender, generation or other forms of social distinction play a distinctive role in articulating popular music and lifestyles. Following DeNora (2004), we analyse how the social dimensions of popular music are articulated in specific contexts. Articulation means to express as well as to create connections among different practices or elements, resulting in new shapes and meanings. Articulation as formulated by Hall (1986, 1996), and developed in the music studies of Middleton (1990) and Grossberg (1992), enables us to further negotiate the historical and socio-logical dimensions of popular music. Theories of articulation are 'attentive to how a plurality of voices sometimes harmonize and sometimes argue, how diverse speakers link various tropes and images from more or less common sources to announce competing claims' (Johnson 2008).

People actively use music to mark 'us' versus 'them', positioning themselves in moral, political, and aesthetic (stylistic) terms and empowering themselves within social hierarchies (Barber 1997). Popular culture in Southeast Asia is similarly a cultural construct of social groups who may use it to symbolically mark important social distinctions (Pinches 1999; Chen and Chua 2007; Heryanto 2008).

The most talked about distinction in this volume is without a doubt that between the urban progressive (*gedongan*) and village backward (*kampungan*) lifestyles (see also Weintraub 2010:226; Wallach; Baulch, both in this volume) as present in many Indonesian popular expressions. Wallach relates how in Indonesia, the Suharto regime's (1966–1998)

commitment to ‘progress’ was fuelled by foreign investment and the importation of consumerist desires for an emerging middle class that sought to differentiate itself from the impoverished, ‘backward’ masses. Such distinctions have been sonically articulated by the musical genres of pop Indonesia and Western pop on the one hand and *dangdut* and others on the other (see also Wallach 2002). Whereas pop Indonesia was a token of progress and modernity, *dangdut* music, its performers and fans are perceived of as disgusting and vulgar, and considered neither ‘traditional’ (that is, associated with indigenous performance traditions and high arts such as *gamelan* or *tembang Sunda*), nor truly ‘modern’ (mostly hinting at those expressions adapted from or originating in the West). This classed perspective of musical genres is obviously problematic and very much depends on which sources are consulted, and whose views are preferred. *Dangdut* fans have been written about, instead of writing themselves. Future studies of *dangdut* may problematize the now very dominant *kampungan* discourse, and would be a shift away from imposed class-related issues that ‘outsiders’ seek among *dangdut* fans. Looking at fan produced literature, videos and websites may teach us to see how *dangdut* fans represent themselves, among themselves, and possibly how they present themselves to non *dangdut*-fans by using a particular musical taste.

Sonically demarcating one’s lifestyle is also well-illustrated by the popular Islamic *nasyid* songs as performed in Singapore, Malaysia, and Indonesia of the late 1990s. For non-Muslim listeners, *nasyid* is too religious to be popular due to the song’s explicit Islamic messages, while many Muslims considered it too Westernized, and to some extent too modern, to be taken seriously as Islamic music. However, *nasyid* music has been extremely successful in offering a new young urban-based Muslim middle class a vehicle for articulating a new lifestyle, combining Islam and modernity (Kahn 2003; Sarkissian 2005; Barendregt 2006, 2011). More recently, Islamic talent shows such as the Malaysian *Imam Muda* or *Festival Nasyid Indonesia* have been instrumental in highlighting publicly spiritual lifestyles by offering role models and new celebrities selected through televised contests. Such contests have often been condemned as mere hedonism and an aping of Western consumerist culture. Nevertheless, there has been a long tradition of secular idols contests in this part of the world; shows which traditionally have succeeded in not only bringing artists and their audiences closer together, but which have also produced some of the most lucrative acts for the region’s industries. Pereira (2011:2–3) refers as such to the talentime contests and the ways 1960s Singapore was full of entertainers deemed the *this* and *that* of

Singapore , but through which also new and upcoming artists were discovered and new audiences attracted. But also the karaoke loving politicians and singing generals described by Kees van Dijk in his chapter fit well with this participatory pattern of much Southeast Asian music practices.<sup>21</sup>

Youth culture is inherent to the world of fandom, audiences and lifestyle, although in Southeast Asia, as elsewhere, the category of youth is an ever changing one that merits further study.<sup>22</sup> There are correspondences and yet differences between the rise of the apolitical *remaja* described by Siegel (1993) and late 1970s Solo and today's *anak Gaul* (Smith-Hefner 2007). The latter refers to teenagers who are familiar with the most recent trends in, e.g. music, film, internet and cellular phones, and who socialize easily with others, including the opposite sex, and who know the language of the youth, called *bahasa gaul*. Musical practices are shown to be part of larger formations of lifestyle, identity, and network in Lars Gjelstad's contribution to this book. In his ethnographic account of the cultural worlds in which some young urban Javanese consumers of pop music lived during the mid-1990s and early 2000s, he shows the importance of popular music for the production of new forms of subjectivity, which in many ways break with deeply grounded Javanese conceptions of respect, etiquette, seniority and hierarchy. In the mid-1990s, Gjelstad's initial fieldwork focused on the members of the Sugaly gang, named after the title of a song by Iwan Fals, Indonesia's most reputed folk singer and then an important critic of the New Order regime.<sup>23</sup> Gjelstad's account vividly describes how the engagement of the Sugaly boys with music had an impact on their moral framing of rising involvement in a range of youth cultural practices, which besides the songs of Iwan Fals included the electronic sound of 'tripping' music, then becoming popular at Solo discothèques. Much in this new form of youth culture is inspired by the aesthetics of MTV-mediated video clips but, referring to Appadurai (1996), Gjelstad convincingly argues how such mass-mediated worlds offer 'scripts for possible lives' as well as new 'resources for experiments with self-making.' Whereas *gaul* is the latest signifier of such youth lifestyle, there are plenty of historical precedents, many of which similarly

<sup>21</sup> For recent accounts of such idols shows and the phenomena of Southeast Asian reality TV, see the works by Coutas (2006) on Indonesia, and Juliana Abdul Wahab (2010) on Malaysia.

<sup>22</sup> For a recent overview of Indonesian youth studies, see Suzanne Naafs and Ben White (2012).

<sup>23</sup> On Iwan Fals, see Mokoo (2003) and Lockard (1998:109).

coincided with popular music expressions.<sup>24</sup> Weintraub, in his chapter on 1960s Melayu music, also hints at an emergent category of youth culture, but also the accompanying possibilities of intergenerational conflict. Using the song *Djangan duduk di depan pintu* (Don't sit in front of the door), a musical rendition of a father and daughter having words about the changing role of women, he shows the public transformation of both youth and gendered identities as they are 'discursively transcoded in popular song'.

In line with our interest in musical lifestyles, the contributors to this volume are particularly interested in cultural entrepreneurs who challenge social boundaries and hierarchies. We suppose that artists operating in the margins of dynamic urban centres often stood at the forefront of articulating modernity through new musical styles. This may be due to mixed ethnic origins, a particular social and cultural orientation, or the networks they are part of, enabling them draw upon heterogeneous cultural repertoires as a source of experimentation. The social groups from which they originate may involve Eurasians in the case of early twentieth century urban genres such as *bangsawan*, *stamboel* or *kroncong* (for accounts of such experiments, see S. Tan 1993; Cohen 2006; Keppy 2008), the young urban Western-inspired Muslims mentioned above or the city dwellers who, newly arrived to any of Southeast Asian's metropoles in the aftermath of a new socio-economic climate and ongoing urbanization, still stand with one foot in the village. A clear vocabulary to describe this category of people is absent. In terms of classical anthropology they approximate Turner's (1974) understanding of the 'liminal'. Regarding more recent literature, Rafael's (1995) 'phantomised identity' in his study of the Philippines is relevant to those who play, what De Certeau (2002:30) calls, the 'art of being in between'. They are intermediaries who appropriate popular music and embody the articulation of modernity as they straddle and, at times, challenge the social boundaries and hierarchies of class, race, religion, generation, gender and locality. New musical styles and associated lifestyles allow one to question existing social boundaries and to symbolically carve out new ones.

The making of popular music, then, involves the interplay among creative artists, an industry of some variety, and a socially differentiated

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<sup>24</sup> Buni Yani, another PhD researcher working within our Leiden project, is writing about Remy Sylado and his iconoclast poetry (*puisi membeling*), named after an experimental rubric that in 1971/72 was first published in the very popular *Aktuil* journal he had helped launch, but was later also practised in many of his pop novels (see also Scherer 2006).

audience, each of which has a stake in defining what is modern, what constitutes 'good taste, and what, finally, can be understood as the 'popular' (DeNora 2000; Bourdieu 1984). As the rigidities of established distinctions become difficult to sustain in eras of rapid social change, new forms of distinction are constantly explored. In the process, popular music transgresses class, gender and other social categories, while it is this act of transgression, through public behaviour, dress, language and sounds that enhances the appeal of popular music. The fact that many of these musical lifestyles are unstable helps to address the instabilities of social change and questioning old, while exploring, new social bonds (Miles 2000). However, one should be careful not to overstate music's role in challenging the social hierarchy, as Yampolsky's account of colonial radio also attests; popular music may cross boundaries, yes, but it seldom erases them. Similarly, Bettina David in her contribution on *dangdut*'s attraction to Indonesians of all classes, explains how its live performances do not change or rework the symbolic order in itself, but rather exposes what she calls 'the semiotic basis of language and the symbolic'. Changes, then, are provoked through 'boundary transgressions' that may lead to public contestations (and she gives the examples of Inul Daratista dancing village-style *dangdut* on national television, or incorporating 'low-class' *dangdut* music into 'high art' genres such as wayang kulit). Nevertheless, once in a while popular musicians are involved in more than mere single transgressions when lines are all too clearly crossed, boundaries seem to fall apart and hence societal categories 'contaminated' and in need of reconfiguration. Hence, the interplay between modernity and tradition – one step forward, two back, but no matter what, difficult to stop.

### *Changing Morals and the Fear of the Foreign and Female*

Modernity in popular music is a complex issue as it may both serve to detest or adopt what is considered to be foreign values and aesthetics. But even while considered deviant and not (yet) popular, it may well become a token of one's identity. The Sugaly boys studied by Gjelstad in his chapter labelled the cultural streams of contemporary youth as 'crazy' (*aliran gila-gilaan*). The fact that they select normative categories like crazy, stress and unruliness from dominant discourses in Java to comment upon their practices, demonstrates that they experience themselves as transgressing some cultural and normative boundaries. Sometimes it is religious norms that are transgressed, other times they run against current

state policies or otherwise challenge the authorities to be. A good example of the latter is found in Adil Johan's contribution to this volume. His chapter tells a story of a continued policing of youth culture that has occurred in Malaysia since the late 1960s. While the contestation in present day Malaysia centres on Islamic discourses of purity and protectionism, a similar discourse was present in the formation of the nation's National Culture Policy (NCP) in 1971. Johan argues that the NCP functioned as a hegemonic policy to counter a burgeoning cosmopolitan youth culture of Malaysia in the late 1960s. Youth culture, expressed through music, dressing and lifestyle has consistently posed a threat to the state's articulation and imposition of a 'national' culture. A survey of articles and fan letters from the music magazine *Bintang dan Lagu* (Stars and Songs, 1966–67) reveals that young Malaysians were actively shaping locally unique musical practices based on trends from the West that were at odds with state-defined notions of national culture. Caught in between such contestations, however, were 'older' artists such as P. Ramlee (1971) who presented a reactionary paper on how to preserve and uplift – with much ambiguity – *asli* (authentic or indigenous) and traditional Malaysian music.

With the rise of the entertainment industry, as Stuart Hall (1981) argues, the popular can only be satisfactorily grasped by reference to Gramscian ideas, thus explaining how ruling classes exert domination over all others with a variety of apparently consensus-making means, including the use of media and entertainment to transmit its system of values. Popular culture is no longer simply those things that matter to masses of people who eagerly consume it; nor is it an ever expanding inventory of 'all things people do or have done'. Rather, it is about the relation between culture and questions of hegemony. Such transformations are at the heart of the (historical) study of popular culture, and during times of transformation one sees an active reworking of traditions. They appear to persist into modern times but more often gain new meaning. 'Popular culture [then] is neither, in a pure sense, the popular traditions of resistance to these processes; nor is it the forms which are superimposed on and over them. It is the ground on which the transformations are worked' (Hall 1981). Popular music has the potential to both connect and divide; a quality which has already been noticed by Thompson in his well known essay on 'rough music'. It can be utterly subversive, challenging state and clergy, but also horribly reactionary and used against those within the community 'crossing forbidden frontiers or mixing alien categories' (Thompson, as cited by Ferzacca 2012).

Especially female performers, willingly or not, have often taken on a role of the 'modern girl', challenging conservatism, morality, religion and calling for change in attitudes and lifestyle, evoking admiration, discussion but also outright outrage.<sup>25</sup>

Several essays in this volume refer to the moral panic brought about by singing and dancing females. One of them, by Jan van der Putten, explains how cultural systems tend to be conservative in nature with social agents consolidating them in order to give a certain sense of stability to a community. In order to illustrate this, he explores the social context of *ronggeng* and *joget* practices in the first half of the twentieth century, thus illustrating what made it so incongruous with a cultural Malay identity that was being reconfigured and promoted through the budding popular press.<sup>26</sup> *Joget* refers to the practice of itinerant groups of professional dance-women and musicians that is common throughout the Malay world and that has a long tradition. The dancing women perform on a make-shift stage where males are invited to participate for a certain fee. Whereas in previous times such incidents of social dance seem to have been restricted to special occasions, social dancing now became institutionalized in the emergence of modern entertainment parks and hence, was accessible to men of all ranks and race. New gained public visibility also meant that it was much more difficult for those who disapproved to look away. By looking at three cases of 'moral panic' in the period 1920s-1950s and launched from different interest groups within the Malay community, he shows how social dancing practices have been used to further various agendas, ranging from the religiously conservative to politically modern or even progressive. Whereas there may seem to have been little agency left for these dancing women themselves, Wallach and David, in their chapters, both describe how female *dangdut* performers in early twenty-first century Indonesia are keen on challenging the status quo, the person of Inul Daratista, a singer notorious for her trademark drill-dancing being a case in point.<sup>27</sup> Wallach argues how eroticized performances of this sort, often accompanied by the drinking of alcoholic

<sup>25</sup> This is not surprising as many authors have referred to the fact that the ushering of the media industry has generally been in favour of female artists. Both Van Zanten (this volume) and S. Williams (1998) have pointed out how Sundanese popular stages have increasingly become a female domain.

<sup>26</sup> For similar moral panics, see both Atkins (2001) and Jones (2001) on controversies sparked by and over the taxi girls of Shanghai.

<sup>27</sup> For what was popularly phrased as 'Inulmania', see Faruk and Salam 2003; Weintraub 2010a, 2010b; Van Wichelen 2010; Sushartami 2012; and David and Wallach in this volume.

beverages and other transgressive behaviour, historically have acted 'as instruments of (carnivalesque) male bonding across divisions of rank and status in many Indonesian groups'. Bettina David's contribution on the vulgar village variant of the same *dangdut* genre – in which songs are sung by scantily clad female singers and a predominantly young male audience dancing to 'sad' and sentimental songs on stage – argues how the discourse of *dangdut*'s lyrics may well represent a popular and unofficial gender ideology. The female lyrical 'I' at the symbolical level seems to represent the passive, muted voice of Indonesian women; yet, at the semiotic level of rhythmic corporeal sensuality she is capable of seducing and controlling her male audience much in line with the power of traditional female singers (cf. Sutton 1984).

The fear of the female voice, be it secular or spiritual in character (see Barendregt 2006), has been an ongoing trope in many popular performance traditions that has recently been fuelled by bans on concerts by international artists such as Lady Gaga's in Jakarta and Erykah Badu performing in Kuala Lumpur. But moral panics about popular music have been about more than singing and dancing women. In a much quoted article, Philip Yampolsky (1989) explains the fate of the song *Hati yang luka* (A wounded heart), a song that was much-copied, triggering spin-offs and one that successfully spilled over into other genres but was also fiercely condemned by then Indonesian Minister of Information, Harmoko. Despised for its defeatist lyrics, the Minister even called for a ban on this and similar 'weeping songs'.<sup>28</sup> In this volume, Baulch similarly relates how many critics complain that *pop Melayu* lyrics seem obsessed with sexual infidelity, its motivations and emotional effects, and see a kind of moaning as one of the genres' defining features. In both cases, lyrics are supposed to undermine the morale of what is framed to be 'the people', and hence in need of protection; a rhetorical device those in power have traditionally seemed to resort to when condemning things of their disliking (R. Williams 1984; Weintraub 2006). The literature similarly abounds with stories of those in charge being horrified by the 'alien performance culture' of foreign troops (Van der Putten, this volume), the predatory behaviour of *kroncong*- singing young males (Becker 1975), a young generation prone to miniskirts and long hair (Sen and Hill 2004; Farram 2007), or the supposed satanic behaviour of young metal aficionados in Malaysia (Yusof 2010). Recent attacks on popular music and its fans

<sup>28</sup> For similar reasons, another song, *takdir* by pop singer Desy Ratnasari, was banned by religious authorities (see Van Dijk, this volume).

may similarly be seen as largely symptomatic of a larger fear of the foreign, with a resort to tradition as the much needed remedy for an unhealthy generation. In late 2011 about sixty young people were arrested by regular and shariah police for the supposed crime of being 'punk' during the staging of a charity concert in Banda Aceh. In a case much highlighted by the international media, those arrested were shown having their hair cut in what was supposed to be a traditional ceremony. 'The women's hair we'll cut in the fashion of a female police officer', a police spokesman was reported to have said: we'll change their disgusting clothes. We'll replace them with nice clothes. We'll give them toothbrushes, toothpaste, shampoo, sandals and prayer gear' (*Global Post*, 14 December 2011). Moral condemnation seems to have given punk music another cause worth singing for!

The upsurge of a more orthodox, scripturalist and even radicalist interpretation of religion and its sometimes ambiguous relation to the performing arts is yet another persisting theme in the region's popular culture. Indonesian fundamentalist vigilante groups such as the Islamic Defenders Front (FPI) have been regularly reported to attack popular music venues (Weintraub 2010; Hoesterey and Clark 2012). In his contribution to this book, Van Dijk provides examples of similar hostile attacks by religious advocates for the Malaysian provinces of Kelantan and Terengganu, the Malaysian states that traditionally have been a stronghold of the Islamist PAS party. There are some noteworthy differences between Indonesia and Malaysia, though, as Van Dijk suggests. Compared to Indonesia there is no lively publishing press interested in books dealing with fatwa's on singing and dancing, but opposition to certain genres of music and certain types of dances and other art forms are nevertheless far greater in Malaysia and more institutionalized than in Indonesia.<sup>29</sup> This is only one of many observations made possible by an area study approach, proving how the Southeast Asian region may turn out to be a fertile ground for analysing the triangle of the popular, modern and the social.

### *Malayness and Other Nationalisms, Official and Unofficial in Character*

For centuries, (pen)insular Southeast Asia has been a fertile crossroads where cultural practices from elsewhere have merged in a multitude of

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<sup>29</sup> However, for an account of how Malaysian Islamist party PAS has been making ample use of rock musicians, see Müller (2012).

new social forms and artistic genres linked to the modern, thus constituting a productive region for studying modernity in colonial and postcolonial settings (McVey 1998; Steedly 2000). Cities like Penang and Singapore were crucial trading nodes and, more recently, famous as centres of a modernist Islam, and the production of new literary, theatrical and musical genres. Referring to the late colonial period, Harper (1999) speaks of the region's urban centres as 'wellsprings of modernity'. Here, people from today's Malaysia, Singapore, Indonesia, and the Philippines mixed with migrants from India, China, the Middle East and Europe. It is these Southeast Asian cosmopolitan hubs that often acted as entrepôt between the larger world and its hinterlands and as a main interface through which modernity was communicated among the new national communities of postcolonial Southeast Asia. Although so far in this introduction we have used the term Southeast Asia to refer to our main unit of analysis, we are well aware of the limitations.

Within the Leiden project some of us do work on popular music genres and artists in the Philippines or Thailand, and some of our forthcoming studies will focus on more than a single country, intentionally promoting intraregional comparison.<sup>30</sup> In all fairness we should say that with some exceptions most of the essays here are still nation centred, with many of them drawing heavily on Indonesian materials (but then half of the Southeast Asian population is Indonesian); Singapore and Malaysia being the two other countries under study here. Whereas today it is utterly amazing that only a few genres and artists successfully manage to address the region as a whole, historically it has been very difficult to separate these three markets. Only from the late 1960s onwards did these countries develop singular domestic markets and each an own infrastructure for recording, distribution and management.

It would be apt to say that our volume's overall focus is on what Yampolsky (during one of our workshops) framed as the 'IMS region' (Indonesia-Malaysia-Singapore, or alternatively, Indies – Malaya – Straits Settlements). Traditionally this area has been designated by many as 'the Malay world', and hence its use in this volume's title. Along with Barnard

<sup>30</sup> Popular music studies of the region are desperately in need of thorough decentring, and again a history of border crossing agents, technologies and genres may be an important step in doing so; but scholars should also dare to step away from the traditional recording capitals and into the regional hinterlands (see next section) as well as focus on some of the more supraregional genres. Not coincidentally, genres that have moved beyond the nation's territories are often religious, regional/pan Asian or ethnic in character – three other ways of anchoring identity in a postcolonial world.

and Maier (2004) we realize the pitfalls of using the term, which refers to a ‘confusing variety of configurations of human beings, locations, languages, customs, states and objects’, and also realize that its use here may not be sufficient in covering all cases offered in this volume (Javanese youth culture, Chinese Malay *pop yeh yeh*). We use the term Malay or better ‘Melayu’ here primarily as a discursive category. In his chapter, Weintraub argues how, historically, ‘Melayu’ must be understood as a hybrid, flexible, and constantly evolving stage upon which people constructed their cultural identity and history in the region. The term, as he shows, predates colonial times and has been used to refer to both an ethnic group (*suku Melayu*) that has traditionally resided around the Melaka Straits and Riau, but also a larger ‘racialized group’ (*rumpun Melayu*) that populates the modern nation states of Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, Brunei Darussalam, and (southern) Thailand in Southeast Asia.<sup>31</sup> The use of a wider culture area such as the Malay World also advocated here is also very much driven by the need to include into one single analytical framework popular music expressions produced by what are now inhabitants of various nation states. This is especially urgent as we would like to address the often seemingly inescapable lure of nationalism for both inhabitants and students of the region. It is an important, yet not all encompassing, factor when it comes to popular music. However, and in spite of our stress on the border crossing and often fluid qualities of much popular music, the very same popular music that connects people across borders may serve as an outspoken means to strengthen national markets. In fact, Anderson’s (1991) is a classic study of how national audiences were created by the mass entertainment industry. But Yampolsky, too, builds upon such an argument as he, elsewhere in this volume, states that radio and records adapted to fragmentation ‘by trying to serve all of the principal ethnic groups. But [yet] the strongest impulse of mass media is to maximize the audience, to market to the mass, and since no ethnically or regionally delimited music could serve as a mass Indonesian music, it was necessary to adopt symbolic forms free of such linkage [...]. Popular music in foreign musical idioms and instrumentation and sung either in a foreign language or in Indonesian was one such form’.

Hence, a number of the essays in this book are concerned with the formation and dynamics of national popular genres that emerged in the

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<sup>31</sup> For more on the historical emergence of the concept of Melayu, see Andaya (2001), Milner (2008) and, in relation to current heritage policies, works such as that of Worden (2001).

aftermath of the newly gained independence of the 1950/60s. In terms of national pop, for example, scholars of Indonesia have generally followed the distinction made by the music industry centred in Jakarta, which itself distinguishes between either 'national' or 'regional' genres of music. Whereas the latter will be dealt with in the next section, national genres include localized forms of rock, hardcore, rap, country, jazz, disco, house, *Hawaiian*, and *pop Indonesia*, but also *kroncong* and *dangdut*, that generally feature lyrics in Indonesian (though sometimes in English) and are marketed primarily in urban regions throughout the archipelago (Barendregt and Van Zanten 2002). Again, the distinction is for the most part industry-driven, and the two levels have at times proven hard to separate from each other, with artists, producers and audiences regularly crossing over in each other's domain. Additionally, Wallach (referring to a 1999 essay by musicologist Thomas Turino) argues that national musics themselves can regularly be considered as hybrid forms that aim to articulate 'local' musical elements (indexing community and cultural uniqueness) with Western elements that index the modernity to which all nations seem to aspire. This 'strategic hybridization' results not only in national cultural forms that mediate between the local and the global, but also reconcile the 'dual yearnings of the citizenry for the cosmopolitan modern on the one hand and the preservation of cultural distinctiveness on the other' (Wallach, this volume). The ongoing dialectic of local, regional and the global, then, importantly feeds into what is popularized as being modern in a certain place and at a certain time, as most essays in this book so vividly capture.

As an example, Weintraub's chapter discusses the hybridization of American popular music and Melayu music in *Pop Melayu*, a genre of American-influenced Melayu music that enjoyed popularity in Indonesia as well as Malaysia during the 1960s. The historical development of that genre can be traced to the early 1960s, and straddles Sukarno's Old Order and Suharto's New Order. Despite the Sukarno regime's efforts to ban American films and music from entering Indonesia, hundreds of illegal student-run radio stations in Jakarta broadcast prohibited recordings of American popular music. *Pop Melayu* as it was reinvigorated by popular artists combined some of the most progressive (American pop) with some of the most conservative (Melayu) music. Composers incorporated musical instruments, rhythms, and verse structures that signalled a link to 'Melayu' identity, as the concept was at the time discursively practiced in Indonesia. Melayu, as many knew, stood for tradition, a connection to forge with fellow Malays and Muslims, and for something larger than

promised by the contemporary Indonesian nation and its neighbour Malaysia; that ‘colonial construct’ which, much to the disdain of Sukarno in the 1960s, was created by the English colonizers and which increasingly started to usurp the notion of Melayu itself. The readymade though fluid notion of Melayuness then may very well have served as a safe haven in times of uncertainty (Indonesia was a republic now, but a far from stable one) and out of sheer discontent with the shape official nationalism was increasingly taking. The mass appeal of Melayuness can also help explain its periodic resurgence within the entertainment industry, even more so when, after 1965, (exponents of) *pop Indonesia* soon became very close with the Suharto administration. Baulch’s chapter thus refers to the Indonesian military’s use of state-prohibited Western style pop and rock music through so-called ‘soldier stages’ in order to interest people in its new regime of governance, beginning with the mass killings and arrests of 1965–6.

Popular songs may consequently serve to harness the interest of leaders, politicians or others affiliated to the government apparatus. At the turn of the new century, Filipino president Arroyo and the current Indonesian president Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono are good examples of singing politicians, but there is a wider tradition of (retired) generals and other power holders performing in public places in several of the countries under study here. As Kees van Dijk argues, politicians may sing for fun or to try to increase their popularity, but their performances create the impression that the singing of popular songs also has something to do with power, with high political and social status. Singing promotes one’s career but can also gain one some extra votes; hence, performances tend to increase whenever elections are due (see also Chua 2007).<sup>32</sup> But there is a different face to singing songs to highlight patriotic campaigns, as the very same songs may be sung by demonstrators telling the elite that ‘they have lost all sense of patriotism and social justice, that they had become selfish, greedy and oppressive’ (Van Dijk, this volume).<sup>33</sup> *Dangdut*, in one

<sup>32</sup> That this is by no means a recent development was also pointed out by one of our reviewers, who referred in this respect to *Wet earth and warm people* (1971), a Canadian film directed by Michael Rubbo which shows General Hoegeng singing *Hawaiian* songs on national Indonesian television, a fact also mentioned in the contribution by Van Dijk here.

<sup>33</sup> Van Dijk (2003) describes how one striking feature of the 1998 student demonstrations in Indonesia was its choice of patriotic symbols as both the patriotic lyrics of the struggle songs and the long marches in which they were sung are signs of the success of Indonesia’s New Order indoctrination. Tyson (2011:23) provides us with another example of the ambiguity of patriotic songs in describing Harry Roesli’s rendering of the song *Satu nusa satu bangsa* (One homeland, one nation) during the 1995 golden anniversary of

sense heir to the *pop Melayu* tradition, may similarly serve as such a counterpoint. *Dangdut's* everyday grassroots, or what Michael Billig (1995) refers to as 'banal nationalism' offers a vision with roots in the early Indonesian nationalist movement; an egalitarian ethos that appealed to many that have been left out of the otherwise very successful New Order chronicle of modernization, progress and development. Jeremy Wallach argues that *dangdut's* ideological positioning as a distinctively national music 'close to the people' evokes an inclusive social vision that constitutes a populist alternative to *both* the Suharto era's hegemonic ideology of 'development' and the exclusivist, moralistic rhetoric that was propagated by Indonesian radical Islamists from the early 2000s onwards.

In neighbouring Malaysia music has likewise served nationalist purposes, here too both official and unofficial in character. In contrast to neighbouring Indonesia, there is in the absence of a true war of liberation no real tradition of songs of struggle, but Malaysia has fared much better in creating a national genre that has been both outspokenly traditional yet able to fill modern stages and address modern demands: *Irama Malaysia* (S. Tan 2005). Hamzah and Shamsul discussed during one of our workshops the Malaysian state's effort at 'political marketing' or 'national branding' of songs. Popular music in a Malaysian context has traditionally been marketed along ethnic lines: Malay music for Malays, Chinese for Chinese, Tamil for Tamil Indians. Except for English and Hindi songs the only songs to reach across all ethnic groups are those created by the state in order to promote its various programmes and national slogans because such songs are aired on all public radio and television stations in all the different language media, day in and day out, sometimes for months on end. These songs<sup>34</sup> are also sung at school assemblies and government official functions throughout the country. 'Young or old can easily hum any of the state songs by heart, albeit, depending on which generation of the country the individual belongs to [...]. They are an inevitable part of everyone's life and escaping them is impossible. Acknowledging full well that these state songs are "authority-defined social realities" in Malaysia,

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Indonesia's independence. See also Lily Kong's (1995) analysis of the governmental 'Sing Singapore' programme and the form of cultural resistance this has triggered locally. Finally, Mitchell (2011) gives a Thai example looking at some of the satirical songs and *lukthung* that have been used by both red-shirt protestors (the UDD) and their yellow-shirt opponents (the PAD) in the country's ongoing political struggle.

<sup>34</sup> These songs include *lagu patriotik* (patriotic songs), *lagu tradisional negeri-negeri* (states' traditional songs) and *lagu rakyat* (public people's songs), a categorization originally devised by the Ministry of Information, Communication and Culture.

nonetheless, due to its frequent repetition they have created particular brand equity for the country' (Hamzah and Shamsul 2011). In other words, songs such as *Malaysia berjaya* (Malaysia has succeeded), *Setia* (Loyal) or, more recently, *OneMalaysia* may not be popular songs in the strict sense of the word, but become popular as a result of being repeated hundreds of times over an extended period of time, and sung publicly by fans and non-fans alike. Examples of the latter are provided in a study by Koh (2008) on the Chinese Malaysian student Wee Meng Chee, who under his alias *Name Wee* published a couple of rap songs on YouTube. His 2007 release *Negarakuku* (a pun on the title of the national anthem, a sample of which is used in the song) stirred a huge controversy in his home country as its lyrics satirized the corruption and inefficiency of the Malaysian police and government officers, and especially the unequal citizenship of Chinese Malays. For months the song polarized Malaysian society as opposition parties and civil society groups challenged the government's interpretation of the song and its significance.

Popular music, then, frequently acts as a tool to sanction new modern and nationalist culture, but at the same time its values are challenged through the very same popular songs that serve as a vehicle for yet other, alternative forms of belonging. The hybridization of the local unique and the cosmopolitan modern seldom passes uncontested. Nor is the role of Southeast Asian recording capitals as the main interface of modernity entirely unchallenged, although large parts of the industry today remain as focused on Jakarta, Kuala Lumpur or Singapore as they were back in the 1930s. These centres are not on their own and each of them in its sheer creativity depends on yet other satellite hubs of creativity, which flourish due a huge student population (Jakarta vs. Bandung and Yogyakarta), the presence of a foreign military base (Manila vs. 1960s Olongapo, where a military base was located) or thanks to being better situated in the international businesses network (the Singapore industry as opposed to musicians signed from both Malaysia and Indonesia). Accordingly, there is a need for remapping the topography of Southeast Asian popular music in more detail and with far more attention for the supraregional as well as pan-Asian popular forms that currently flood the region,<sup>35</sup> but also paying due attention to those smaller local industries that have developed away from the centre.

<sup>35</sup> For studies of Pan-Asianism in pop, see the analysis of Dick Lee by Wee (1996) and Mitchell (2004). For the more recent fashion of Japanese pop and especially the huge popularity of Korean Wave in Southeast Asia, see Shim (2006), Chua and Iwabuchi (2008) and especially Siriyuvasak and Hyunjoon (2007). Another study that has not yet been done but

*The Modern Ethnic*

Novel, ‘modern’ technologies in the early twentieth century, such as records and radio, served to shape and unite new audiences and helped to create some of the most vivid national genres in the countries under study here. However, throughout the twentieth century these technologies have also been instrumental in forging other forms of belonging that were often diametrically opposed to new-born nationalist sentiment.

Elsewhere in this volume, Weintraub remarks how one productive effect of President Soekarno’s opposition to Western popular music in the late 1950s has been to encourage producers, composers, musicians, and singers to mix regional songs with Western musical elements (see also Piper and Jabo 1987; Barendregt 2002). Similarly, when during the late 1970s much of the nationalist magic lost (again) its appeal such resentment had a sonic dimension. This was a time of rapid urbanization and homogenization with peoples of different ethnic origins mixing in Southeast Asian capitals such as Jakarta or Kuala Lumpur and the related need to mark those different identities. National policymakers fearing political risks tried to quell ethnic sentiment by subjecting it to various nationalist tactics, such as the folklorization of the regional arts in Indonesia, or in Malaysia by propagating ethno-nationalist policies that subdued regionalist identities. But it is especially in this era that counter-modernist readings prevail,<sup>36</sup> which romanticize village life, ‘that imagined site of ignorance, stasis, and resistance to national modernity’ (Wallach, this volume). It is under these circumstances that participants have been prone to articulating ‘the ethnic modern’, by connecting residual musical traditions to the latest urban trends and technologies.<sup>37</sup>

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which is particularly urgent in the context of Indonesia is the status of Chinese language popular music. For an industry that is largely Chinese owned there has been remarkable little marketing of Chinese hit genres, nor any indication of genuine localized versions of genres that traditionally have been popular among the Chinese Diaspora, such as Canto-pop.

<sup>36</sup> Obviously for those studying Indonesia, similar decentralizing tendencies took place in the aftermath of the Reformasi period and its subsequent call for regional autonomy (*otonomi daerah*), triggering new intercultural processes and a return to the local as a response to the New Order’s centre-periphery model (see also Weintraub 2010:217).

<sup>37</sup> This response of Indonesian traditional musicians inserting their musics with more popular sounds, genres or technologies from elsewhere may well have been triggered by the very same forces that in the Suharto administration sought and still seek to teach villagers not to want their traditional music (see for a more exhaustive comment, Yampolsky 2001).

Facilitating the regional pop fashion that saw the rise in the early 1980s, were new cheap grassroots media technologies allowing musical entrepreneurs to re-engage localized forms of identity and offering a platform for the ethnic and traditional genres those industries previously ignored. Manuel (1993) documents how the advent of cassette technology at this time results in decentralization and the fragmentation of decades of state and multinational monopolies. Compared to old, centralist and relatively expensive media like radio, cinema and gramophone, these new micro media practices facilitate grassroots musical initiatives, creating niche markets for genres hitherto disregarded by the industry. In Indonesia, the 1970s and 1980s ushered in a golden age for regional pop; various regional genres like *pop Minang*, *pop Batak* or *Pop Sunda* became so popular, that for years regional stars outstripped national ones in fame.

A regional popular music is targeted at consumers who are the residents of a specific region, or the members of specific ethnic groups, rather than at Indonesians in general (Yampolsky 1989:12–13). Lyrics tend to be in ‘local’ or ‘ethnic’ languages and dialects such as, for instance, Sundanese or Ambon Malay. But how is the ethnic made to sound?<sup>38</sup> In his contribution to this book, Wim van Zanten regrets that too many popular music studies, especially in the field of cultural studies, have focused purely on political and sociological aspects, to the exclusion of musical structures and actual sounds.<sup>39</sup> Why not focus on popular music as being music? Van Zanten embarks on his mission showing how musical features in various popular musics of West Java mean that the music may be called ‘Sundanese’, named after the majority ethnic group populating that particular region. Analysing several versions of two well-known Sundanese songs and how these songs are variously interpreted over time, Van Zanten shows that whereas in the 1960s-1970s the style of performing included many Western aspects, (including high final notes, trumpets and organs, elements from blues, Hawaiian guitars and rock-n-roll), later recordings started to incorporate the archetypical Sundanese *suling* flute, even while sometimes played on electronic instruments. The persistence of the Sundanese tone systems *pélog* and *sorog* in popular song traditions have generally been regarded as one of the important criteria for deciding

<sup>38</sup> For other analyses of regional pop, see Hatch (1985) and Sutton (2003); and for particular genres, amongst others, Barendregt (2002), Suryadi (2003) and Fraser (2011) on *pop Minang*; Hodges (2006) on *pop Batak*; S. Williams (1990) and Jurriëns (2004) on *pop Sunda*, and Arps (2009) on popular music for the Banyuwangi area of Eastern Java.

<sup>39</sup> See Moore (2006) for a similar critique.

whether a song qualifies as *pop Sunda* and, as Van Zanten argues, their being played on electronic instruments should not make a difference. The use of keyboard synthesizers may have a standardizing effect on the pitch of the popular songs; nevertheless, 'the musicians are still able to let their audiences see the world in an enchanted form, musically coloured "Sundanese" by the use of Sundanese tone systems, mostly 8 and 16-beat musical phrases, singing ornaments, musical patterns, and the melancholic sound of the suling' (Van Zanten, this volume).

Regional pop genres such as *pop Sunda*, *pop Batak* or *pop Minang* seem to have been highly successful in generating new bonds among migrants of particular regions now living in the larger Southeast Asian cities, partly through dissemination of these new regional genres by distribution networks that often extended far beyond the nation's borders. Due to the creation of an often overarching regional style, emblematic use of ethnic or regional traditions and language standardization, it also led both city dwellers and those in regions to identify with a larger 'traditional' community that undercut national loyalties. In sum, in this (but also later) period, modernity is seemingly articulated away from nationalist interpretations through recourse to the familiar, an undercurrent of traditional, often ethnic affiliation, that had been publicly elided. Ironically, it should be noted that the resulting regionally produced pop music was initially produced in the nations' capital where, at the time, the music industry was based, far from the region that inspired it. From here, recording companies mushroomed in provincial towns like Medan, Padang, Bandung and Makassar in Indonesia. Far less is known about the cassette recording industry's impact in Malaysia, but we suspect that processes of regionalization and critiques of modernity must have similarly dominated. We do know that a regional pop industry has similarly existed in places such as Sarawak and Sabah (Lockard 1998:225) but it was never as successful as its Indonesian equivalents. Questions thus remain for Malaysia and also neighbouring countries regarding which genres were taken up in redefining ethnic and traditional genres and which, in the course of time, succeeded or failed to be promoted as new popular forms? To what extent was regional pop music also invented in these countries and directed at a rural audience or addressed the needs and identity confusion felt by migrants to cities? These are all questions for future research. For certain is that in the Malaysian context, the renewed interest for ethnic and traditional genres seems to have focused primarily on Malay musical traditions, generally marginalizing genres popular among other ethnic groups, especially those of the already marginalized forest

dwelling groups.<sup>40</sup> However, also here tradition has come back with a vengeance.

In the final contribution to this book, Tan Sooi Beng describes how ‘world music’ – a marketing term that first emerged in the 1980s – has triggered responses among local Malay musicians who have been keen to mix their own Malay, Chinese, and Indian musical traditions with African and Latin Rhythms. As elsewhere world music on stage and record has foregrounded the tension between cultural homogenization and heterogenization, the local and the global, the modern and the traditional. By focusing on the musical collaboration of the forest dwelling Orang Asli community with urban musicians, as well as the Sarawak Rainforest World Music Festival (RWMF), Tan illustrates that world music ‘has had a positive effect of validating musicians and musics of the indigenous communities in Malaysia who have been marginalized and are trying to survive under precarious conditions’ (S. Tan, this volume). While Malaysian mainstream media have largely tended to ignore these modern ethnic songs, as they are deemed critical of government and do not conform with the non-controversial musical styles promoted by the Malaysian entertainment industry, world music is also seen as a way to remove the image of backwardness among Orang Asli populations. By presenting the songs in a modern setting, a younger generation of Orang Asli has been inspired to learn these songs. Using modern instruments such as the guitar and keyboard and the world music idiom helps the younger generation to engage with modernity, while not losing pride of one’s tradition. Tan’s piece nevertheless show the ambiguous character of modern ethnic songs, which mostly remain a prerequisite of urban migrants, and detached from long house and ritual context easily become a medium for self-orientalization. World music, then, has become one of the latest arenas in which to articulate Southeast Asian tradition with modern sounds, ideas and lifestyles.

*Remembering the Twentieth Century, as we Listen to it...*

At the turn of the twenty-first century, Southeast Asian pop music is a world calling out loud to be explored by music lovers and academics alike.

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<sup>40</sup> Although lately, under the banner of musical heritage, much has been done to revive an interest in both traditional and popular performing arts of Malaysia. For examples, see the work by Tan.

Not only has Southeast Asian popular music proven to be an auditory component of various forms of new belongings, ranging from new religious, pan-Asian or ethnic modern identities, it increasingly succeeds in interesting a world out there in all things related to Southeast Asia. Outside the Malay world, *dangdut* has achieved some success as a 'world music' genre among middle class listeners in Europe, North America and especially Japan. Korean and Japanese agencies are keen on recruiting their latest talents from the region, still following pretty much the capitalist rationale of Western entrepreneurs before them; you need software (the singer) to sell the hardware (East Asian audio equipment). And Asian diva's such as Siti Nurhaliza or Islamic boy band Raihan have become used to performing in other languages than their own and are often seen abroad. The pioneering use of novel technology by those in otherwise sometimes marginal positions persists to be an important drive behind many popular productions nowadays. As we have seen, it has provided both the young, minorities and forest dwellers with means to popularize their own songs and use marketing strategies similar to those of a still thriving but ever changing entertainment industry. Importantly, new digital technologies, tools and platforms have also facilitated an interest in pop history itself; in the sights and sounds of twentieth century performers and the songs they have been producing.

Today, the internet provides music lovers of and in the region with the means to discuss, share and play their music. The Net is home to countless fan sites, detailing the minutiae and whereabouts of their idols, it accommodates home pages of artists themselves who, often without intervention from conglomerates, are able to launch their latest hit songs and related merchandise. It also provides sound archaeologists, sonic detectives, discographers amateur, and academics alike with the means to seriously undertake and update their research on what the twentieth century may have sounded like, and what it tells us about the history of a particular people and their place in the world.<sup>41</sup>

One only has to open up YouTube to find countless hit songs, film tracks or evergreens performed by Southeast Asian artists, with user comments vividly describing what the song has meant to its listeners to understand: there is something particular about music that activates the human memory. It may explain the plethora of re-releases of 1960s and 1970s records in recent years, the retro longing of musical acts such as White

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<sup>41</sup> In fact topic of our project's next volume *Participatory Pop Practices*, which is due to appear in late 2014.

Shoes and the Couples Company, Amy Mastura or Dick Lee, but also the ongoing popularity of cover bands and reunion concerts that hail the musical achievements of the region. Not only is much music well remembered, music clearly is an indispensable means in retrieving memory. The idea of a record reiterating the same content each time it plays is subconsciously transposed onto the experience attached to hearing the music. 'People's expectations to feel the same response each time the record is played, stems from a craving to relive the past as it was – as if the past was a record' (Van Dijck 2006). The twentieth century has been extremely successful in producing such 'sound souvenirs'<sup>42</sup> and it is through them that we sometimes gain surprisingly new insights in the coming of modernity and how it has been situated within localized and time-bound debates. It is time that these musical memories receive the academic interest they deserve and we are just embarking on such an enterprise. Ours is a project that is situated in the 'borderlands' of anthropology, history, cultural studies and musicology with data drawn from a range of sources. Our aim is to map the infrastructure of the region's music industry, to help identify popular artists and genres, and to build biographies of key artists and cultural brokers, as well as identify audiences and lifestyles; and yes, even shifting social categories. If this book somehow contributes to such interests and invites others to follow, our mission has been accomplished...

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<sup>42</sup> The term is taken from a collection of essays edited by Bijsterveld and Van Dijck (2009) which deals with similar and related issues of the remembering of and by music.

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PART ONE  
AN EMERGENT ENTERTAINMENT INDUSTRY



## CHAPTER TWO

### MUSIC ON DUTCH EAST INDIES RADIO IN 1938: REPRESENTATIONS OF UNITY, DISUNITY, AND THE MODERN

Philip Yampolsky

The period in which increasing integration was to have come about [as proponents of 'Indisch nationalism' or 'Indisch citizenship' hoped] – the first half of [the 20th] century – instead witnessed a rapidly increasing segmentation of colonial society. (Van Doorn 1983:6)

They were like two planets moving along their own orbits, in a very confined universe. If merely to stay on track, it was logical and imperative that each of them, the Eastern as much as the European radio, work strenuously on building up and shielding their own wholeness or, at least, the appearance of it. (Mrázek 2002:184)

Mangkunegara's broadcasts of his palace musicians [on the Solosche Radiovereeniging station, SRV] ... brought 'palace art' to any listeners with access to a receiver, at a time where other princely houses – particularly in Yogyakarta – were also 'democratizing' their arts by making them available outside the palace. Live broadcasting added another dimension, though, by at once localizing something modern and modernizing something local. Mangkunegara VII's broadcast of live gamelan music was a totally modern act. (Lindsay 1997:108)

This chapter is an initial report on a project I began years ago as a complement to my research on gramophone recording in Indonesia in the late-colonial era. The purpose of the gramophone research is to learn about the musical life of the Dutch East Indies (DEI) in that era – with respect both to the musical features of the various genres and to how music functioned in society, what it meant to people to perform it or listen to it or buy records of it.<sup>1</sup> This complementary research on radio broadcasting reveals a side of things we cannot see from studying the record industry.

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<sup>1</sup> Portions of my work on gramophone records have been published in Yampolsky 2010 and 2011. This is a much-expanded version of a paper presented at a KITLV workshop on 'Popular Music in Twentieth-Century Southeast Asia,' held in Jakarta on 10–11 January 2011. I want to thank my research assistant, Tiur Manalu, who spent countless hours copying out radio listings and photographing newspaper articles for me; Bart Barendregt, Peter Keppy, and Henk Schulte-Nordholt for a fellowship enabling me to pursue radio matters

Radio was more strongly conditioned by its physical location than were records. To make new records, a recording company could send its engineers on tour to cities across Java,<sup>2</sup> and if it wanted to record musicians who did not live along the tour's route, those performers could be brought to the engineers. For radio, however, it was too expensive and impractical to bring musicians to the cities from afar, especially for repeated broadcasts; instead, radio stations were largely dependent for live broadcasting on local musicians, or on broadcasts relayed from other stations in other cities.

On the other hand, radio was more flexible than the gramophone industry in exploring new talent. A gramophone recording represented a considerable investment in artists' fees, engineers' fees, shipment of master recordings abroad for manufacture, and actual production costs, plus shipment of the finished records back to the DEI for sale and distribution to retail outlets. For this reason, recording companies, though they had a constant need for new product, were cautious in recording untried performers. Radio, however, could afford to give unknowns a chance, and in order to develop new talent stations solicited and attended to audience input. For example, *Soeara Nirom*, the program guide for the government-controlled NIROM network's *Oostersche (Eastern) Programma*, stated in November 1937 that 'many of our Arab listeners in Surabaya' had requested that a certain *gambus* group, the Gamboes Orkest Alhambra, perform on air, and accordingly NIROM would give the group a trial broadcast (*perijsbaan*) on 18 November 1937. Then in February 1938 the guide announced that audience reaction to the trial broadcast had been good, so now Alhambra would be broadcast regularly. In October 1939, the same publication reported that in response to the trial broadcast of another *gambus* group (Gamboes Orkest Assoffa), NIROM had been inundated with letters and reports from all corners of the colony.<sup>3</sup> It cost the radio station

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at the KITLV in Leiden and for comments on the workshop presentation; and, as usual, Alan Feinstein, Jennifer Lindsay, Henk Maier, and Andrew Weintraub for their incisive and illuminating comments, questions, and criticisms, even if sometimes I am too mulish to profit by them.

<sup>2</sup> Nearly all recording in the DEI was done in Java, with the exception of the Odeon/Beka tours to Bali in 1928 and 1929 and some recording in West and North Sumatra in the second half of the 1930s.

<sup>3</sup> *Soeara Nirom* 1937e, 1938b, 1939d. More on letters to NIROM: at the beginning of 1937, *Soeara Nirom* said it was receiving 'statements of satisfaction with our broadcasting' – 100 letters and postcards a month – from all over: Palembang, Balikpapan, Medan, Malang, Payakumbuh, Manado. And in November 1939 NIROM announced a new policy, to give five minutes of airtime every day to letters from listeners. Only letters of general interest would be answered on air; others would be replied to by letter 'as usual' (*Soeara Nirom* 1937b, 1939f).

virtually nothing to do a *proefuitzending* (trial broadcast); performers would have been happy for the opportunity to go on the air, and if a new group was a failure it simply was not invited back.

Thus research into radio broadcasting uncovers musicians who did not make it onto record, and it situates music in a localized and day-to-day temporal context as gramophone records cannot. Those are the concerns of the first part of this chapter: what radio research can tell us about Indonesian music near the end of the colonial era. But this research also allows us to consider the position of radio and radio music in the great issues that were in the air in the 1930s: modernity, nationalism, the relations between colonizer and colonized, and the development of an Indonesian (rather than narrowly ethnic, local, or religious) consciousness. Radio's relation to these issues is the focus of the second part of the chapter.

### *On the Air*

Both record and radio research are shaped (one could say deformed) by the fact that they must be for the most part indirect. Some collections of records exist, but I estimate that no more than 30% of the gramophone records produced for the DEI before 1942 can be found in collections, and those collections are scattered around the world. Even so, record researchers are better off than those who work on radio: broadcasts were in those days wholly ephemeral, and there is no retrieving them today. Studying both radio and gramophone records, then, requires us to work with secondary sources: catalogues and advertisements for records, program guides for broadcasts. And program guides are even harder to find than records. That is why this chapter focuses on 1938 – not because that year was particularly momentous, but because it is the year for which I could find complete runs of program guides for the largest number of stations.

### *Live vs. Recorded Music*

In this chapter I map the live music broadcast on five radio stations for the twelve months of 1938. Live music on a sixth station is summarized but not tabulated.<sup>4</sup> First, though, a defining question needs an answer: why *live* music?

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<sup>4</sup> Technically this sixth was not a station but a programme, the Westersche Programma, of the same broadcasting network (NIROM) that produced two other programmes, the Oostersche Programma for West Java and a different Oostersche Programma for Central and East Java). Since all three NIROM programmes had different content, it is convenient to treat them as separate stations. I should explain a convention I follow in this chapter: I

Radio discourse in the 1930s assumes that listeners prefer live music to gramophone records. An increase in the amount of live broadcasting is always touted by the radio stations as an improvement. A station in Surakarta (Solo) assures its listeners,

[With a subsidy from the government-sponsored radio network, NIROM] we will be able to improve [*memperbaiki*] our programme by adding live music [*menambah levende muziek*]. Not only twice a week, but maybe three or four times a week or even every day we can send out *kleنengen* [gamelan music], alternating with [other genres of music and theater accompanied by music, such as] *kroncong* and *kethoprak*, *wayang orang*, etc. (*Darmo-Kondo* 1934b)

A station in Batavia says,

The board always thinks about and works toward increasing the ratio of true broadcasting to broadcasting of gramophone records,<sup>5</sup>

and a year later the same station announces with pride that it now airs live programs every day (*Pewarta V.O.R.O.* 1937c). The government network, at the start of its fourth year of operation, says that a reorganization will allow it to ‘improve our programming, increasing live broadcasting by more than 50%’ (*Soeara Nirom* 1937a); and four years after that, looking back over seven years of broadcasting, it observes:

At the start we had to rely on music from gramophone records, but little by little we reached the point where records were only used to fill up the time between two live broadcasts, of which there are now very many. So the situation is reversed, and live broadcasting is now the mainstay of our programme.<sup>6</sup>

In 1941, after the government has ceded control of broadcasting to ‘Eastern’ audiences to a federation of private (i.e. non-government) stations, a

use *programme* (or its Dutch equivalent, *programma*) for an overall broadcasting design or structure, such as the Western and Eastern programmes of NIROM (or the BBC’s Third Programme), and *program* for an individual broadcast, such as a *kroncong* group’s program on such-and-such a date. We could consider a station’s published *program guide* to be a guide to the overall programme, but in fact it was used to tell listeners what programs would be broadcast when, so I call it a *program guide* rather than a *programme guide*.

<sup>5</sup> ‘Senantiasa memikir-mikirkan dan mengoesahkan akan membesarakan penjiaran sebetoelnya ditimbang dengan penjiaran plaat-plaat gramaphoon’ (*VORO Jubileumnummer* 1936:9).

<sup>6</sup> ‘Kalau kita pada permoelaan siaran kita teroetama sekali mesti bekerdjya dengan moesik dari piring gramofoon, tetapi lambat-laoen moesik dari piring gramofoon ini oemoemnjah hanja dipakai oentoek mengisi waktoe jang terloeang antara doea siaran hidoepljang banjak benar didalam programma kita. Djadi sebaliknya siaran-hidoeplioelah sekarang jang mendjadi siaran-oetama didalam programma kita’ (*Soeara Nirom* 1940e).

newspaper article criticizes the new regime with a long list of complaints, including:

Sometimes the schedule for one night – indeed, often for two nights in a row – has no live *kroncong* or gamelan music, even though these two kinds of music are the centerpieces of the broadcasting programme. They ought to be in the schedule every night. (*Pewarta Soerabaia* 1941a)

Nevertheless, radio needed gramophone records. In an essay written at the beginning of official broadcasting, K.W.L. Bezemer, the General Director for Broadcasting at NIROM, the government-approved network, wrote that ‘although the public generally expresses a preference for live performance,’ when it comes to ‘what the English call “high-brow” music’ (he uses the English term), NIROM must depend on records, because there are not enough skilled performers of European classical music in the DEI (*De N.I.R.O.M. Bode* 1934a). (Besides, he continues, with new technological advances in recording, recordings sound as good as live music, and when we start receiving here the new automatic record changers from Europe, which allow a long work to be heard without interruptions to change the disc, even the most spoiled listeners will have little to complain about.) While how to please devotees of classical music seems a specialized problem, it points up one of the virtues of gramophone records for any station: they could be played when live performers were not available. But of course a station had to renew its stock from time to time. VORL, broadcasting to the ‘native’ audience in Bandung, complained in 1939 that its listeners were bored with all the records VORL owned or could borrow from its members, and for lack of new records VORL could not, unlike other stations, broadcast in the morning hours.<sup>7</sup> (Presumably live musicians – who might have day jobs – could not be counted on for morning broadcasts.)

Another virtue of the gramophone record was that it was cheap compared to live performers: one had to pay musicians every time they played on the air, but a one-time purchase bought a record the station could play indefinitely. An inventory statement from VORL in Batavia shows that in 1937 that station had 377 records in inventory, and it couples this information with a statement that 2208 hours of gramophone music were broadcast in that year (*Pewarta V.O.R.O.* 1938). If, for the sake of a rough calculation, we assume that all the records it broadcast were the ones in its own inventory, that each side of each record was three minutes long,

<sup>7</sup> *Berita VORL* 1939. According to its 1938 inventory statement, VORL owned 705 playable (*bruikbaar*) records and another 309 unplayable (*onbruikbaar*) that were presumably either broken or worn out (*Berita VORL* 1938b).

and that the station played all the records the same number of times, then each side of each record would have been played nearly 60 times in the course of the year.

Table 2.1, put together from disparate sources, sketches the proportions of live music and recorded music broadcast in the DEI. (Some details of the table, such as the relation of VORO to NIROM, will become clear later

Table 2.1. Broadcasting of live and recorded music (including theater) on DEI radio, shown as number of hours (yearly) and as percentages of total music broadcasting (TM).

|                                | Live<br>music<br>(hours) | Live<br>% of<br>TM | Gramo<br>records<br>(hours) | Gramo<br>% of<br>TM | Total<br>music<br>(hours) |
|--------------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------|-----------------------------|---------------------|---------------------------|
| <b>NIROM WESTERSCHE*</b>       |                          |                    |                             |                     |                           |
| 1935                           |                          | 32%                |                             | 68%                 | 100%                      |
| 1937                           |                          | 18%                |                             | 82%                 | 100%                      |
| 1939                           |                          | 27%                |                             | 73%                 | 100%                      |
| 1940                           |                          | 24%                |                             | 76%                 | 100%                      |
| <b>NIROM OOSTERSCHE 1936**</b> |                          |                    |                             |                     |                           |
| Batavia (VORO)                 | 831                      | 40%                | 1227                        | 60%                 | 2058                      |
| Bandung                        | 935                      | 46%                | 1115                        | 54%                 | 2050                      |
| Surabaya                       | 1050                     | 51%                | 998                         | 49%                 | 2049                      |
| <b>VORO (BATAVIA)</b>          |                          |                    |                             |                     |                           |
| 1935 (VORO for<br>NIROM)***    | 784                      | 47%                | 885                         | 53%                 | 1669                      |
| 1936 (VORO for<br>NIROM)**     | 831                      | 40%                | 1227                        | 60%                 | 2058                      |
| 1937 (VORO alone)***           | 1004                     | 31%                | 2208                        | 69%                 | 3212                      |
| 1938 (VORO alone)***           | 1007                     | 30%                | 2296                        | 70%                 | 3303                      |

*Notes:*

\* Figures for the NIROM Westersche Programma come from Witte 1992:29 for 1935 and 1939, and from Witte 1998:113 for 1937 and 1940. They are apparently based on tabulations of one month's broadcasts for each year.

\*\* Figures for the NIROM Oostersche Programma in 1936 come from *Pewarta V.O.R.O.* 1936b and 1936c and cover two four week periods (19 July–15 August and 13 September–10 October 1936). The figures have been averaged and extrapolated to cover a full year.

\*\*\* These figures (except 1936, for which see the \*\* note) come from VORO sources and cover a full year, requiring no extrapolation. For 1935: *VORO Jubileum-nummer*. For 1937: *Pewarta V.O.R.O.* 1938. For 1938: *Pewarta V.O.R.O.* 1939a.

in this chapter.) It is apparent from the table that the amount of recorded music was considerably higher in broadcasting to the Western (*Westersche*) audience. It stands to reason that with some 215 Indonesians, Chinese, and 'other Asiatics' for every one European in Java and Madura (and over 250:1 for the whole colony), there would have been a bigger pool of musicians available to play live for the Eastern audience.

I still have not fully answered the question of why this chapter concentrates on live music. Partly the reason is that, as I said at the start, it is meant to complement my research on gramophone records. Since I have discussed or will discuss elsewhere the character and circumstances of recorded music in the DEI – including, naturally, the records played on the radio – the present study can concentrate on what was unique to radio, namely the live broadcasting. Another reason is that, as we have seen, both the stations and the audiences believed that (in VORO's words) 'true broadcasting' was live; it was what the medium was meant for. And a third reason is suggested by the quotation from Jennifer Lindsay I have taken as an epigraph: live broadcasting was an inherently modern thing to do in the closing years of the colonial era. I will return to the modernity of radio at the end of this chapter.

#### *A Brief History of Radio in the DEI<sup>8</sup>*

Radio begins in the DEI as the hobby of the wealthy – amateur enthusiasts, first in Batavia, then in other main cities, and mostly if not entirely

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<sup>8</sup> For other general accounts, see *Sedjarah radio di Indonesia* 1953 and Wild 1987, and for detailed considerations of specific topics, see Lindsay 1997 (private radio before and after Independence) and Witte 1998 (NIROM, with emphasis on the *Westersche Programma*). Mrázek 2002 includes a meditation on radio's place in the imagination of the colony. Like the present chapter, Takonai 2007 examines music programming, but for different time periods and with different points of focus. (See footnote 31) Another work making use of radio program guides, though not focused primarily on music, is Wirayawan 2011, which concentrates on the private *ketimuran* stations, particularly SRV. (I thank Jennifer Lindsay for bringing this book to my attention.) Wirayawan and I differ in focus and disagree in interpretation: dualistically, he sees the private radio stations as motivated by a heroic ideological and nationalistic commitment to protecting Indonesian or Eastern culture from Western poison, and NIROM as opportunistically imitative of the private stations, motivated by imperatives of commercial competition; whereas I see all the *ketimuran* stations, including NIROM, as broadcasting the same material (much of it already Western, despite the *ketimuran* rhetoric) and using the same formats, with NIROM – if only because it had more money, better equipment, and a broader network – coming the closest (though still not very close) to reflecting and honoring Indonesia's cultural diversity. Wirayawan seems determined to champion the private stations and disparage NIROM, and partly because of this bias and partly because of incomplete information

within the segment of the population designated European.<sup>9</sup> The first organized radio group was the Bataviase Radiovereeniging (BRV), which in 1925 began broadcasting (in Dutch) from the Hôtel des Indes in Batavia. Operating expenses were covered by the members of the *vereeniging* (association) themselves. A more commercial venture was initiated a few years later by the Nederlands-Indische Radio Omroep Maatschappij (Dutch East Indies Radio Broadcasting Company), known as NIROM, incorporated in Amsterdam in December 1928 with capital from three investors: Radio-Holland, the Philips group, and Maintz & Co. The aim of the venture was to develop broadcasting from Holland to the DEI, and within the DEI itself.

In September 1930 a proposal from NIROM was debated and ultimately approved in the Volksraad (People's Assembly) in Batavia, and in January 1933 the government of the DEI granted NIROM a ten-year concession to conduct broadcasting operations in the colony. Private radio groups like BRV were allowed to stay on the air, but none had the resources to compete with NIROM's powerful transmitters. A year after the concession was granted, NIROM began broadcasting.

Despite the threat (and, from 1934, the fact) of NIROM, small radio groups continued to emerge in the DEI throughout the first half of the decade. In 1930, Mangkunegara VII, officially the 'younger' of the two princes of Surakarta (Solo), gave a small transmitter to a *kunstkring* (arts circle) of aristocratic art patrons, who used it to broadcast gamelan concerts from the Mangkunegara's palace (the Mangkunegaran) every 35 days. At that time there were no more than 20 radio receivers in Solo. In early 1933 a group of people affiliated with the Mangkunegaran was formed to upgrade the transmitter and plan regular broadcasts. Describing itself as a *perhimpunan* (collective), this group was formally established on 1 April 1933, under the name Solosche Radio Vereeniging (Solo Radio Association, SRV), but it did not begin broadcasting until eight or nine

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there are inaccuracies in his treatment of several key topics, such as NIROM's *ketimuran* programming, the nature and availability of gramophone records in the DEI, and NIROM's relation to SRV. (In order, I think, to protect SRV's image, he mentions the subsidy NIROM paid to VORO but not the one it paid to SRV from 1934 through 1937 and perhaps beyond; see footnote 21 here.) Nevertheless, Wiryawan's is a well-researched, though slanted, study of radio in the DEI.

<sup>9</sup> The term covered persons born in Europe of European parents, persons born in the Indies of European parents, and recognized children of unions between a Dutch father and an Asian mother. (Curiously, Japanese were also classified as Europeans. Chinese and Arabs were not.) For more on this topic, see Van der Veur 1955 (ch. 2), and Van Marle 1951–52.

months later.<sup>10</sup> SRV was the first of the stations devoted to what would come to be called *siaran* (or *radio ketimuran*, 'broadcasting of an Eastern character' ('Eastern broadcasting' for short). These *particulier* or 'private' stations broadcast primarily in Indonesian (Melayu) and concentrated on content of interest to *pribumi*, Eurasians, and Chinese-Indonesians.<sup>11</sup>

The next private *ketimuran* association to appear, known as MAVRO (standing for Mataramsche Vereeniging voor Radio Omroep, 'Mataram [=Yogyakarta] Association for Radio Broadcasting'), was formed by a group of aristocrats from the Yogyakarta courts in February 1934. Other *ketimuran* radio groups emerged later that year: one in Batavia that was first called VORL (for Vereeniging van Oostersche Radio Luisteraars, 'Association of Eastern Radio Listeners') but changed its name (in late December 1934, after the agreement with NIROM was negotiated) to VORO (Vereeniging voor Oostersche Omroep, 'Association for Eastern Broadcasting');<sup>12</sup> one in Surabaya called CIRVO (Chineesche en

<sup>10</sup> There is a discrepancy in SRV sources regarding the date of the first broadcast. In a speech at the official opening of SRV on 24 January 1934, Sarsito Mangoenkoesoemo, the chairman of SRV, says the initial trial broadcast occurred on 14 December 1933, and further broadcasts were made every night thereafter (*Darmo-Kondo* 1934a). In a 1939 article Sarsito again says the first broadcast was in mid-December 1933 (1939:183). But the station's 1936 anniversary book, the *SRV gedenkboek* ([1936]:6), says it took place on 5 Januari 1934, which it specifies was 'Saptoe Kliwon ... pada sorenja, hari malam Akad Legi' (that is, it was Saturday in the seven-day week and Kliwon in the five-day 'market week,' and the time was the eve of Sunday-Legi; this latter detail fixes the day as Saturday, not the eve of Saturday, which in European reckoning would still be Friday). In fact, 5 January 1934 was a Friday; if the first broadcast occurred on Saturday-Kliwon, the date was 6 January 1934. Wiryawan (2011:86, 182) repeats the *Gedenkboek*'s date of 5 January 1934. The date given by Sarsito was a Thursday, not a Saturday.

<sup>11</sup> *Pribumi*: 'native Indonesians'; *Inlanders* or *Inheemschen* in colonial parlance. The term *pribumi* was understood to exclude persons of Chinese ancestry, no matter how long their families had been in Indonesia. *Eurasians*, in this context, means persons of mixed European and Indonesian descent *without* European status. Colonial society distinguished between those who qualified as Europeans under the law (as in footnote 9; Van der Veur reserves the term 'Eurasian' for this group), and those who did not, typically because they were not recognized by their European fathers or because it was their mother who was the European parent. In this chapter, context should make it clear whether I am referring to Eurasians classified as Europeans, to Eurasians classified as *pribumi*, or to all persons of mixed European-Asian ancestry, regardless of classification. Van der Veur (1955:22) observes that 'legally, culturally and socially [Eurasians who qualified as Europeans] were set apart from their brethren of mixed descent "on the other side of the fence". The one stream of mixed descent constantly fought hard to be accepted as Dutch citizens in practice; the other stream diffused almost instantly into the indigenous population, quickly becoming an integrated part of it.' Both propositions in the last sentence are, I think, overstated. There was surely duality, ambivalence, and divided loyalty on both sides of the line.

<sup>12</sup> The name was changed because the association thought the original name implied that only Asians could become members, whereas 'there are many groups other than Easterners [*golongan diloear Ketimoeran*] who are devoted to Eastern broadcasting'

Inheemsche Radioluisteraars Vereniging Oost Java, 'Association of Chinese and Native Radio Listeners of East Java'); and one affiliated with the Kraton Solo (the 'older' Solonese princedom), called SRI (Siaran Radio Indonesia, 'Indonesian Radio Broadcasting'). SRI was not a *perhimpunan*, since it had no subscribers; it described itself instead as a 'philanthropic service' of the Kraton to disseminate Javanese high culture. Still more *ketimuran* groups started in the next years: VORL (Vereeniging voor Oosterse Radio Luisteraars, 'Association for Eastern Radio Listeners') in Bandung at the end of 1935, and Radio Semarang in 1936.

Although they will not be discussed at any length in this chapter, one should note that there were also private radio groups broadcasting primarily to a Europe-oriented, Dutch-speaking audience. On the model of the phrase *siaran ketimuran*, these can be called *siaran kebaratan* (Western broadcasting).<sup>13</sup> Four such groups formed the Omroep Vereeniging in Java (Broadcasting Association of Java) and in January 1935 began publishing a joint program guide, the *Radio-Bode*. The four groups in the association were: BRV (Bataviase Radio Vereeniging), PMY in Bandung, RVMJ in Semarang, and ARVO in Surabaya.

The salient distinction between NIROM and the private radio groups is precisely that the private groups were private, responsible only to their membership, while NIROM answered to the government.<sup>14</sup> It is less relevant to stress, as one writer has, that NIROM was a profit-making venture and the private groups were not. The commercial aspect of NIROM should not be overemphasized: NIROM did not make its money from advertising, but rather from a government-administered compulsory license fee levied on radios, known as the *luisterbijdrage* (listening contribution) or *omroepbijdrage* (broadcasting contribution).<sup>15</sup> In return for the concession, the government demanded that NIROM's broadcasts reach the whole of Java within one year from the start of broadcasting and the entire colony within three years. NIROM was also responsible for ensuring that

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(*Pewarta V.O.R.O.* 1935c). Undeterred, the radio group that formed in Bandung in late 1935 (see *Berita VORL* 1938a for this date) took the name VORO had discarded.

<sup>13</sup> *Soeara Nirom* sometimes uses this term (e.g. *Soeara Nirom* 1938a).

<sup>14</sup> The private groups were engaged in what today in the United States would be called 'listener-supported radio.'

<sup>15</sup> In 1934 the *luisterbijdrage* for NIROM was f3 a month. By 1938 it had come down to f1.50 a month, still a significant sum. At the beginning of January 1939 it went down again a *talen* to f1.25. The license covered only NIROM. Listeners to the other *ketimuran* stations were expected – implored – to become members and make monthly contributions: in 1938, the contribution for an ordinary member (there were higher, more expensive grades as well) was f1 a month for VORO, VORL, and MAVRO, f0.50 for SRV.

its broadcasts not conflict with the interests of the State, the laws of the land, public order, and good morals.<sup>16</sup>

NIROM's first official broadcast took place on 1 April 1934. Radio technology did not yet permit signals from one studio, even with relays, to reach all the way from Batavia to East Java, so NIROM had to set up two studios, one in Batavia and one in Surabaya, and broadcast separate programmes from each. At the start, broadcasting was only in Dutch and served almost exclusively the Europe-oriented audience, with an hour or two per week for Asian gramophone records; this broadcasting was known as the *Westersche* (Western) *Programma*.

Two months later, at the end of May, NIROM announced in its program guide, *De N.I.R.O.M.-Bode*, that Indonesian (*Inlandsche*) and Chinese listeners had requested that NIROM make more room for Eastern (*Oostersche*) music in its broadcasts. 'But to fulfill this request,' the announcement continued,

would be a difficult matter, because it doesn't seem possible to take time from the programme we already have and use it for Eastern music. It is certain that Eastern music is not much liked by the European public, just as the Indonesian public does not much like European music. The number of registered listeners to NIROM is at present around 6200, of whom circa 1250 are Natives, Chinese, and Foreign Asiatics.<sup>17</sup> Given this ratio, it would be unfair of NIROM to split its programming between European and Eastern music. The only solution that would be fair for all parties is to set up separate transmitters to broadcast European and Eastern music (*De N.I.R.O.M.-Bode* 1934b).<sup>18</sup>

<sup>16</sup> This is the gist of Article 6, paragraph 6 of the Gouvernement Besluit (governmental decree) no. 38, which granted the concession to NIROM on 30 December 1932. (The decree, first published in the *Javasche Courant* on 10 January 1933, is photographically reproduced in Witte 1998:190–194.) In keeping with Article 6, the government required the private *ketimuran* stations – but not apparently NIROM – to submit scripts of all spoken-word material to officials of the Post, Telegraph, and Telephone Service for review before broadcast. This must have been an onerous requirement for comedians, *dhalang* (puppeteers), and theater troupes, all of whom typically worked without a script. I have come across one documented incident where the rule was applied: in March 1937 a scheduled broadcast on VORO by the Chinese Opera troupe Hiap Kioen Hie had to be cancelled, because the script had not been sent to the government 14 days beforehand for approval (*Pewarta V.O.R.O.* 1937b, 1937d). A similar incident involving a *tayuban* broadcast on SRV (in itself rather surprising) is mentioned in an August 1938 newspaper article (*Sin Tit Po* 1938), but I do not have the details.

<sup>17</sup> The official figure for radio licenses at the end of 1933 (see Table 2.2a) was 8,580, far above the figure NIROM gives here. I have no explanation for the discrepancy.

<sup>18</sup> 'Dari pihak publiek bangsa Indonesia dan Tionghoa banjak datang permintaan kepada kita, soepaja lebih banjak diloeangkan tempat dalam programma boeat lagoe-lagoe Timoer. Akan memenoehi permintaan itoe adalah satoe perkara jang soesah djoega, sebab tidak moengkin rasanja boeat mengambil waktoe lagi dari programma jang soedah ada itoe boeat lagoe Timoer. Soedah tentoe lagoe Timoer tidak begitoe disoekai oleh publiek bangsa Eropah, seperti djoega publiek bangsa timoer djoega koerang menjoekai

Soon there were more complaints from the non-European listeners, including an *aksie-vergadering* (protest meeting) in Batavia on 10 June 1934, in which listeners complained that NIROM's idea of Oostersche programming was to broadcast only a few hours a week, only gramophone records, and only at times when few people were listening (*Pewarta V.O.R.O.* 1935b). Apparently these protests were mainly on behalf of West Javanese listeners, since at the time of its official opening NIROM had already worked out an arrangement to pay a subsidy to SRV in Solo to relay live broadcasts to audiences in Central Java.<sup>19</sup> Beginning in January 1935 NIROM gave a further subsidy to VORO, the private *ketimuran* group in Batavia, to organize NIROM's live broadcasting to Batavia's Oostersche listeners.<sup>20</sup> NIROM continued its subsidy to SRV and made a similar arrangement with MAVRO in Yogyakarta; in Surabaya and Bandung, NIROM handled the Oostersche programming itself. Thus by August 1935, when NIROM began to publish *Soeara Nirom*, its biweekly, Indonesian-language program guide for the Oostersche Programma, NIROM was in fact broadcasting five different Oostersche programmes: to Batavia, Bandung, Yogyakarta, Solo/Semarang, and Surabaya.

Near the end of 1935, NIROM began to take over from VORO more of the programming for Batavia, while continuing to pay subsidies to VORO, MAVRO, and SRV. But in late 1936 NIROM announced that from January 1937 it would start to handle all of its *ketimuran* broadcasting itself and would therefore reduce the subsidies to the private stations.<sup>21</sup> This decision caused an uproar among the private stations, which dreaded the loss of income and also feared that their most popular live performers would be wooed away by NIROM. The matter was raised in the Volksraad, and, surprisingly, the government's response was not to dismiss the issue but rather to suggest that the private stations should unite in a single organization to manage *siaran ketimuran*. This suggestion led to the formation,

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lagoe-lagoe Eropah. ...' (*De N.I.R.O.M.-Bode* 1934c). The Dutch version of the sentence beginning (in my translation) 'It is certain' ('Soedah tentoe' in Indonesian) is: 'Het Europeesche publiek waardeert nu eenmaal slechts in geringe mate de Oostersche muziek en wij kunnen ons indenken, dat zij, die speciaal op Oostersche muziek zijn gesteld, weinig gevoelen voor het Europeesche programma-gedeelte' (*De N.I.R.O.M.-Bode* 1934b).

<sup>19</sup> This subsidy arrangement was announced to the members of SRV on 1 April 1934, in a speech by the chairman, Ir. R.M. Sarsito, on the occasion of the beginning of NIROM's regular broadcasting (*Darmo-Kondo* 1934b).

<sup>20</sup> The way VORO phrased this was: VORO's programs were broadcast over NIROM's transmitter, on the wavelength 190 m. (*Pewarta V.O.R.O.* 1935a).

<sup>21</sup> In 1935 VORO received a subsidy of f500 a month from NIROM (*VORO Jubileumnummer* 1936:10). In 1938 the subsidy was f200 a month (*Pewarta V.O.R.O.* 1939b). René Witte reports that SRV received f625 a month in 1935 and f300 a month in 1937, and MAVRO f450 in 1935 and f150 in 1937 (Witte 1998:144).

in late March 1937, of the Perikatan Perkoempoelan Radio Ketimoeran (Federation of Eastern Radio Associations, known as PPRK), encompassing VORO (Batavia), MAVRO (Yogyakarta), SRV (Solo), VORL (Bandung), Radio Semarang, and CIRVO (Surabaya). (SRI in Solo was not part of the federation.) PPRK eventually – a long time later, in November 1940 – took over all *siaran ketimuran* from NIROM, and broadcast until the Japanese ousted the Dutch from the DEI in March 1942.

The year I focus on in this paper, 1938, sits right in the middle of this history. By 1938, NIROM was broadcasting its Westersche Programma to the whole of the DEI from Batavia, the Surabaya and Batavia Westersche programmes having been consolidated in Batavia in 1937. Taking over the *ketimuran* programming from the private stations had enabled NIROM to consolidate Oostersche broadcasting as well. Rather than five Oostersche programmes it was now broadcasting only two: one to West Java from studios in Batavia and Bandung, and one to East and Central Java from the studio in Surabaya. The Surabaya programme was also sent out to the 'Groote Oost' (the islands of the 'Great East' beyond Java),<sup>22</sup> and transmitters in West Java sent the Batavia/Bandung programme west to Sumatra. For the most part, NIROM was handling its *ketimuran* programming itself, though it relayed some broadcasts originating from one or another of the private stations, and it had an ongoing arrangement with SRI to relay gamelan performances by musicians of the Kraton Solo. At the same time, the private *ketimuran* stations were broadcasting to their respective regions, without substantial subsidy from NIROM. The handover of all *siaran ketimuran* to PPRK, to be broadcast over NIROM's transmitters but with content unsupervised by NIROM, was still two years off.

Table 2.2 situates 1938 in DEI's radio history statistically, showing how many radio licenses (conventionally equated with the number of radio sets)<sup>23</sup> were owned in various population groups in the DEI from 1927 to 1940.<sup>24</sup>

<sup>22</sup> Also to the north of Java? It is not clear whether NIROM considered Borneo part of the Groote Oost, or simply did not consider it. Administratively, Borneo and the Groote Oost were separate residencies, and they are treated as such in the DEI government's annual *Indisch verslag*. (See, e.g., *Indisch verslag* 1941 2:461.)

<sup>23</sup> At least in theory, one could not buy a radio without paying for a license. Whether people found ways to buy unlicensed radios, or whether they could allow their license to lapse after a year and still manage to listen, is not clear to me. Citing a thesis by Budi Sulaksono (1993), Wiryawan says there were nine radio receivers in the Mangkunegaran palace compound in May 1941 (2011:84); later (2011:207) he says that they were all unlicensed, but he does not say how he (or Sulaksono?) knows this.

<sup>24</sup> Citing the *Statistical pocket book of Indonesia 1941*, published in Batavia in 1947, René Witte (1998:124) gives figures that differ from those in Table 2.2. In fact, something went

Table 2.2a. Licenses for use of radio sets in DEI.

| Year | Europeans | <i>Pribumi</i><br>(‘Natives’) | Chinese & Other<br>Asiatics | Total   |
|------|-----------|-------------------------------|-----------------------------|---------|
| 1927 |           |                               |                             | 1,106   |
| 1928 |           |                               |                             | 1,567   |
| 1929 |           |                               |                             | 2,132   |
| 1930 |           |                               |                             | 2,464   |
| 1931 |           |                               |                             | 2,780   |
| 1932 |           |                               |                             | 4,844   |
| 1933 |           |                               |                             | 8,580   |
| 1934 |           |                               |                             | 16,875  |
| 1935 | 19,020    | 4,411                         | 4,135                       | 27,566  |
| 1936 | 25,681    | 7,259                         | 6,088                       | 39,028  |
| 1937 | 32,756    | 12,238                        | 9,468                       | 54,462  |
| 1938 | 39,919    | 18,173                        | 12,817                      | 70,909  |
| 1939 | 45,039    | 25,608                        | 16,863                      | 87,510  |
| 1940 | 50,054    | 31,539                        | 20,275                      | 101,868 |

Source: *Indisch verslag 1941, part 2*. The same figures appear in volumes of the *Statistisch zakboekje voor Nederlandsch Indië* (1934–1938) and in the *Statistical pocket book of Indonesia 1941*.

Table 2.2b. Total population of the DEI in 1930.

|      | Europeans | <i>Pribumi</i> | Chinese &<br>Other Asiatics | Total      |
|------|-----------|----------------|-----------------------------|------------|
| 1930 | 240,417   | 59,138,067     | 1,348,749                   | 60,727,233 |

Source: *Volkstelling 1930*.

Table 2.2c. Percentage of 1930 population holding radio licenses in 1938.

|      | Europeans | <i>Pribumi</i> | Chinese &<br>Other Asiatics | Total |
|------|-----------|----------------|-----------------------------|-------|
| 1938 | 16.6%     | 0.031%         | 0.95%                       | 0.12% |

wrong with Witte’s table. The figures in the *Statistical pocket book* (1947:145) exactly match those in Table 2.2a (which I took from *Indisch verslag 1941*). Witte’s table unaccountably interpolates a line of figures for 1935 that are not in the *Statistical pocketbook*, and this interpolation throws off all the subsequent figures by one year. Thus the figures shown for 1935–1940 in my Table 2.2a and in the *Statistical pocket book* are shown in Witte for 1936–1941.

### *The Westersche Programma*

The following observations are based on a tabulation of 28 days of NIROM's Western programme (7 August to 3 September 1938, inclusive). The programming is dominated by the NIROM house ensembles and personnel – the Omroep Orkest (Broadcast Orchestra) and Studio Orkest directed by Carel van der Bijl, and the NIROM Quintet, directed by Boris Mariëff. Carel van der Bijl, a violinist, also leads a trio under his own name and plays chamber music with other instrumentalists.<sup>25</sup>

For the rest, there are regular broadcasts from the house orchestras at the Hôtel des Indes in Batavia and the Societeit Concordia in Bandung and broadcasts by three Hawaiian music groups and a popular-music group of unidentified specialty, the Caroline Crooners & Avalon Boys. There are chamber music and vocal recitals by performers who may be regulars in the NIROM ensembles or perhaps local amateurs. There is one

PLAYLIST 1: EUROPEAN MUSIC. TWO BROADCASTS BY THE NIROM QUINTET ON THE SAME DAY

(a) *Matinée-concert door het Nirom-Quintet onder leiding van Boris Mariëff.*

[Matinée concert by the Nirom-Quintet, led by Boris Mariëff].

NIROM Westersche Programma, 7 August 1938, 12:00–12:35.

[Emil] Waldteufel. Deux à deux (waltz)

Grieg. Arabic Dance (from *Peer Gynt*)

Mühlenau. Wiener Puppen

Sumkay. Badinerie

Zimmer. Echo der Welt

(b) *Vooravondconcert door het Nirom-Quintet onder leiding van Boris Mariëff.*

[Early evening concert by the Nirom-Quintet, led by Boris Mariëff.]

NIROM Westersche Programma, 7 August 1938, 18:20–19:00.

[Percy] Elliot[t]. In Sunny Spain (suite)

Johann Strauss [II]. Telegramme (waltz)

[W. C.] Powell. Fascination

Dvořák. Third Slavonic Dance

Meyerbeer-[Oscar] Fetrás. Les Huguenots (fantasie)

<sup>25</sup> An Internet search indicates that after the war Carel van der Bijl became first violinist of the Brabant Orchestra in Holland.

big concert, lasting two hours, by the Bataviasche Orkest-Vereeniging ‘Toonkunst’ (Batavian Orchestra Association ‘The Art of Music’), directed by J. de Ruyter Korver, with Theo van der Pas as piano soloist;<sup>26</sup> the program contains Mozart’s Symphony no. 39, his Piano Concerto no. 23, Tchaikovsky’s Serenade for Strings, two piano pieces by Chopin, and, interestingly, a ‘grammophon-intermezzo’.<sup>27</sup>

PLAYLIST 2: EUROPEAN MUSIC. AN EVENING CONCERT BY THE OMROEP ORKEST

*Concert door het Omroep-Orkest onder leiding van Carel van der Bijl.* [Concert by the Broadcast Orchestra, led by Carel van der Bijl].

NIROM Westersche Programma, 15 August 1938, 20:30–21:30.

[Adolphe] Adam. Si j’étais roi (ouverture)

Dvořák. Suite, op. 98

Leoncavallo. Prélude to the 3<sup>rd</sup> act of *Maia*

Mascagni. Intermezzo from *Cavalleria rusticana*

[Ludwig] Grossman[n]. Czardas from *Geist des Wojewoden*

Gounod. Le tribut de Zamora: Danse espagnole & Danse italienne

Aside from the ‘Toonkunst’ concert, the Hawaiian music, and the performance by the Caroline Crooners et al., everything here is what would now be called ‘light classical.’ The various distinctions – lunch concert, early afternoon concert, tea-time concert, etc. – do not seem to correlate with differences in programming, though a plain ‘concert,’ without a time-of-day designation, seems to have been somewhat weightier than the others (See Playlists 1 & 2).

There are two big omissions in this programming. One is live jazz: there were jazz bands, with Eurasian and sometimes *pribumi* and *peranakan*

<sup>26</sup> Theo van der Pas (1902–1986) was a prominent Dutch pianist (*Encyclopedie van de muziek* 1956–57, II:442). He played a Chopin piano concerto in a 1943 radio broadcast under Mengelberg, and his recordings of Beethoven piano sonatas and a Brahms cello sonata (accompanying Emanuel Feuermann) were issued by Columbia.

<sup>27</sup> The playing of gramophone records as interludes in live performances occurred not only in Western classical music concerts, but in *kroncong* and Javanese gamelan programs as well. I have seen no explanations of why broadcasters wanted to do this, so I can only speculate: partly for variety, I imagine; to give the live performers a cigarette break; and perhaps because gramophone technology was still exciting enough (and of improved quality, since the introduction of electrical recording in 1927) that it added glamor to the broadcast. Nevertheless, the juxtapositions could be jarring: in an exchange of letters published in *Djawa*, Poerbatjaraka and Brandts Buys (1934:214, 222) complain about broadcasts where *kroncong* records are played in the pauses between Javanese gamelan compositions.

Chinese<sup>28</sup> personnel, functioning in Batavia at the time (see Möller 1987), but one didn't hear them on NIROM.<sup>29</sup> ('Dansmuziek' programs from the Hôtel des Indes and the Societeit Concordia may have included touches of jazz, but one assumes those society orchestras were more sedate than Brown's Sugar Babies or The Musketeers of Swing and other jazz bands Möller names.) And the other is, of course, *kroncong*, the predominant form of popular music in Indonesia at the time: not a note of live *kroncong* in the Westersche Programma.<sup>30</sup> I have not checked to see whether there were any periods of gramophone music set aside for *kroncong*, but it seems unlikely. In a survey of everything (including gramophone records) broadcast on all NIROM stations during nine days in May 1938 (this is a separate mini-research project, not presented in this chapter), I found no *kroncong* at all on the Westersche Programma, neither live nor recorded. Not only was there no *kroncong*, there was no music with *any* Indonesian theme – not Godowsky's Javanese piano pieces, nothing by Paul Seelig or any of the other 'Indische' composers discussed by Franki Raden (Notosudirdjo 2001) or Henk Mak van Dijk (2007). Virtually the only indication that NIROM's Westersche broadcasting was situated in the Indies is the 'NI' in the station's name.

### *The Oostersche Programma*

My observations on the Oostersche Programma are based on a detailed tabulation of all of the live music broadcast in 1938 on five *ketimuran* stations: the two NIROM 'Eastern stations' (that is, the West Java and East/Central Java sectors of the Oostersche Programma, broadcast from Batavia/Bandung and Surabaya, respectively), as well as VORO (Batavia), VORL (Bandung), and SRV (Surakarta).<sup>31</sup>

<sup>28</sup> Persons of mixed Chinese and Indonesian ancestry were termed *peranakan*. The term could also be used for persons of full Chinese ancestry born in Indonesia, but it implied a degree of assimilation to Indonesian language and culture.

<sup>29</sup> Even if NIROM had wished to broadcast Batavian jazz on gramophone records, it could not have mustered more than six minutes, since only one commercial disc of a Batavia jazz band was ever issued. This was His Master's Voice NT 33, released in January 1936, on which The Silver Kings played *Dinah* and *Ma (=Ma, he's making eyes at me)*. For more on this disc, including a letter from the Sultan of Kutai acknowledging receipt of a copy, see Möller 1987:29, 61.

<sup>30</sup> One did, however, hear live broadcasts of both *kroncong* and Batavia jazz groups on BRV, the private *kebaratan* radio in Batavia. For a discussion of *kroncong* in this period, see Yampolsky 2010.

<sup>31</sup> Takonai's 2007 article offers a similar study of NIROM's Oostersche programming for two weeks in 1936 (16–31 October) and four weeks in 1942 (4–31 January). His article does not distinguish between live broadcasting and the broadcasting of gramophone records.

The total absence of Indonesia on NIROM's, Westersche Programma is not mirrored in *siaran ketimuran*: there is a little bit of Western music on all five stations, and a bit more than a little on VORO, which tried to recognize the heterogeneity of the Batavia population (as did NIROM in the Batavia/Bandung sector of its Oostersche Programma). But the great preponderance of programming on the Eastern stations is eastern, as one would expect given the polarized structure of NIROM's broadcasting.<sup>32</sup>

Many genres are common across the board, though regional preferences or emphases are apparent if we compare the quantities, both of broadcasts and of performing groups:

- *Kroncong* and *Hawaiian* were strong on all stations, though *Hawaiian* was strongest in broadcasts from Solo and *kroncong* was strongest in broadcasts from Batavia.
- Central Javanese gamelan – one would expect to find it regnant in Solo, but it is surprising to see how prevalent it was in cities not predominantly Central Javanese. It was broadcast regularly both to Batavia and Bandung from the Gedong Museum in Batavia; moreover, the Bupati of Bandung supported a Central Javanese gamelan that broadcast not only performances but also instructional programs. Some of the latter provided accompaniment for dance practice (*wireng*), but it is not clear how the others instructed. Perhaps aspiring musicians played at home on their *gender* or *rebab* along with the radio broadcast?
- *Macapat*, a Central Javanese genre of sung poetry using a variety of stanza patterns with associated vocal melodies, was also well represented (both as performance and as instruction) not only in Solo but also on the Surabaya station, and, to a lesser extent, as performance only, in Batavia. It was, however, wholly absent from Bandung.
- Sundanese music, strong in Bandung (of course) and Batavia, was non-existent on SRV and negligible on NIROM Surabaya.
- East Javanese genres had no presence anywhere but in Surabaya.
- Chinese music was relatively well distributed, though weak in Solo and weaker still in Bandung.

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<sup>32</sup> I will return to the matter of polarization later in this chapter. For now, it is sufficient to note the existence of a Western Programme broadcast entirely in Dutch, with a program guide published in Dutch and all of its music wholly Western; and an Eastern Programme broadcast entirely in Indonesian, with its program guide in Indonesian and its programming devoted to music of Asia with only a slight touch of the West.

- Gambus and harmonium orchestras, which had explicit Muslim associations, were most energetically broadcast in Batavia and Surabaya.
- Sumatran music was largely a concern of NIROM, though VORO also addressed the Minangkabau population in Batavia.<sup>33</sup>

What is *not* here? There is surprisingly little Muslim devotional music, though there were certainly lectures on Islam and there was live Qur'anic recitation (*pengajian*).<sup>34</sup> Again no jazz; I don't understand why not – though the eclectic *Hawaiian* programs (see below) included some songs that could be counted as jazz or what was called *hot* music (in Indonesia as in Europe and the U.S.). There is also nothing from Kalimantan, or Sulawesi, or anywhere east of Bali, and hardly anything from Bali itself. Given the prominence of Balinese gamelan in today's picture of Indonesian music, we may find this puzzling, but we must remember the constraints of radio in those years. Since there was no studio in Bali, the only way Balinese gamelan could be broadcast live would be for a gamelan to be transported to one of the Javanese cities with a studio – an expensive proposition.<sup>35</sup> (The lone form of Balinese music broadcast on these stations in 1938 is *janger*, broadcast three times by SRV; but *janger*, requiring only singers and a few instruments, was far more portable than a full

<sup>33</sup> VORO broadcast programs of '*lagoe-lagoe Minangkabau aseli*' (old-style Minangkabau music; this translation of *asli* is discussed in footnote 82 below), performed by the Perkoempelan A.S.A. under the direction of Tamimi gelar Soetan Roemah Tinggi, 22 times in 1938 – not at all in the first three months, but four times in April, five times in May, and two or three times each month thereafter. Although outnumbered by Melayu in Batavia, the Minang were the only Sumatran ethnic group VORO programmed for. The reason for singling them out may be simply what the director of VORO explained in a disgruntled-sounding article in January 1937 after NIROM reduced its subsidy to the station: '*Before* [i.e. when VORO was tailoring its programming to NIROM's requirements], VORO had to pay attention to all the groups of people of the East [*semoea golongan dari bangsa Timoer*] and had to play music from all of them. *Now* we are working only for our own members. So if, for example, we have no one with a Hindu name in our membership list, we don't have to play Hindu music. Hindus can look for their music on NIROM. They are *obliged* to pay NIROM every month, so it is their *right* to hear the music they care for. If they become members of VORO, then VORO will be obliged to play the music they like' (*Pewarta V.O.R.O.* 1937a). So VORO must have had members with Minang names, but none with Batak or Melayu names. Probably there were more Minang than other Sumatrans in Batavia who were interested in radio and also able to pay for both NIROM (obligatory) and VORO (optional).

<sup>34</sup> I have excluded *pengajian* from the tabulation because in Islam recitation of the Qur'an is not considered music.

<sup>35</sup> But not, apparently, impossible: on 5 March 1941 Mangkunegara VII sponsored a *malam kesenian Bali* (Balinese arts night) that was broadcast live over SRV (Wirayawan 2011:93). Perhaps a Balinese troupe was on tour.

Balinese gamelan.) The same applies to Kalimantan and the ‘Great East’: unless there were performers and instruments in the cities on Java that had radio studios, there could be no live broadcasts of their music.<sup>36</sup>

### *Specific Genres*

The program guides reveal interesting aspects of the character of various genres in radio performance. One is the elasticity of some of them. For example, broadcasts of East Javanese gamelan music from the NIROM studio in Surabaya were often interspersed (*diselingi*) with pieces played by the studio’s *angklung* orchestra.<sup>37</sup> *Gambus* broadcasts typically consisted of seven or eight numbers, of which most were sung in Arabic but at least two were ‘extra Melajoe’ (Playlists 3 and 4).

This idea of the *extra* needs investigation. The term appears frequently in the playlists for radio broadcasts, where it usually seems to mean any piece of music outside the normal style or repertoire of the principal genre being broadcast. The term is close to *selingan* (alternation, insertion), as with the *angklung* in the broadcasts of East Javanese gamelan music, but it is more flexible: if genre A is *diselingi* with genre B, you can expect to hear those two kinds of music, genres A and B.<sup>38</sup> But if genre

<sup>36</sup> Nor were there any gramophone records of music from Kalimantan or the eastern islands at that time. There were, however, recordings of Balinese music, and these were played on the radio.

<sup>37</sup> This orchestra is something of a mystery. *Angklung* is a Javanese and Balinese folk instrument, most common in West Java, consisting of two or more bamboo tubes tuned in octaves and loosely mounted in a frame; when the frame is shaken the tubes strike the frame and emit their pitch. Traditionally, *angklung* in Java are played in tuned sets producing only a few pitches or at most a pentatonic scale, but in 1938 a schoolteacher in West Java named Daeng Soetigna began making *angklung* sets tuned to Western scales and capable of playing European melodies. (The pinpointing to 1938 comes from Sumarsono and Pirous 2007:xxi.) What then was the *angklung* orchestra of NIROM’s Surabaya studio playing in 1938? Javanese folk music with traditionally tuned *angklung*? That music has a very limited repertoire. Was it an East Javanese version of Daeng Soetigna’s diatonic *angklung*? This would be the first indication I have seen that Soetigna’s innovation spread so rapidly out of West Java (or alternatively that it emerged independently in East Java). Was it a Surabaya version of the Banyuwangi ensemble known as *angklung* but featuring bamboo tube-xylophones rather than shaken tube-rattles? It seems extremely unlikely that it could have been any form of the Balinese *gamelan angklung*.

<sup>38</sup> The combinations could be pretty strange. Witness the fifth anniversary concert of The Jolly Gipsies, a children’s *Hawaiian* group in Solo. In this performance, broadcast over SRV on 19 November 1938, *Hawaiian* songs, the focus of the program, were interspersed with Javanese gamelan music (*diseling dengan klenengan*). Or the performance (*klenengan*) of Central Javanese gamelan music by the group Mardiwiromo broadcast by VORO on 1 January 1936, which had interpolations of *kroncong* and Melayu songs played (live) by Krontjong Orkest Zeentral.

A is your main program, and there are ‘extra songs’ (*lagu extra*), you don’t know what genre or genres they might belong to. The term apparently derives from the practice of the *bangsawan* or *stambul* theater, where ‘extra’ songs and dances, unrelated to the plot – cakewalks, cariocas, dances from India, whatever – could be inserted as entr’actes.

On the other hand, in the repertoire of Sundanese *tembang* (the high-status genre that was the normal repertoire of the many groups called *ketjapi orkest*), the *lagu extra* (later called *panambih*) became not a whatever but a specific type of song. In a typical performance of *tembang Sunda*, a group of unmetered *tembang*, all using one tuning or scale, would be followed by a metered *panambih* in the same tuning or scale.<sup>39</sup>

#### PLAYLIST 3: GAMBUS

*Gamboes Orkest “Rozen” dipimpin oleh toean Rozen Bahar, dinjanjikan oleh toean A. Salmin.* [Gambus Orkest “Rozen,” directed by tuan Rozen Bahar, with tuan A. Salmin, singer].

NIROM Oostersche Programma (Batavia/Bandoeng), 8 May 1938, 23:00–24:00.

- Lagoe Pemboeka'an
- Rumba Carioca
- Achi Ittifaag
- Golbie Tamanna
- Boewah Tandjoeng (selingan)
- Ali Baba Rumba
- Lagoe Penoetoep

#### PLAYLIST 4: GAMBUS

*Gamboes Orkest “Alhambra” dari Batoe dipimpin oleh toean S. Oemar Hamoed Talib, di dalam Studio Nirom, memperdengarkan matjam2 lagoe Arab.*

[The Gambus Orkest “Alhambra” from Batu, directed by tuan S. Oemar Hamoed Talib, in the NIROM studio, presents a variety of Arabic songs.]

NIROM Oostersche Programma (Soerabaia), 5 January 1938, 20:30–23:00

- Iftitah Marsch
- Sjarah Arabië “Haman”
- Extra Melajoe
- Billas Jahabibie

<sup>39</sup> As I say, the term *panambih* (Sundanese: additional, or a supplement) only came into use later, but to distinguish the specifically Sundanese *lagu extra* from other less-defined kinds of *lagu extra*, I will use the term *panambih* before its time.

Idhadhaga  
 Mama  
 Sjarah Arabië “Holkin”  
 Extra Melajoe Idjo Idjo

Usually sung by women (whereas the unmetered *tembang* could be sung by men or women), their lyrics concerned love and natural beauty, and the songs carried a subtle erotic charge. Partly because of the star female singers and partly because fixed meter made the songs more accessible, *lagu panambih* were more appealing to the general public than the old-fashioned, unmetered *tembang*, and the gramophone industry favored them for this reason, recording far more *panambih* than *tembang*.

On radio, however, *panambih* often appear paired with a *tembang* from the standard repertoire (Playlist 5), or yet more classically, as a pendant to a group of *tembang* (Playlists 6 and 7). That is to say, they are kept within the classical frame and are not allowed to become free-standing, as they often were on records. I interpret this as showing that the support for *tembang Sunda* on radio was mainly conservative, interested in maintaining the genre's prestigious, aristocratic associations, while the gramophone industry simply sought what sold. (It reminds us that radio and gramophone were, as I remarked earlier, different media, with different considerations.)

#### PLAYLIST 5: TEMBANG SUNDA

*Ketjapi Orkest “Balebat” dipimpin oleh toean Djoehrie, soeara Nji Mas Djoeedjoe.*

[Kacapi Orkest “Balebat,” directed by tuan Djoehrie, with Nji Mas Djoeedjoe, vocal.]

NIROM Oostersche Programma (Batavia/Bandoeng), 7 August 1938, 19:00–21:00

Bajoeboed extra Renggong Gede  
 Sinom Panangis extra Boengoer  
 Kentar Adjoen extra Senggot Pelog  
 Sinom Tjirebonan extra Tjatrik  
 Oedanmas Karatonan extra Bandjaran Miring  
 Eros extra Rara-rara kring Panglima  
 Sinom Satria extra Senggot Ys Lilin  
 Boebaran

## PLAYLIST 6: TEMBANG SUNDA

*Ketjapi Orkest "Sekar Familie" dengan penjanji tembang jang terkenal dari Tjiandjoer Enden Imong, dipimpin oleh toean R. Emoeng Poerawinata. [Kacapi Orkest "Sekar Familie," with the famous tembang singer Enden Imong from Cianjur, directed by tuan R. Emoeng Poerawinata.]*

NIROM Oostersche Programma (Batavia/Bandoeng), 5 July 1938, 20:30–23:30

*Tembang dalam soeroepan Pelog:*

- Pemboeka'an lagoe Papalajon
- Dandangoela Bajoebiedoed
- Dandangoela Kentar
- Dandangoela Mangari
- Sinom Liwoeng
- Sinom Panangis
- Sinom Tjirebonan
- Extra Renggong Gantjang
- Liwoeng Djaja
- Djemplang Serang

*Tembang dalam soeroepan Sorog:*

- Sinom Pangrawit
- Sinom Satrija
- Sinom Kapati-pati
- Extra Boengoer
- Asmarandana Embat-embat
- Asmarandana Karaton
- Kinanti Oedanmas
- Extra Bandjaran

*Papantoenan dalam soeroepan Pelog:*

- Papatet
- Moepoekembang
- Radjamantri
- Randegan
- Sampioeng
- Djemplang Penganten
- Djemplang Titi
- Extra Tjatrik

## PLAYLIST 7: TEMBANG SUNDA

*Ketjapi Orkest "Rekamaja," dipimpin oleh toean Moehamad Bakri, soeara Nji Moemoen. [Kacapi Orkest "Rekamaya," directed by tuan Moehamad Bakri, with Nji Moemoen, vocal.]*

NIROM (Batavia/Bandoeng), 2 September 1938, 19:00–19:45, 20:00–20:30.

*Soeroepan Pelog: Papantoenan*

- Papatet
- Randegan
- Sampioeng
- Djemplang Penganten
- Extra Senggot Pelog

*Soeroepan Sorog*

- Sinom Pangrawit
- Sinom Satrija
- Sinom Kepati-pati
- Kinanti Oedanmas
- Extra Bandjaran

Turning to the two ubiquitous genres of popular music, *kroncong* and *Hawaiian*, we find – as further examples of the elasticity of genres on radio – that both had by 1938 expanded quite a bit beyond their core repertoires.

KRONCONG. Playlist 8 shows a broadcast by the Krontjong Orkest Lief Souvenir, from Batavia. It mixes *kroncong* and *stambul* tunes<sup>40</sup> with songs in the general Batavia repertoire (*Djali-djali*, *Persi roesak*, *Kramat Karem*) available to any popular musicians in Batavia. (The Chinese-Betawi *gambang kromong* ensemble, for example, played all three of these tunes.) Note that although this is nominally a *kroncong* broadcast (since the performing group is called a *krontjong orkest*) only four of the ten named tunes (ignoring the opening and closing signature tunes) are *kroncong*. One other is a *stambul*, and all the rest are *lagu extra*, three of which have, like *kroncong* itself, associations with Batavia. Thus, though the songs themselves are diverse in form and idiom, a Batavian theme pervades the broadcast.

The Melody Band in Surabaya (Playlist 9) offers another heterogeneous program, this one without a localizing theme. Though the group is billed as a *krontjong-orkest* and the broadcast is listed in *Soeara Nirom* as a program of ‘original [i.e., in this context, old-style] and modern *kroncong* and *stambul* songs,’ there are no *stambul* and only two explicit *kroncong* numbers (though some of the other songs may be *kroncong* without saying so in their titles), along with seven songs in English, a nostalgic number

<sup>40</sup> In the context of the 1930s, *stambul* songs can be considered a distinctive sub-repertoire of *kroncong*.

harking back to the legendary Portuguese origins of *kroncong* (*Nina boe-boek*), a song associated with the *peranakan* Chinese (*Poekoel gambang*; Miss Tioe, the Melody Band's star female singer, was *peranakan*), three songs associated with the Melayu and Minang of Sumatra (*Sirih koening*, *Tjik Mamat, Simambang Boekit Tinggie*), and one (*Sontolojo*) with a probable East Javanese connection.<sup>41</sup> Koesbini, a versatile singer and composer, apparently specialized in songs in languages other than Indonesian, so the prominence of English-language songs here is probably meant to showcase this talent. Other *kroncong* broadcasts by The Melody Band included Koesbini singing in German and Dutch, as well as songs (with other singers) associated with Ambon, Manado, and Bengkulu.

PLAYLIST 8: KRONCONG

*Krontjong Orkest "Lief Souvenir" dipimpin oleh Soewardi dibantoe oleh violist Abdul Karim dan penjanjiz Miss X, Deetje, serta Djajasoepena.* [Kroncong Orkest "Lief Souvenir," directed by Suwardi, with Abdul Karim, violin, and the singers Miss X, Deetje, and Djajasoepena.]

NIROM Oostersche Programma (Batavia/Bandoeng), 12 May 1938, 20:35–22:00

- Marsch Pemboka'an
- Krontjong Slamat Ketemoe (Miss X)
- Krontjong Anak Jang Dosa (Soewardi)
- Extra: Djali-djali (Miss X)
- Extra: Lacucaracha Rumba (Soewardi)
- Krontjong Keschatan [sic: Kesehatan?] (Deetje)
- Stamboel Passar Malam (Djajasoepena)
- Extra: Persi Roesak (Miss X)
- Extra: Ja Toean Ja Njonja (Soewardi)
- Extra: Kramat Karem (Miss X)
- Krontjong Penghidoepan (Soewardi)
- Lagoe Penoetoep

Playlist 10 shows a third *kroncong* broadcast, this one by the famous Batavia group Lief Java, here with a guest singer, Miss Roekiah, a recording star

<sup>41</sup> An East Javanese gamelan composition with this title was included three times in 1938 in broadcasts of East Javanese gamelan music by NIROM's Surabaya studio gamelan (*klenengan dari Studio Nirom meloeloe gending2 Djawa Timoer*). The song performed by The Melody Band could be musically related to this East Javanese melody (or to the Central Javanese *Ladrang Sontoloyo*, reported to me by Marc Perlman), or it could simply have borrowed the title. Note that in another broadcast by The Melody Band, Koesbini sang *Krontjong Gembala Sontolojo*, which is probably the same song as in Playlist 9, under a different title.

particularly prominent in 1938 because of her leading role in the first Indonesian-language hit movie, *Terang boelan*, whose title song she sings in the broadcast. We find Betawi songs, Sumatran songs (*Kota Silindoeng tjan-tik, Danau Toba, Sri Landak*), a Chinese reference (*Peking diwaktoe malam*), a Javanese reference (*Poelau Djawa*), and the bare minimum of *stambul* and *kroncong* (one each). No songs in English, this band having a film star but no Koesbini. What is being conveyed here? Lief Souvenir, calling itself a *krontjong orkest*, treats *kroncong* as an element of Batavian music, not as a self-limiting genre. The other two groups, while still claiming to be *kroncong* ensembles or to offer programs of *kroncong* and *stambul*, also travel far outside the formal constraints of those genres, and at the same time they strive to expand their nominal *kroncong* into a pan-Indonesian popular music – not by presenting actual melodies in local performance styles from across the country, but by adapting and arranging melodies in the string-band idiom (inevitably using Western tunings and harmonies), or, when that is unfeasible because the melodies resist adaptation, by avoiding musical references and instead simply *mentioning* regions and ethnicities in the lyrics of the songs. Koesbini's Melody Band makes a further effort to connect this expanded *kroncong* to international popular music.

#### PLAYLIST 9: KRONCONG

*Krontjong-Orkest "The Melody Band" dipimpin oleh toean-toean Koesbini dan Moechtar di dalam Studio Nirom, memperdengarkan matjamz lagoë kröntjong dan stamboel jang origineel dan modern. [Kroncong-Orkest "The Melody Band," directed by tuan Koesbini and tuan Moechtar in the NIROM studio, presents a variety of *kroncong* and *stambul* songs, both old-style and modern.] [Note: the singers are Koesbini and Miss Tioe.]*

NIROM Oostersche Programma (Soerabaia), 9 January 1938, 20:30–23:00

- Lagoë Pemboeka'an
- Serenade (Miss Tioe)
- Nanking Rumba (Koesbini)
- Kiss Me Goodnight (Koesbini)
- Goodnight Marie (Koesbini)
- Krontjong Prempoean Sedjati (Miss Tioe)
- Krontjong Oh, Manoesia (Koesbini)
- Poekoe Gambah Poekoel Piano (Miss Tioe)
- Nina Boeboek (Koesbini)
- Sinar Mataharie (Miss Tioe)
- Sorga Doenia (Koesbini)

Melihat Sambil Tersenjoem (Miss Tioe)  
 Sontolojo (Koesbini)  
 There's Something in the Air (Koesbini)  
 Will You Remember Sweetheart (Koesbini)  
 Boenga Tjempaka (Miss Tioe)  
 Blue Moon (Koesbini)  
 Tjik Mamat (Miss Tioe)  
 Ramboet Item Matanja Galak (Koesbini)  
 Sirih Koening (Miss Tioe)  
 Simambang Boekit Tinggie (Koesbini)  
 Shanghai Night (Koesbini)  
 Let's Yourself Go [sic] (Koesbini)  
 Menglipoer Hati (Miss Tioe)  
 Penoetoep

## PLAYLIST 10: KRONCONG

*"Terang Boelan" – speciaal krontjong programma dimainkan oleh "Lief Java" dipimpin oleh Hugo Dumas dan dibantoe oleh Miss Rukyah [=Roekiah] dan lain-lain penjanji jang terkenal. [Terang Bulan – a special kroncong program played by "Lief Java," directed by Hugo Dumas, with Miss Rukyah and other well-known singers.]*

NIROM Oostersche Programma (Batavia/Bandoeng), 13 June 1938, 21:30–24:00

Marsh [sic] Pemboeka'an  
 Terang Boelan (Miss Rukyah) [=Roekiah]  
 Poelau Djawa (Ismail dan Koor)  
 Bungah Mawar (Miss Rukyah)  
 Peking Diwaktoe Malam (Louis Koch)  
 Djali-djali (Jan Boen)  
 Bergirang Hati (Miss Rukyah)  
 Duduk Termenung Ditepi Laut (Miss Rukyah)  
 La Cumparsita (Instrumental)  
 Kota Silindoeng Tjantik (Zahir dan)  
 Persi Roesak (Miss Rukyah)  
 Fatimah! Gadys Desa (Miss Rukyah)  
 Stamboel "Poespa Warna" (Louis Koch)  
 Danau Toba (Ismail)  
 Waktu Makan (Miss Rukyah)  
 Menyesal (Miss Rukyah)  
 Krontjong Boenga Melati (Louis Koch)  
 Sri Landak (Extra Malay Turn) (Koor)  
 Gelombang Laut (Miss Rukyah)  
 Selamat Malam

## PLAYLIST 11: HAWAIIAN

*Siaran dari Studio Nirom di Soerabaia, memperdengarkan lagoe2 Hawaiian dimainkan oleh The Twilight Minstrels.* [A broadcast from the NIROM studio in Surabaya, presenting Hawaiian songs played by The Twilight Minstrels.]

NIROM Oostersche Programma (Soerabaia), 13 January 1938, 21:00–23:00

- There's a Star in the Sky
- Time on My Hands
- Violeta
- Underneath the Palms
- Where Are You
- Pretty Red Hibiscus
- Over Somebody Else Shoulder [sic]
- Dinah
- Let's Start Our Love Anew
- I Wish I Were Twins
- Just Say "Aloha"
- Basin Sheet Blues [sic!]
- Apple Blossom Time
- So Nice
- I'd Rather Be a Beggar with You

## PLAYLIST 12: HAWAIIAN

*Hawaiian Orkest "The Twilight Minstrels" dipimpin oleh tuan Tan Hong Djwan di dalam Studio Nirom, memperdengarkan matjam2 lagoe Hawaiian.* [Hawaiian Orkest "The Twilight Minstrels," directed by tuan Tan Hong Djwan in the NIROM studio, presents a variety of Hawaiian songs.]

NIROM Oostersche Programma (Soerabaia), 4 August 1938, 21:00–23:00

- I'd Like to See Samoa of Samoa
- Honolulu Hula Hula Heigh
- O Mine Ha Ha [=Minnehaha?]
- Harbor Light
- Love and Learn
- Little Heaven of the Seventh Seas [sic]
- Toodle-oo
- Moon or Moon [sic]
- Sentimental Gentlemen from Georgia
- China Sea
- Is It True What they Say about Dixie
- A Night by the Ocean

HAWAIIAN. Again we have an expanded genre: while *Hawaiian* broadcasts always contain songs with Hawaiian or South Seas reference (*I'd like to see Samoa of Samoa, Just say aloha*), they also include popular and light jazz tunes. But never does a *Hawaiian* program include a *kroncong*, or indeed any song in Indonesian; and neither do *kroncong* programs include *Hawaiian* songs. This is quite striking, considering the near-identity of the instrumentation for *kroncong* and *Hawaiian*. One might think the distinction between the genres was racial, but both *kroncong* and *Hawaiian* ensembles included the same mix of Eurasian, *peranakan* Chinese, and *pribumi* performers. The most plausible explanation is that the genres were kept distinct in language and repertoire because of the audiences they were expected to reach: *Hawaiian*, sung in English (or Hawaiian), was aimed at an audience oriented to the wider world outside Indonesia, while *kroncong* focused either narrowly on Batavia (e.g. Playlist 8) or more broadly on Indonesia (Playlists 9 and 10). Koesbini evidently tried to widen *kroncong*'s focus to include European/American popular music as well (as in Playlist 9), but such songs were folded into a predominantly Indonesian context, whereas *Hawaiian* broadcasts simply eliminated Indonesia from the discourse.<sup>42</sup>

### *In the Air*

A public medium necessarily takes a stance on public issues, if only by remaining silent about them. In this second section I consider what radio

<sup>42</sup> By 1940 this had changed, and some groups performed *Hawaiian* songs with lyrics in Indonesian. The earliest instance I have seen so far of this subgenre, called *langgam Hawaii* or *langgam Hawaiian*, is a NIROM broadcast on 9 February 1940. A comment, interesting both for its essentialism and for its view of what popular music can do, is found in *Soeara-Nirom* 1940g: 'Hawaiian songs and Hawaiian guitar are very popular these days – not only the lovely instrumental music but also the songs in English and Hawaiian. Hawaiian music opens a road for our young people to advance by way of music and singing. Not only young men, but also our young women now have the courage to come forward without fear or shame. Because they are Eastern, Hawaiian songs are very accessible, and they are also easily made suitable to conditions in our country. Now the songs called *langgam Hawaii* have emerged, which are Hawaiian songs and music but with singing in our language here' (emphasis added).

The Indonesian text: 'Lagoe dan guitaar Hawaii sekarang sangat popoeler sekali djadinja, sehingga boekan sadja digemari orang moesiknya jang indah itoe, melainkan djoega boeah lagoenja didalam bahasa Inggeris dan Hawaii. Teroetama lagoe Hawaii itoe memboekakan djalan kepada pemoeda kita oentoek mentjari kemadjoean didalam moesik dan bernjanji, boekan sadja bagian pemoeda, poen pemoedi kita soedah berani tampil kemoeka dengan tidak oesah gentar dan maloe lagi. Karena lagoe Timoer, maka lagoe Hawaii itoe moedah benar diterima, dan moedah poela disesoeaikan kepada keadaan dinegeri kita ini. Demikianlah lahir lagoe langgam Hawaii itoe, jaitoe lagoe dan moesiknya menoeroet langgam Hawaii sedang boeah njanjinja bahasa kita disini.'

and radio music had to say or show about two of the central issues of the DEI in the late 1930s: the unity or disunity – racial, ethnic, and political – of colonial society; and the nature and impact of modernity.<sup>43</sup>

### *East vs. West*

In March 1939, the prominent Indonesian nationalist Hadji Agoes Salim published a two-part essay titled *Radio dan masjarakat* (Radio and society) in the Medan newspaper *Sinar Deli*.<sup>44</sup> In the first part of the essay, *Pertjeraian Bangsa* (Separation of peoples), Salim criticizes NIROM for failing to implement radio's potential to bridge the gap between Indonesians and the Dutch. He writes:

In virtually every government office and every business, various peoples meet and mix, especially Dutch and Indonesians. This is also the case in nearly every school. But outside of official business, association [*pergaoelan*] between Easterners and Westerners, especially Dutch and Indonesians, rarely – in fact, one may say, never – takes place. The two peoples deliberately distance themselves from each other. The Dutch do not want to mix freely with the Indonesians, seeming to feel that they will be lowered by the association; and the Indonesians avoid contact with the Dutch in order to protect themselves from opinions and behavior they feel are insulting. Although more and more Indonesians have 'Western' education and hold 'Western' rank and position, this has not decreased the separation, which has instead grown more rigid, perhaps fueled by competition.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> This second half of the present chapter is no longer restricted to 1938.

<sup>44</sup> Salim 1939. Part 1, 'Pertjeraian bangsa,' was published in *Sinar Deli* on 23 March 1939, and Part 2, 'Pertjeraian golongan,' on 28 March 1939. 'Pertjeraian bangsa' was later republished in the Surakarta newspaper *Darmo-Kondo* over two days (11–12 April 1939), but I could not find 'Pertjeraian golongan' in that paper.

<sup>45</sup> 'Dalam tiap2 pedjabatan dan tiap2 peroesahaan pemerintah atau pertikoelir hampir rata2 bertemoe tjampoeran berbagai bagai bangsa, teroetama bangsa Belanda dan bangsa Indonesia. [Paragraph] Demikian djoega hampir dalam tiap2 sekolah. [Paragraph] Tapi soenggoehpoen begitoe pergaoelan antara bangsa Timoer dan Barat teroetama antara bangsa Belanda dan bangsa Indonesia, diloeear oeroesan djabatan (officieel) hampir, malah boleh dikatakan sekali kali, tidak ada. Dengan sengadja doeae pihak itoe mengasingkan diri antara satoe dgn lain. Bangsa Belanda tidak maoe ketjampoeran 'anak negeri', dalam pergaoelan merdeka, seolah olah koeatir akan menjadikan rendah pergaoelannja djika ketjampoeran. Maka dgn sendirinja bangsa Indonesia mengasingkan diri soepaja terpelihara dari pada anggapan dan perlakoean yg dirasakannja sebagai perhinaan. Dengan bertambah banjaknja bangsa Indonesia yg berpeladjaran 'Barat' dan mendoeoekei pangkat dan djabatan 'Barat', boekanlah bertambah koerang pisahan itoe, malah bertambah keras. Seolah olah ditambah keras oleh nafsoe persaingan!' (Salim 1939). The abbreviations *dgn* and *dg* are in the published text.

Such apartness, Salim says, is dangerous and runs counter to the ideals of human well-being and progress (*hadjat kemanoesiaan dan kemadjoean*). Thus it distresses him to see that while NIROM's Oostersche Programma broadcasts the songs of Indonesians, Chinese, Indians, Malays, Arabs, and also (like the Westersche Programma) songs in English, Hawaiian, and Maori,

evidently the Dutch language is forbidden [*pantangan*] for Eastern broadcasting, and songs in Indonesian are forbidden for Western broadcasting. And the music and Western songs called classical seem also to be forbidden for NIROM's Eastern broadcasting. ... With this policy, NIROM, a halfway official body, becomes as it were propaganda for and a demonstration of the separation of peoples, with the approval of the ruling power.<sup>46</sup>

Salim praises VORO, the private *ketimuran* station in Batavia, for broadcasting some Dutch-language programs. This is appropriate, he says, given that thousands of Indonesians understand and indeed speak Dutch (particularly, he could have added, in the kinds of families that could afford radios).

This is a curiously one-sided attack. In the first place, it is not quite fair: the Oostersche Programma did (as Salim acknowledges) broadcast its Padvinders (scouting) program in Dutch (spoken by an Indonesian broadcaster); it also, to celebrate the birthdays of the royal family or the anniversary of the Queen's succession to the throne, broadcast programs with Dutch-language songs 'especially for those of the Orange group,'<sup>47</sup> and from time to time *kroncong* with Dutch titles were included on *kroncong* playlists even when there was no special occasion.<sup>48</sup> (But aside from these few contexts, Salim is right that the Dutch are barely present in the Oostersche Programma.)

<sup>46</sup> 'Hanja roepanja basa Belanda menjadi pantangan oentoek siaran Timoer, sebagai djoega lagoez dan njanjian basa Indonesia menjadi pantangan oentoek siaran Baratnja. Begitoe poela lagoez moesik dan njanjian Barat jg dinamakan klassiek seolah2 menjadi pantangan poela oentoek siaran Timoer Nirom. ... Dengan lakoe jg demikian itoe, Nirom jg bersifat setengah djabatan seolah2 menjadi propaganda dan demonstratie pisahan bangsa dgn kebenaran dari pihak kekoeasaan' (Salim 1939).

<sup>47</sup> In 1938, these songs included the anthems *Wilhelmus* and *Wien Neerlandsch bloed*, and various popular tunes: *Zandvoort*, *Draaien draaien*, *Ik hou van Holland*, *Zilver tusschen 't goud*, *Je hebt een hart van goud*, *Van je heidel doedel dee*, *Hei hei meisjelief*, *Omdat ik zooveel van je hou*, and *Het meisje van de overhaal*.

<sup>48</sup> I am not certain that the lyrics of these songs were in Dutch, though the titles were. Some of these titles from 1938 broadcasts are: *Krontjong Tanah Abang bij nacht*, *Krontjong Nirom bij nacht*, *Krontjong Java bij nacht*, *Krontjong Parijs van Java*, *Krontjong Melati van Java*, *Krontjong Het Zevental*, *Krontjong De Bliksem*, *Krontjong De Regenboog*, etc.

Secondly, why does he lash out at the Oostersche Programma like this yet skim lightly over the Westersche Programma? Judging from my Westersche surveys for 1938, *nothing* from Indonesia, words or music, was broadcast on the Western Programme. NIROM operated on the premise that Dutch listeners wanted nothing but European music, and Asian listeners wanted nothing but Asian music.<sup>49</sup>

But was this premise true? *Pertjeraian golongan* ('Separation of groups'), the second part of Hadji Agoes Salim's 1939 essay, concerns social rather than racial divisions in the DEI. The only people who have radios, he writes, are those who can afford to buy the machines and pay for the license and the electricity – 'a very thin stratum of society'. Even high government officials (*ambtenar2 sampai pangkat kontrolir jd mengepalai pemerintahan negeri*) say they cannot afford radios, so certainly the mass of ordinary people (whom he calls *rakjat ramai* and *lapisan tengah dan lapisan sibanyak daripada rakjat anak negeri*) cannot. This is surely correct; but if only the wealthy could afford radios, is it likely that those Asians among them (some 40,000 in 1938, according to Table 2.2), many with enough wealth and privilege to afford Western education and Western interests, listened only to Asian music? Or consider the 45,000 Europeans who held radio licenses at the end of 1939: Witte (1998:125) points out that 28,000 of them were actually Eurasians with European status,<sup>50</sup> and, as I remarked earlier, Eurasians had one foot in each camp. Undoubtedly many of them were listening to both Western and Eastern music.<sup>51</sup>

Anyone could turn the dial from west to east and back again. Indeed, while *De N.I.R.O.M.-Bode* contained detailed schedules of two weeks of Westersche broadcasting, and *Soeara Nirom* contained equally detailed listings for Oostersche broadcasting, each also provided a one-page

<sup>49</sup> Recall the justification NIROM offered for establishing its separate Oostersche Programma, quoted earlier (see footnote 18): 'Eastern music is not much liked by the European public, just as the Indonesian public does not much like European music.' 'Not much liked' sounds to me like a faint-hearted way of saying 'rejected'.

<sup>50</sup> For the reason discussed in footnote 24, Witte presents this figure in incorrect reference to 1940 rather than 1939.

<sup>51</sup> In August 1967, the *Djakarta Times* published an article describing *kroncong* as 'typically Indonesian.' The article was later translated into Dutch and published in *Tong Tong*, a magazine aimed at 'Indos' (Eurasians) living in Holland. See 'Krontjong: een manifestatie van typische Indonesische muziek', *Tong Tong* 12–16 (29 February):5, 1968. The translation was accompanied by an anonymous editorial comment (probably by Tjalie Robinson) remarking (disapprovingly) on the furious reaction of some Eurasians that '*kroncong* is NOT Indonesian, it comes from us!' (*Krontjong is NIET Indonesisch, maar 'van ons.'*) Recall that *kroncong* did not appear at all in NIROM's Westersche Programma – but clearly it had listeners who were classified as Europeans.

summary of the other programme's schedule for those two weeks. An invitation, perhaps. And a listener who wanted to pay the money could subscribe to either program guide, or both.<sup>52</sup>

One further instance of modest – but not nonexistent – crossover. In April 1936, *De Nirom-Bode* published the results of a poll taken earlier that year (*De Nirom-Bode* 1936). NIROM had held an election for a board of advisers, and it asked all who voted in that election, 5884 listeners, which programme they preferred to listen to, the Westersche or the Oostersche. Then, on the basis of the listeners' names, NIROM sorted the responses into three categories: Europeans, Natives, and Chinese. The results are shown in Table 2.3.

Table 2.3. Results of 1936 NIROM questionnaire regarding listener preferences for Westersche or Oostersche Programma.

|   | Europeans | Pribumi<br>(‘Natives’) | Chinese<br>& Other<br>Asiatics | Total  |
|---|-----------|------------------------|--------------------------------|--------|
| 1 # of respondents to<br>NIROM<br>questionnaire                               | ?         | ?                      | ?                              | 5,884  |
| 2 % of NIROM<br>respondents (line<br>1) preferring<br>Westersche<br>Programma | 98.1%     | 6.6%                   | 30.5%                          |        |
| 3 % of NIROM<br>respondents (line<br>1) preferring<br>Oostersche<br>Programma | 1.9%      | 93.4%                  | 69.5%                          |        |
| 4 # of radio license<br>holders – end 1935                                    | 19,020    | 4,411                  | 4,135                          | 27,566 |
| 5 % of total # of<br>license holders<br>(line 4)                              | 69%       | 16%                    | 15%                            | 100%   |

(Continued)

<sup>52</sup> The guides did not come free with the license fee. In 1937, a subscription to *Soeara Nirom* cost an additional fo.25 a month.

Table 2.3. (*Cont.*)

|   | Europeans | Pribumi<br>(‘Natives’) | Chinese<br>& Other<br>Asiatics | Total                             |
|---|-----------|------------------------|--------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| 6 Putative # of all license holders preferring Westersche Programma (applying % in line 2 to # in line 4) | 18,659    | 291                    | 1,261                          | 20,211<br>(73.3% of line 4 total) |
| 7 Putative # of all license holders preferring Oostersche Programma (applying % in line 3 to # in line 4) | 361       | 4,120                  | 2,874                          | 7,355<br>(26.7% of line 4 total)  |

Sources: Lines 1 & 2: *De Nirom-Bode* 1936; line 4: *Indisch verslag*, part 2, for 1938 (published 1939). Other lines extrapolated from Lines 1, 2, & 4.

It is probably no surprise that some 98% of the Europeans preferred the Western programme, and not much of one that 93% of the Indonesians preferred the Eastern programme – though the 2% of Europeans and 7% of Indonesians listening against type are of interest. The surprise is among the Chinese, 30% of whom chose the Western programme and 70% the Eastern.

So there is considerable likelihood, and some evidence, of listening across racial boundaries. In the *discourse* of Indies radio, however, everyone stays in his or her box. We have seen this already in the east/west opposition that justified the creation of the Oostersche Programma; but it was strong also in *ketimuran* rhetoric. For example:

The broadcasting of Eastern music now is far from satisfactory. Radio listeners are stuffed full of Western music, which is obviously not enjoyed by Chinese, Arabs, or Indonesians.<sup>53</sup>

<sup>53</sup> ‘Sekarang sadja penjiaran lagoe-lagoe Timoer soeda djaoeh dari memoeasken. Pendenger-pendenger radio terlaloe banjak didjedjel dengen lagoe-lagoe Barat, jang tentoe sekali ada tida menjotjokin bangsa Tionghoa, Arab atawa Indonesiers’ (*Pewarta Soerabaia* 1938b).

Similarly, most of the rationales offered for the formation of the Federation of Eastern Broadcasters (PPRK) are essentialized expressions of the box mentality:<sup>54</sup>

Eastern broadcasting should be managed by Eastern people, because the music of the East can definitely be accepted and will definitely be satisfactory if they manage it themselves.<sup>55</sup>

The goal of PPRK is generally known to be that the variety [of *ketimuran* broadcasting?] and [its?] suitability to the Eastern soul should be held and managed by Eastern people themselves as much as possible.<sup>56</sup>

So that *ketimuran* broadcasting can satisfy and fulfill the desires and needs of *ketimuran* listeners, its programming and broadcasting have been turned over to PPRK.<sup>57</sup>

The essentialist assumption is that precisely because NIROM's Oostersche programming was not run *by* Asians it could never be acceptable *to* Asians. In this regard it is interesting to note that when PPRK finally did take over *ketimuran* broadcasting (in November 1940), listeners complained that it should have brought NIROM's star performers with it. In an article bluntly titled 'Why are PPRK's broadcasts bad?', the director of PPRK, Soetardjo, is reported as saying in PPRK's defense that NIROM had tied up its star performers in contracts prohibiting them from working for anyone else, and also that NIROM had reneged on a promise to transfer its entire *ketimuran* staff to PPRK.<sup>58</sup> Thus he defends PPRK, which

<sup>54</sup> It is striking how few serious arguments were advanced for *why* PPRK should control *ketimuran* broadcasting. When Soetardjo Kartohadikoesoemo first proposed PPRK to the Volksraad (Soetardjo 1936), he at least offered a pragmatic rationale. He argued that since NIROM had been dependent on the private *ketimuran* stations for its Eastern programming, once it cut its ties with them (as it intended to do at the start of 1937), it would have no good *ketimuran* material to broadcast. Therefore, he proposed, the government should support a federation of the *ketimuran* broadcasters themselves, independent of NIROM, since they already knew how to do it and could ensure that good *ketimuran* programming remained on the air. On 16 August 1938 the Volksraad approved the transfer of *ketimuran* broadcasting from NIROM to PPRK. Once approval was won, there was no longer a question of why PPRK should take over, only a question of when, so justifications did not need to be cogent.

<sup>55</sup> 'Seantero omroep katimoeran bisa dioeroes sendiri oleh orang-orang Timoer. Ini ada beralesan atas timbangan bahoea muzieknja katimoeran tentoe aken bisa disetoedjoei dan tentoe aken memoeasken dioeroes oleh orang Timoer sendiri' (*Pewarta Soerabaia* 1938a).

<sup>56</sup> 'Toedjoeannja P.P.R.K. poen oemoem ketahoein, bahoea memang soeda samoestinja kerageman dan katjotjokan pada batin Timoer dipegang dan dioeroes sendiri sabisa-bisanja' (*Pewarta Soerabaia* 1940c).

<sup>57</sup> 'Agar soepaja siaran radio Ketimoeran dapet memoeaskan dan memenoehi keinginan keboetohan pendengar Ketimoeran, maka penjelenggaraan programma dan penjiarannja diserahkannya kepada PPRK' (*Persamaan* 1940).

<sup>58</sup> 'Kenapa penjiaran P.P.R.K. djelek' (*Pewarta Soerabaia* 1940a). A few days afterwards, two of NIROM's key performers – Koesbini, by then the director of the Surabaya studio's

was expected to be by nature *better* than NIROM, by saying PPRK's problem is it doesn't have NIROM's artists and staff.<sup>59</sup> The rhetoric of essentialism prevented people from recognizing that PPRK was simply adopting NIROM's broadcast models and practice.

### *East vs. East*

*Ketimuran* radio was acutely concerned with balance and proportion. In the remarkable essay 'Taman boenga Nirom' ('NIROM's flower garden'), published in *Soeara-Nirom* in April 1940, fully three-quarters of the text is devoted to an extended metaphor depicting NIROM's Oostersche Programma as a garden of flowers: the various Indonesian and Asian arts are the flowers and NIROM is the gardener, whose task it is to ensure that one species does not overshadow another or crowd it out, and to coordinate the colors to make a pleasing overall view (*pemandangan jang sedap daripada segenapnya*).

Every plant and kind of flower needs its own plot of land and its own kind of nurturing, so as to prosper; every kind of art that comes before the microphone needs a time for broadcast and reception that is coordinated with the others, so its beauty can shine out . . . That is why all of these beautiful flowers have been turned over to NIROM to be arranged in a design, so the neat and handsome garden of radio broadcasting can satisfy and delight all the groups of listeners who wish to enjoy the beauty of NIROM's garden.<sup>60</sup>

NIROM has to take care that each art has sufficient time before the microphone, and also that adding a new art to the roster does not reduce the time for others. For this reason NIROM often has to reject, with regret, the requests of listeners who ask that the broadcast time for their favorite art be extended.

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house orchestra, and R. Soekarno, the group's principal male singer – published a refutation, denying that they were bound by any contract to NIROM (*Pewarta Soerabaia* 1940b). The reason they were not performing for PPRK, according to Soekarno, was that PPRK had opened discussions with them but then let the matter drop.

<sup>59</sup> However questionable Soetardjo's replies, note that the attacks on PPRK began less than a month after its first broadcasts, which seems unsporting.

<sup>60</sup> 'Tiap toemboehan-toemboehan dan bangsa boenga itoe menghendaki tanah jang lain, pemeliharaan jang lain, soepaja dapat soeboer hidoepnja; tiap-tiap oesaha dimoeka microphoon, tiap-tiap boeah kesenian jang dinjatakan didepan microphoon itoe menghendaki waktoe penjiaran dan waktoe penerimaan jang selaras, soepaja terkemoekalah keindahanmjia. . . Maka segala boenga-boengaan jang indah dan molek itoe terserah kepada Nirom oentoek menjoesoen karangannja, soepaja taman siaran-radio jang teratoe rapi dan bagoes itoe dapat memenoehi kehendak segala golongan pendengar, jaitoe penjadap keindahan taman Nirom, dan memoeaskan hatinja sedapat-dapatnya' (*Soeara-Nirom* 1940d).

Another difficulty lies in choosing the artists. There are many kinds of orchid, with many different colors, and therefore it is not visitors to the garden, but the professional gardener who should do the planting. On the basis of his experience, and with expert advice, he must decide which flower should be planted and where it should be placed, so the beauty of the whole garden is not diminished (*terganggoe*, 'disturbed'). Thus NIROM – taking into account the different and sometimes opposed interests of various social groups – has been given the responsibility to organize the many arts into a general programme for Eastern Broadcasting.

Sometimes it happens that one or another performing group thinks it has the *right* to appear in a certain position in the programme, and therefore it circulates a petition among listeners to strengthen its claim. But this is as though the flowers told the gardener where they should go in the garden, without regard for the overall design. Our readers will surely agree it is the gardener, namely NIROM, who must decide the place of each flower.<sup>61</sup>

Published six months before the looming takeover of *siaran ketimuran* by PPRK, 'Taman boenga NIROM' obviously presents NIROM's justification of its operations over the previous six years. What it doesn't say is that the principles had never worked: the flowers were constantly telling the gardener what to do. Listeners in North Sumatra requested that NIROM broadcast more Melayu music and less Javanese.<sup>62</sup> In Surabaya they said Central Javanese court gamelan is too elevated to serve for relaxation and they much preferred the lighter East Javanese gamelan broadcasts.<sup>63</sup> Chinese listeners in Surabaya complained that NIROM's broadcasting to the Chinese was far from satisfactory and would remain so since there were no Chinese working for NIROM; the only solution was for NIROM to set up a new transmitter and initiate an all-Chinese

<sup>61</sup> 'Ada kalanja kita lihat, bahwa sesoeatoe orkest menjangka *berhak* mendoedoeki soeatoe tempat jang tertentoe didalam programma, dan didalam permintaannja akan hak jang tersangka itoe orkest itoe menjangka poela lebih landjoet, bahwa permintaan itoe mesti dikoeatkan dengan daftar tanda tangan jang dikoempoelkan dengan soesah-pajahnja. Boekankah jang seperti ini seakan-akan boengalah jang memberi atoeran kepada si toekang-taman tentang tempatnya didalam taman besar itoe, dengan tidak mengingatkan soesoenan segenapnya? Pembatja kita tentoe mengerti, bahwa si toekang-tamanlah jaitoe Nirom, jang mesti menentoekan tempat segala matjam boenga jang telah sedia' (*Soeara-Nirom* 1940d).

<sup>62</sup> *Soeara Nirom* 1937d.

<sup>63</sup> 'Vorstenlandsche gamelan wordt door velen te hoog geacht voor ontspanningsmuziek. De gamelan-uitzendingen uit Soerabaja, welke gemakkelijker worden begrepen, genieten daarom een zekere voorkeur' (*De Nirom-Bode* 1937).

programme staffed by Chinese.<sup>64</sup> (Essentialism again.) Not to be outdone, an Arab-Indonesian member of the Volksraad called for a separate Arabic-language programme.<sup>65</sup>

These are all instances of identity politics, the box principle at work. And it hardly ended with the handover. In June 1941, well into the PPRK era, Chinese listeners in Bandung complained that broadcasting aimed at Chinese listeners had decreased by 50%. They formed a committee to improve (*perbaakin*) PPRK's broadcasting by adding more Chinese programs. In response, *pribumi* listeners formed their own committee to 'defend' (*membela*) PPRK. The newspaper article reporting this (in a paper with a large Chinese readership) remarked that the Chinese committee was not 'anti-PPRK' (*tida bersifat anti*), it was simply offering suggestions for improvement, and the author hoped the misunderstanding would not lead to conflict between the races (*Pewarta Soerabaia* 1941b).

The radio stations themselves accepted the box principle. VORO states it succinctly:

It is inevitably the case that the Chinese want to hear Chinese music, the Arabs want to hear Arab music, the Javanese Javanese music, and so forth. Every group wants its own music.<sup>66</sup>

#### NIROM's version:

Melayu listeners in Sumatra certainly, we feel, prefer Melayu music and *kroncong* to Sundanese gamelan. And Sundanese listeners value *kroncong* higher than Javanese gamelan, Javanese listeners value *kroncong* and Melayu music more than Sundanese *wayang golek*, and so forth. If we broadcast Javanese gamelan, our Sundanese and Melayu listeners will say, 'Don't play too much Javanese music, because we don't understand it.' And if we broadcast *wayang golek* from Sunda, the Javanese listeners will say, 'Don't play too much Sundanese music, because we don't understand it at all.' And so forth. But in fact we *must* play all those kinds of music, because, as we all know, listeners to NIROM *ketimuran* consist of so many groups, whose wishes must be satisfied, even though it is not easy to do so.<sup>67</sup>

<sup>64</sup> *Soeara 'Oemoem* 1939. The new transmitter should be called NIROM III, in line with the Westersche transmitter NIROM I and the Oostersche transmitter NIROM II.

<sup>65</sup> Bafagih 1940. The Volksraad member was named Al-Djoeffry.

<sup>66</sup> 'Soedah seharoesnja, bahwa bangsa Tiong Hwa soeka mendengar lagoe Tiong Hwa, bangsa Arab lagoe Arab, bangsa Djawa lagoe Djawa dan begitoe selandoetnja. Masing-masing golongan soeka pada lagoe-lagoenja sendiri' (*Pewarta V.O.R.O.* 1937d).

<sup>67</sup> *Soeara Nirom* 1937c. The original text of the last sentence is: 'Tetapi toch kami MOESTI memperdengarkan lagoe-lagoe terseboet, sebab sebagai diketahoei, pendengar-pendengar dari Nirom ketimoeran terdiri dari begitoe banjak golongan bangsa timoer, kemaoean siapa semoeaan haroes dipenoehi, sedangkan pekerjaan jang demikian itoe, sebagai dapat diketahoei tidak moedah.'

As with the east/west opposition, we cannot know whether listeners went exploring into other people's music, but we can see that the radio programmers believed they did not. East Javanese music was only broadcast to East Java, West Javanese music only to West Java, and Sumatran music only to Sumatra and Batavia, and a little bit to Surabaya. Central Javanese music was broadcast on all the stations, but the Javanese were everywhere, constituting 45% of the *pribumi* population of the entire colony. And, just as in the radio programming, the rhetoric of identity politics also made no allowance for crossover.

### *One Nation, the Indonesian Nation*

So far, this investigation of radio's power to promote unity or disunity has all been about disunity. The unity comes from the prevalent forms of popular music: *kroncong* and *Hawaiian*, heard frequently on all the stations, and *orkes gambus* and *orkes harmonium*, somewhat less frequent but still widespread.

In an influential article (1986), Tsuchiya Kenji proposes that *kroncong* – because of its supposed origins in the music of Portuguese slaves and subsequent adoption by Eurasians and Indonesian seamen and the *stambul* theater, itself dominated by Eurasians – belongs to no particular culture but is inherently mestizo, and moreover that it 'stirs up feelings of melancholy and nostalgia in the hearts of its listeners that embod[y] neatly [the] amorphous 'mestizo' situation in 19th-century Java.' He goes on to say that *kroncong* on the radio 'made even deeper inroads in Javanese society and [was] often combined with the melody of native Javanese music.'<sup>68</sup>

Tsuchiya's main topic is Raden Adjeng Kartini, and I am in no position to dispute his conclusions about her. But I think he has *kroncong* all wrong. *Kroncong* was not on the whole melancholy.<sup>69</sup> Rather it was, up until

<sup>68</sup> The one melody? Tsuchiya is probably thinking of *langgam jawa*, a genre using the instrumentation of *kroncong* but whose hundreds of melodies were in a scale approximating the *pelog* tuning of Javanese gamelan music – but *langgam jawa* did not emerge until the 1950s. There was, however, a now-obscure 1930s precursor of *langgam jawa* known as *kembang kacang*, using *kroncong* instrumentation and a quasi-*pelog* scale. I have seen no indication that the genre had a presence on radio or gramophone records before the war, though a tune with the title *Kembang katjang* is included in some *kroncong* broadcasts.

<sup>69</sup> There was one infrequently played minor-key melody, *Kroncong Bandan*, that was reserved for laments of the poor-me variety; and occasionally other *kroncong* melodies would be used for lovesick lyrics, but these cannot justify a characterization of the whole genre as melancholy. Neither can Tsuchiya's melancholy be located in *kembang kacang* (if he knew about it at all). Koesbini ([=Kusbini] 1972:34) reports that *kembang kacang* was happy and was interspersed with humor (*gembira, berseling humor*).

about 1917, an up-tempo, melodically limited vehicle for banter in the *pantun* verse form; and after that it was most likely to be romantic, cheery, or mood-neutral. It was not the music of no culture, it was by the end of the nineteenth century the urban folk music of Batavia, and from there it entered the musical repertoire of the *stambul* theater. Nobody really knows what *kroncong* was before the 1880s, but by that time, when it begins to surface in the historical record, it was very much the music of one specific group, the Eurasians of Batavia, and perhaps also the *peranakan* Chinese. And from the 1920s on it became a *popular* music, disseminated to cities everywhere in the DEI on gramophone records and radio. For reasons I have explored elsewhere (Yampolsky 2010), over the course of the 1930s *kroncong* became increasingly Westernized, abandoning both its characteristic accompaniment idiom and the traditional *pantun* stanza form of its lyrics and instead adopting dance-band arrangements (rumba, tango, foxtrot, waltz).

It is going much too far to imply – as one would have to do in order to reconcile my view with Tsuchiya’s – that popular music is ipso facto mestizo. Popular music often crosses boundaries – of geography and culture, perhaps, to unite people by generation rather than by ethnicity – but it does not erase those boundaries. That is what the formidable presence of *gamelan*, *tembang Sunda*, *wayang*, *macapat*, *ludruk*, and *kethoprak* on the radio in 1938 shows us: the boundaries were there; the Javanese desire to hear Javanese gamelan and *wayang kulit* and *kethoprak*, the Sundanese desire to hear *tembang Sunda* and *wayang golek* had not eroded. *Kroncong*, precisely because it was sung in the lingua franca and was not linked to a specific region or ethnicity, may well have offered a relief from the confinements of cultures, a vision of a wider world; but it did not miscegenate genres.

What it did, rather, was to place within a Western instrumentation and an increasingly Western musical idiom lyrics relating to Indonesian life and sung in the Indonesian lingua franca. *Hawaiian* went further in the same direction: with lyrics in English (or Hawaiian) and, again, a foreign musical idiom, it moved out of Indonesia completely – except for the fact that it was played in Indonesia by Indonesians.<sup>70</sup> *Gambus* and *harmonium* broadcasts straddled boundaries: the songs were for the most part sung in Arabic, but the playlists always included *lagoe extra Melajoe* (Melayu

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<sup>70</sup> This observation applies to *Hawaiian* before the emergence of *langgam Hawaii* (footnote 42).

*extra songs*) in Indonesian, and the musical idioms of these broadcasts shifted between the Middle East for the Arabic songs and a Malay/Middle-Eastern/Western mixture for the extras. The appeal was to Muslims of all ethnicities, and to speakers of the lingua franca.

Thus *kroncong*, *Hawaiian*, and the Arabic-language repertoire of *gambus/harmonium* were all supra-ethnic and supra-regional – in fact, to some extent, international. In their *lagoe extra Melajoe*, *gambus* and *harmonium* were not quite supra-ethnic, inasmuch as some of these songs were associated with the Melayu ethnic group, but they were nearly so, since the mother tongue of that group was the lingua franca; and they were fully supra-regional, since the Melayu were the least regionally bound of all Indonesian ethnicities, with sultanates established from Malaya and Aceh to British North Borneo and Maluku.

Today, in the twenty-first century, Indonesian society is so fragmented that no form of expression tied to one ethnic or regional group can be accepted by any other groups as representing *them*. (For example: although Javanese batik is an internationally recognized symbol of Indonesian culture, a batik national flag would be unthinkable.) The situation was the same in the early years of the twentieth century, when first gramophone and then radio were introduced to the colony. These media adapted to the fragmentation by trying to serve all of the principal ethnic groups. But the strongest impulse of mass media is to maximize the audience, to market to the mass, and since no ethnically or regionally delimited music could serve as a mass Indonesian music, it was necessary to adopt symbolic forms free of such linkage: forms tied to no particular place within Indonesia, or forms from outside Indonesia altogether. Popular music in foreign musical idioms and instrumentation and sung either in a foreign language or in Indonesian was one such form; music associated with a world religion like Christianity or Islam was another.<sup>71</sup> This is in large part, I believe, what accounts for the prominence in 1938 of *kroncong*, *Hawaiian*, *orkes gambus*, and *orkes harmonium* alongside all the gamelan, *wayang*, and *tembang*.

Once PPRK took over *siaran ketimuran*, the role of *kroncong* in creating a mass audience acquired a political interpretation. PPRK's first high-profile live event, variously billed as a concert of Indonesian folk

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<sup>71</sup> Still today, the only musics that have a pan-Indonesian audience are, on the one hand, the various kinds of Indonesian-language popular music, all of which use Western instrumentation and elements of Western idiom, and, on the other, music associated with Islam or, to a lesser extent, with Protestant and Catholic Christianity.

music (*Volksconcert Indonesia*) and a performance of Eastern art (*pertoendjoekan kesenian Timoer*), was a concert held in the Schouwburg in Batavia on 11 January 1941 and nominally devoted to *kroncong*, which Soetardjo described in his opening speech as a kind of music 'enjoyed (*digemari*) by almost all the Eastern people who live in these various islands.' (The definition of *kroncong* was sufficiently loose by then that the concert probably included other types of popular music as well, as did the radio broadcasts itemized in Playlists 8, 9, and 10.) The groups performing were Krontjong Orkest The Golden Star, Krontjong Orkest Lief Java, and the PPRK Radio Orkest. Lief Java wore Javanese dress; the Radio Orkest wore dinner jackets. Miss Roekiah, Miss Ijem, and Miss Soelami sang in the concert, and the comedian known as Botol Kosong (Empty Bottle) also performed.<sup>72</sup>

In the very first issue of PPRK's program guide *Soeara Timoer*, covering the two weeks ending with that concert, one of the editors, Hamid Algadrie, published a manifesto titled 'PPRK and Indonesian culture,' which proclaims that

Indonesian society has only recently arisen from sleep. It has been a static society but is now moving to become a dynamic one; it is an Eastern society that has just 'married' with Western society and has not yet produced the child that will, when it is grown, be Indonesian culture in the true sense, namely *a culture that can be understood by every member of Indonesian society, and that contains an active spirit!*

In our view, this is PPRK's primary duty: to aid in forming this Indonesian culture for the future, and to ensure the success of the 'marriage' between Eastern and Western culture, so our society and culture do not become something unproductive, 'between two worlds, the other powerless to be born,' as in a wrong marriage, one that cannot produce healthy offspring.<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> Soetardjo's speech was published in *Soeara Timoer* 1941. The details of the performers' dress and the names of the soloists come from Boediardjo 1941b.

<sup>73</sup> *Soeara Timoer* 1940–41. 'Masjarakat Indonesia adalah satoe masjarakat jang beloem beberapa lama bangoen dari tidoernja, satoe masjarakat jang statisch jang sedang menoedjoe ke masjarakat jang dynamisch, satoe masjarakat Timoer jang baroe 'menikah' dengan masjarakat Barat, jang beloem dapat melahirkan anak, jang, djika dewasa, akan meroepakan keboedajaan Indonesia, dalam artian kata jang sesoenggoehnja: jalih keboedajaan jang dapat difaham oleh tiap-tiap anggauta dari masjarakat Indonesia dan keboedajaan jang mengandoeng dijwa jang bergerak! [The words in italics here are all caps in the original.] [Paragraph] Sekedar pemandangan kita disinilah terletak kewadjiban P.P.R.K. jang teroetama: membantoe membentoek keboedajaan Indonesia jang satoe oentoek hari kemoedian dan mendjaga berhasilnya 'perkawinan' diantara keboedajaan Timoer dan Barat, soepaja masjarakat dan keboedajaan kita tida meroepakan sesoeteoe

Algadrie did not specifically name *kroncong* as the child of East and West that would usher in a true Indonesian culture, and Soetardjo in his opening speech did not claim more for *kroncong* than that it was widely enjoyed. But commentators recognized instantly that PPRK was proposing *kroncong* as a *moesik persatoean*, a ‘music of unity’ that could appeal to all Indonesians. The well-known polemic in the journals *Poedjangga Baroe* and *Kritiek en Opbouw* on ‘*kroncong* vs. gamelan’ turns on this point.<sup>74</sup> Ali Boediardjo (1941b) started it off by attacking the 11 January concert as an ‘American-style show’ (*show tjara Amerika*) and stating that he was appalled that PPRK was offering *kroncong* as an example of art (*keserian*). But, he said, the concert raised a more important question: what should be the unifying music of Indonesia (*moesik manakah jang akan didjadikan moesik persatoean Indonesia*)? Not, in his view, *kroncong* – ‘that mix of false and shallow romance, that mix of imitation American jazz and showbiz,’ that ‘shadow’ (*bajangan*) of European music – but Javanese gamelan, a music of refinement, delicacy, grandeur, and joy. Boediardjo concedes, however, that gamelan music may be *too* refined for modern Indonesian society; but it has the capacity to change, perhaps by incorporating Western elements, perhaps not.

To which Armijn Pané replied (1941a:257), ‘Apparently [Boediardjo] forgets that there are people from Sumatra, Manado, or Ambon, who do not find the atmosphere of *gender* and *slenthem* [gamelan instruments] appealing.’ Even if they can appreciate it, as Pané himself (a Sumatran) does, they don’t think it’s the highest pinnacle of culture. Pané admits that *kroncong* in the past was shallow, but now – perhaps as a result of radio’s influence, he suggests – it has more content. (However, all he seems to mean by this is that the formulaic words and syllables formerly used to fill out a verse line and make it fit the melody were now eschewed by songwriters as amateurish.) And because it is enjoyed by all groups (not just one, like Javanese gamelan), it fulfills one of the requirements for a unifying music (*memenoehi salah satoe sjarat moesik persatoean*). That is why PPRK, wanting to satisfy all groups, chose to devote its first concert to *kroncong*. Pané ends his

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jang onproductief, between two worlds, the other powerless to be born, sebagi satoe perkawinan jang salah, tak koeasa melahirkana toeroenan jang sehat.’

The English phrases in the second paragraph are an incomplete quotation from Matthew Arnold’s ‘Stanzas from the Grande Chartreuse,’ in which the poet speaks of himself as ‘Wandering between two worlds, one dead, / The other powerless to be born.’

<sup>74</sup> The key articles in the polemic are: Boediardjo 1941a in Dutch; its Indonesian translation, Boediardjo 1941b; and Armijn Pané 1941a and 1941b. Other contributions are Resink 1941 and Brandts Buys-Van Zijp 1941.

article by saying that ‘just as there is, alongside the regional languages, the Indonesian language, so also with music: alongside the regional musical arts such as Javanese, Sundanese, and Balinese gamelan, etc., it must be admitted that there is a music of Indonesia in general [*moesik-Indonesia oemoem*], namely *kroncong*’ (Pané 1941a: 260).

But this political spin on *kroncong* was, in 1938, still in the future. By forming a mass audience of listeners, radio can be said to have shaped an Indonesian public, but I think it anachronistic to say that in 1938 this public had an Indonesian consciousness. It was instead, I believe, a consciousness directed towards *entertainment*, and ultimately towards consumption. And even in 1941, *kroncong* and popular music in general may have been becoming a *musik persatuan* by virtue of their wide appeal, but I see little indication that they were acquiring political *content*, that they had anything to say about what Indonesia should be. It took the Japanese occupation and the resistance to recolonization by the Dutch to give the audience formed by media, the consumers of entertainment, a political, national purpose.

### *A Digression on Nationalism*

The word *Indonesia* was officially banned on the air in the DEI until 8 January 1942.<sup>75</sup> At that time, the Procureur-Generaal wrote to PPRK saying it was now permitted to broadcast speeches and songs containing the word. *Indonesia Raya*, however, was still banned, because it was classified not as a song (*njanjian*) but as a national anthem (*lagoe kebangsaan*) (*Soeara Timoer* 1942).

Although songs may have been excluded from the airwaves because of government warnings or self-censorship on the part of the stations themselves, I know of only one recording, aside from *Indonesia raya*, that was banned from circulation. This was *Brani kerna benar*, recorded by S. Abdullah and released in November 1936. In late January 1937 the police went after it, seizing copies in record stores and banning future sales.<sup>76</sup> Here are the lyrics.

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<sup>75</sup> *Soeara Timoer* 1942. But notice Playlist 20 from 1938, where it slipped in. Perhaps the ban was not carefully enforced.

<sup>76</sup> *Sinar Pasoendan* 1937a, 1937b. The second article helpfully provides the song lyrics, for anyone who failed to snare a copy of the record before the stock was seized.

*Brani kerna bener / Be brave because you're in the right*

Foxtrot Krontjong – HMV NS 131, issued November 1936<sup>77</sup>

S. Abdullah & the H.M.V. Batavia Orkest

Asal sendiri merasa benar,  
Djanganlah moendoer atawa keder,  
Maski moesoehnja besar dan angker,  
Lawanlah teroes djangan meliker  
[=melingker]

Maski apa akan menjadi,  
Madjoelah teroes djanganlah djeri,  
Oendjoek dirimoe sebagai laki-laki,  
Boeat membela kebenaran sedjati.

So long as you feel you're in the right,  
Don't retreat or lose your way.  
Even though your opponent is big and  
frightening,  
Keep on opposing, don't turn away.

Whatever will happen,  
Press forward, don't be afraid.  
Show your manliness,  
To defend what is truly right.

If these lyrics were enough to bring out the police, think how innocuous everything else broadcast and sold without interference must have been! To see 1930s *kroncong*, or 1930s radio and gramophone in general, as a nationalist force is, I believe, just wishful thinking.<sup>78</sup>

### *Modern Music*

And, finally, what about modernity, a central theme of the present volume? Here are instances of how the word *modern* is used in reference to DEI radio music.

*Modern* (the word itself, untranslated) occurs frequently as a descriptor in the program guides, seemingly serving as part of a performing group's

<sup>77</sup> Here and elsewhere in this chapter, release dates and other discographical details come from my discography-in-progress of pre-war gramophone records issued for the DEI, Malaya, and Straits Settlements. Song lyrics come from HMV record catalogues or from paper sleeve-inserts issued with the records. The translations into English, admittedly rough, are my own.

<sup>78</sup> Citing Tsuchiya, Mrázek (2002:180) writes: 'The radio ... helped the *kroncong* to become the dominant Indonesian national, indeed nationalist music.' Tsuchiya (1986:82, n.8) doesn't phrase it quite this way. He says that through radio '*kroncong* melodies made even deeper inroads in Javanese society' and, further, that 'in the process of Indonesia's fight for independence from Japan's military rule, *kroncong* became popular in songs inspiring a nationalistic spirit'. Both statements are correct, but Mrázek has not situated them properly in time. The 'deeper inroads' were made in the years up to 1942, years when *kroncong* was purely entertainment music. It is true that during the Japanese occupation (1942–1945), and especially during the Indonesian Revolution (1945–1949), *kroncong* songs became a medium for expressing the spirit of resistance and nationalism. But that came about because the Japanese banned the Western popular songs and popular idioms that had increasingly infused *kroncong* since 1930 and by 1942 had, I believe, rendered *kroncong* passé. *Kroncong* was revitalized and, so to speak, re-Indonesianized by the ban, and that is when it became available for nationalist content.

name (though I suspect it may sometimes be a descriptive insertion by the editors rather than the musicians):

- Modern Harmonium Orkest ‘S. M. Alaydroes’
- Gamboes Orkest Modern ‘Rozen’
- Modern Gamboes Orkest ‘Al Wardah’
- Orkest Melajoe Modern [Modern Melayu Orchestra] ‘Penghiboer Hati’
- Orkest Melajoe Modern ‘Sinar Sumatra’
- Krontjong dan Modern Gambang Kromong Orkest ‘Sinar Kramat’
- Orkest Tiong Hwa Modern [Modern Chinese Orchestra] ‘The Bright Stars’
- Modern Javaansch Tooneelgezelschap [Modern Javanese Theater Company] ‘Sri Moeljo Koentjoro’ (this was a *kethoprak* troupe).

Or it may be used to describe the kind of music to be broadcast:

- ‘modern kacapi music’ (*ketjapi modern*, played by Soehji Soebandi or Soelaiman)
- ‘modern Chinese tunes’ (*lagoe Tiong Hwa modern*, unnamed group)

So what does *modern* mean in reference to music on the radio? What does the descriptor indicate?

In application to the instrumentation of a performing group the meaning is clear: ‘modern instruments’ (*perkakas modern*, *boenji-boenjian modern*, *alat-alat modern*) are always European instruments.<sup>79</sup> Entries from the program guides demonstrate this repeatedly:

- The Strijkorkest [string orchestra] Pandowo performs ‘Central Javanese music with Western instruments [*lagoe Djawa-tengah dengan instrumenten Barat*]. The times have changed, and the art of instrumental music must also change. And so: Central Javanese music with modern instruments.’ Another reference to this ensemble, some years later, states that the modern instruments (*alat boenji-boenjian modern*) include ‘violin, guitar, cello, etc., to replace the gamelan’ (*oentoek peng-ganti gamelan*).<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> The idea of ‘modernizing’ a traditional instrument – developing gamelan instruments that play European major/minor scales, for example – does not arise in the program guides.

<sup>80</sup> The first quotation is from *Soeara Nirom* 1937f: ‘Zaman telah beredar dan berganti, demikian poela matjam kesenian boenji-boenjian djoega menghendaki perobahan: Lagoe Djawa-tengah dengan instrumenten, jang modern.’ The second, listing the instruments, is from *Soeara-Nirom* 1940f.

- The Orkest Ketjapi 'Poerwakanti' – which would seem, from the name, to be a Sundanese ensemble of plucked zithers (*kacapi*) plus a bowed lute (*rebab*) or flute (*suling*) – 'is not like the usual *kacapi* ensemble. Instead, apart from the *kacapi* themselves, the instruments are all modern [*perkakas moesiknya serba modern*]. Instead of the *rebab*, there is a violin ... and there is a plucked cello.'<sup>81</sup>
- A photograph of the *Orkest Tiong Hwa Modern* [Modern Chinese Orchestra] 'The Bright Stars' shows guitar, string bass, accordion, violin, saxophone, and, indistinctly, what might be a trumpet. No traditional Chinese instruments are evident (*Soeara-Nirom* 1939b).
- A photograph of the Orkest Modern Al-Ittihad, which plays 'modern Arab music,' shows three guitars, violin, double bass, ukulele, tambourine, trumpet, and harmonium (*Soeara-Nirom* 1940b).
- A photograph of the Orkest Soeling Modern daripada Kepandoean Arab 'Al Irsyad' (the Modern Flute Orchestra of the Arab Scout Troupe 'Al Irsyad'), from Surabaya, shows a group of boys in scouting uniforms, with a boy conductor in front. The instruments are side-blown bamboo or wooden flutes (these were introduced into Indonesia by missionaries in the 19th century) plus two guitars and a sit-down drum kit (bass drum, two snare drums, and a wood block) (*Soeara-Nirom* 1939c).
- In reference to the Orkest 'Minangkabau Saio': 'In order to fulfill the demands of Minangkabau art, so that it should not be too hard-pressed [*terlaloe terdesak*] by modern music and instruments [*alat dan lagoe modern*], tuan Rozen Bahar, the director, has brought from West Sumatra two master musicians.' They play traditional Minang instruments: *rabab* (bowed lute) and *salung* (*saluang*, an oblique flute) (*Soeara-Nirom* 1940c).
- The Orkest 'Nam Fong' will play 'modern Chinese music with modern and old-style instruments [*perkakas modern dan asali*.]' A photograph of the ensemble shows Chinese instruments (*yangqin*, *sanhsien*, *erhu*, and *hsiao*), plus two violins and a guitar (*Soeara Nirom* 1939a). Guess which instruments are the modern ones?

In application to style and repertoire, the meaning of *modern* is more complicated. Not surprisingly, it is often contrasted with terms denoting

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<sup>81</sup> *Soeara-Nirom* 1940b. The description specifies that the cello is not held upright but is instead placed horizontally across the player's lap, and that it is 'not only plucked but also struck with the palm, making a thrumming sound [*mendengoeng*] like a *gendang* [the kind of drum used in Javanese and Sundanese gamelan].' The 'cello-drum' sound was also a feature of *kroncong* from at least the mid-1920s.

the past, such as *lama*, *koeno*, *asli*, and *origineel*,<sup>82</sup> and linked instead with the ideas of youth, newness, and the present:

Among the Arabs [in Batavia], many of the young people prefer modern songs to old ones [*lagoe modern dari pada lagoe koeno*]. The same is true among the Chinese (*Pewarta V.O.R.O.* 1937a).

It seems that English has become the language of our young people. Everywhere and all the time they sing in English. Their parents sometimes become annoyed at them, because their older ears are tuned and suited only to grand and weighty old-style music [*moesik lama, jang alamat dan berat itoe*]. Parents dearly wish to see their children pay more attention to their own culture [i.e., rather than foreign culture]. Older people cannot adjust their sensibility and their listening to the commotion [*kebisingan*] found in all modern songs and instrumental music, nor to the extreme behavior of young people reflected in the songs. *Kroncong, gamelan, kacapi, rebab, salung, and suling* remain the sounds old people love.<sup>83</sup>

The existence of contrasting modern and old-style versions of a genre in the repertoire of a single performing group is frequently mentioned in the program guides:<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> The Indonesian equivalent of *origineel* is *asli*; it is defined in dictionaries from the 1930s and '40s as 'original,' but in most cases in Indonesian music no one knows what the original repertoire or style actually was. One knows only what people did within living memory, or what is thought to have been earlier practice. This is why I typically prefer to translate both *origineel* and *asli* as 'old-style,' or, in some contexts, 'traditional.' As for the other antonyms of *modern*: *lama* means 'old,' and *kuno* ranges in meaning from 'old' back through 'archaic' to 'ancient.'

<sup>83</sup> Here is the original text of this interesting passage (*Soeara-Nirom* 1940i): 'Maka serasa bahasa Inggeris itoe telah menjadi bahasa pemoeda kita seoemoemna. Dimana sadja dan bilapoen mereka menjanjikan njanji dalam bahasa Inggeris selaloe. Maka orang toea mereka kadang-kadang djadi kesal memikirkan itoe, sebab pendengaran telinga orang toea itoe masih selaras dan hanja sesoeai dengan soeara moesik lama, jang alamat [see below] dan berat itoe. Orang toea itoe ingin sekali melihat anaknya lebih banjak menoedjoekan perhatian akan boeah keboedajaan sendiri. Orang toea itoe tidak dapat menjesoekaikan per[a]saan dan pendengarannnya kepada kebisingan jang terkandoeng didalam segala lagoe dan moesik modern, dan djoega akan ketelandjoeran pemoeda jang terbajang didalamna. Krontjong, gamelan, ketjapi, rebab, saloeng dan soeling masih menjadi alat boenji-boenjian jang masih digemari sangat.' This is an old use of *alamat* that does not appear in today's dictionaries (e.g. Stevens and Schmidgall-Tellings, or the Pusat Bahasa dictionary of 2008). It is found, however, in Iken and Harahap's *Kitab arti logat Melajoe* (1940:14), which gives *kehormatan*, *kemegahan*, and *kebesaran* as a second group of meanings after the current senses of 'street address,' 'sign,' etc.

<sup>84</sup> On the other hand, some groups play *only* the modern or *only* the old-style version of a genre; and some genres have only one form on radio. In the case of Javanese and Sundanese gamelan, for example, the term *asli* frequently appears in conjunction with gamelan broadcasts, but *modern* never does, except in reference to instrumentation when the music is transferred to European stringed instruments (as with the Strijkorkest

- 'Krontjong-Orkest 'The Melody Band' ... presents a variety of *kroncong* and *stambul* songs, both old-style [*origineel*] and modern' (*Soeara Nirom* 1938a, entry for 9 January; cf. Playlist 9).
- 'Alongside *lagoe Tapanuli lama* [i.e., old songs from the region of northern Sumatra known as Tapanuli, the homeland of the Toba Batak], various kinds of modern Tapanuli songs have emerged, as will be heard in the broadcast by Batak Hawaiian Tapian Na Uli (*Soeara-Nirom* 1940a).
- Hoa Kiauw, a *gambang kromong* ensemble, 'presents modern and old-style *gambang kromong* [*lagoe gambang-kromong modern dan asli*]' (*Soeara-Nirom* 1940h).

What then makes a genre, or a version of a genre, modern? Instrumentation alone does not do it, since it is possible to have a traditional repertoire played on Western instruments (Strijkorkest Pandowo and Orkest Ketjapi Poerwakanti, above), and to have a modern repertoire played on a traditional instrument (*kacapi modern*, discussed below). I propose that in the discourse of DEI radio it is *the incorporation of elements of the European and American ('Western') popular music of the 1920s and '30s* that qualifies a music as modern. The elements may be specific popular songs, or, more generally, dance rhythms, song forms, the common-practice harmony, or the accompaniment idioms and arrangement styles of Western popular music.

Consider the following genres, all characterized in the program guides either as wholly modern (e.g. 'modern Chinese music') or as having both a modern and an old-style repertoire:

- *Kroncong and stambul*. As quoted above, The Melody Band offers both *origineel* and *modern kroncong* and *stambul*. The difference is one of both idiom and instrumentation: old-style *kroncong* and *stambul* used a string band of violin, small lutes, and cello, and a distinctive accompaniment idiom, while the modern songs of the 1930s expanded the instrumentation (already 'modern,' in that the instruments of the old style were Western) to include dance-band instruments (clarinet, trumpet, saxophone, piano, etc.), and they adopted dance-band idioms: jazz, blues, swing, rumba, tango, foxtrot, beguine, and so forth. When these

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Pandowo above). Gamelan was inevitably 'traditional,' and *asli* appears in the program-guide descriptions not to contrast the *asli* form with a modern one, but to contrast gamelan music with all the modern music around it on the radio. *Hawaiian* is another genre with only one form: there was no *asli* version, so 'modern' is not needed in the descriptions.

idioms were applied to compositions in the specific structures of *kroncong* and *stambul*, the results were *kroncong tango*, *kroncong blues*, etc., collectively called *kroncong modern*.

- *Sundanese kacapi ensembles*. Two performers, Soehji Soebandi and Soelaiman, regularly appeared (individually) on NIROM playing the Sundanese *kacapi* or plucked zither. Their programs were called *ketjapi* (=*kacapi*) *modern*. The genre title contrasts implicitly with the very frequent broadcasts by one or another *kacapi orkest*, which presented the much-loved genre of *tembang Sunda*, discussed earlier in connection with Playlists 5, 6, and 7.

The contrast is implicit because, for some reason, *tembang Sunda* was not characterized in the program guides as *asli*.<sup>85</sup> *Tembang Sunda* was sung entirely in Sundanese and was accompanied only by the traditional instrumentation of one or more *kacapi* plus a flute (*suling*) or a bowed lute (*rebab*). What made the *kacapi modern* broadcasts modern was not the instrumentation, since both musicians are described as playing the *kacapi*, but the repertoire. Playlist 13 shows one of Soebandi's broadcasts: five tunes with English titles (including Shirley Temple's signature song, *On the good ship Lollipop*) and one with a Hawaiian title (*Oea-oea*, the opening piece for all of Soebandi's broadcasts, which suggests that his *kacapi* may have imitated the sound of a *Hawaiian* guitar in some numbers). Others of his broadcasts included *La paloma* and *Bei mir bist du schön*; there was not one with even an Indonesian – let alone a Sundanese – title.

The other *kacapi modern* performer, Soelaiman, was one of the directors of the Ketjapi Orkest 'Margaloejoe,' which played traditional *tembang Sunda* repertoire (though its programs were less formal than those shown in Playlists 5, 6, and 7). On his own, however, in the *kacapi modern* broadcasts, Soelaiman played mainly pieces with Indonesian (not Sundanese) titles, and he included melodies totally outside the *tembang Sunda* repertoire, such as *Terang boelan* (Miss Roekiah's film hit, a Western-idiom popular song) and the Batavian popular tunes *Djali-djali* and *Tjantek manis*, presumably arranged in a Western idiom.

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<sup>85</sup> I speculate that the reason *tembang Sunda* on the radio is not called *asli* is that *panambih* had already become so prominent that the 1930s style of performance was felt to be a newer, modified form of the genre. Playlist 5, for example, with one *tembang* paired with one *panambih*, clearly gives a greater share of the performance to *panambih* than more classical programs like those in Playlists 6 and 7, where one *panambih* follows a group of *tembang*. So the 1930s form was already not *asli* – but it was not *modern*, because it had not yet assimilated significantly to Western or Indonesian popular music.

- *Chinese music (lagu Tionghoa)*. Playlist 14 shows a broadcast by the Orkest Tionghwa Modern [modern Chinese orchestra] ‘The Bright Stars.’ This is the same Chinese-music ensemble whose instruments (guitar, string bass, accordion, violin, saxophone, trumpet?) were listed above. In its broadcasts, the group always played ‘modern Chinese music’ (no contrasting old-style tunes were indicated), plus a number of extras, usually with titles in English. In this broadcast, six of the extras were taken from a 1937 American movie, *The singing marine*, starring Dick Powell. In other broadcasts by this group, the extra songs included *I'm Popeye the sailor man*, *Pennies from heaven*, *Tiger rag*, and *Kicking the gong around*. I am not able to assess the Chinese-language titles, but the Western instrumentation of the ensemble, as well as the juxtaposition of Chinese songs with English-language ones, strongly suggest that they came from the realm of Western-idiom Chinese popular music. If so, then – just as *kacapi modern* was contrasted with *tembang Sunda* – they are implicitly contrasted with the Chinese traditional music heard in *yang kim* or *pat im* broadcasts.
- *Batak music (lagu Batak)*. Toba Batak traditional music – typically instrumental and sounding quite unlike the music of a Western string band or dance band – was never, so far as I know, broadcast on DEI radio, and certainly not in 1938 on the stations I deal with here. Batak music on the radio and on gramophone records was newly composed; it focused on singers and consisted of duets and choruses, tangos and rumbas in the standard Western harmonic idiom. (Cf. the quotation above concerning the Batak Hawaiian Tapian Na Uli group. Note the ‘Hawaiian’ in the group’s name.)
- *Melayu music (lagu Melayu), Harmonium, Gambus*. I must be more tentative when we come to these three genres. More work needs to be done to assess the differences among them and the extent to which their explicitly modern forms (*Melayu modern*, *gambus modern*, and *modern harmonium*) embraced Western popular music.

I include sample playlists of their modern-form broadcasts as Playlists 15–20. Only one piece comes unequivocally from the West: the instrumental tango *A media luz* in Playlist 15. (The second instrumental in that broadcast, *Salome*, probably does as well.) The other titles are in Arabic and Indonesian. Are the Arabic titles rumbas and tangos, as they often are on those DEI gramophone records of the period that are sung in Arabic? (Remember the rumbas in Playlist 3, broadcast by a *gambus* orchestra *not* designated as modern: even the ordinary *gambus* groups were playing Western dance music.) And the Melayu titles – are these

ordinary urban popular songs in Western idioms, or are they performed in the heterophonic unharmonized idiom of traditional Melayu Deli music?

My supposition is that when Playlist 16 says the broadcast will include 'popular songs' (*lagoe-lagoe jang populair*), it means songs drawn from the Westernized repertoire omnipresent on the radio, not from a separate and narrower repertoire of Melayu-idiom popular song. Corroboration seems to come from a 1939 program-guide entry for the

**PLAYLIST 13. KACAPI MODERN**

*Ketjapi modern, dimainkan oleh Soehji Soebandi.* [Modern *kacapi*, played by Soehji Soebandi.]

NIROM Oostersche Programma (Batavia/Bandoeng), 7 September 1938, 11:30–12:00.

Oea-oea  
Alone  
Tina  
Happy Days  
On the Good Ship Lolly-pop  
Little Man

**PLAYLIST 14. MODERN CHINESE**

*Orkest Tiong Hwa modern "The Bright Stars" atawa "Bing Sing," dipimpin oleh toean Tan Soen Han di dalam Studio NIROM, memperdengarkan matjam-matjam lagoe Tiong Hwa modern.* [The modern Chinese Orchestra "The Bright Stars" or "Bing Sing," directed by tuan Tan Soen Han in the NIROM Studio, presents various modern Chinese tunes.]

NIROM Oostersche Programma (Soerabaia), 23 August 1938, 20:00–22:00.

[Ten tunes with Chinese titles, transliterations sic in the program guide]:

Siauw Siauw Moo Lie  
Tjhwee Bauw Bauw  
Tjwee Hoo Ti I Oe  
Nie Yauw Djang Koo  
Mai Pauw Koo  
Yauw Lan Tjhih  
Yen Tjhwen  
Tjin Tjoeng  
Sin Mao Mao U  
Ta Ti Sin Tjwin Tjhih

*Extra's:*

*Song-hits from the The singing Marine [movie, 1937]:*  
 The Song of the Marines (steps)  
 'Cause My Baby Says It's So (fox-trot)  
 You Can't Run Away from Love (slow-fox)  
 The Lady Who Couldn't Be Kissed (fox-trot)  
 Night over Shanghai (fox-trot)  
 I Know Now (slow-fox)  
 Hoor Mijn Lied, Violetta (tango)  
 Lulu's Back in Town (fox-trot)  
 Some Fiddlin' (violin solo)  
 Here Come the British (fox-trot)

## PLAYLIST 15. MELAYU MODERN

*Orkest Melajoe Modern "Sinar Sumatra," dipimpin oleh toean Moehamad Noerdin.* [Modern Melayu Orchestra "Sinar Sumatra," directed by tuan Moehamad Noerdin.]

NIROM Oostersche Programma (Batavia/Bandoeng), 12 August 1938,  
 20:00–22:00.

Opening marsch  
 Bersenang Hati  
 Boeroeng Tjamar  
 A Media Luz (muziek [=instrumental])  
 Rindoe  
 Lagoe Dana  
 Ranoengan Kalboe  
 Salome (muziek [=instrumental])

## PLAYLIST 16. MELAYU MODERN

*Orkest Melajoe Modern "Penghiboer Hati," dipimpin oleh toean St. Perang Boestami, dinjanjikan oleh Nona Siti Priwati dan Boeng Sjaugie.* [Modern Melayu Orchestra "Penghibur Hati," directed by tuan St. Perang Boestami, with singers Nona Siti Priwati and Boeng Sjaugie.]

NIROM Oostersche Programma (Batavia/Bandoeng), 4 September 1938,  
 23:00–24:00.

Lagoe Pemboeka'an  
 Sambil Berbaring  
 Wangkang Petjah  
 Anak Dagang  
 Nasib Rabihatoen  
 Seri Sambas  
 ditambah dengan lagoe-lagoe jang populair [*plus popular songs*]

## PLAYLIST 17. MELAYU MODERN

*Orkest Melajoe modern dipimpin oleh toean August Oedin, dengan soeara dari Siti Rohana.* [Modern Melayu Orchestra, directed by tuan August Oedin, with Siti Rohana, singer.]

NIROM Oostersche Programma (Batavia/Bandoeng), 25 May 1938, 23:00–24:00.

Pemboeka'an: Turksch Marsch  
 Air Mawar Toempah  
 Serantih  
 Laili Madjenoen  
 Nasib Rabihatoen  
 Boeroeng Poetih  
 Penoetoep: Nina Bobok

## PLAYLIST 18. MODERN HARMONIUM

*Modern Harmonium Orkest "S. M. Alaydroes."*

NIROM Oostersche Programma (Batavia/Bandoeng), 23 August 1938, 21:30–23:30.

S. M. Marsch  
 Menentoet Ilmoe  
 Agisbis Mata Sjita  
 Pasar Gambir Didirikan  
 Bandar Negeri  
 Kaoem Iboe  
 Mata Jakiran  
 Gamboes Singapo[e]ra  
 Jahabiboelgalbi Silni  
 Tanah Periangan  
 Penoetoep

## PLAYLIST 19. MODERN GAMBUS

*Modern Gamboes Orkest "Pemoeda," dipimpin oleh toean H. Moh. Jasin Aldjawi.* [Gamboes Orkest "Pemoeda," directed by tuan H. Moh. Jasin Aldjawi.]

NIROM Oostersche Programma (Batavia/Bandoeng), 12 December 1938, 22:30–24:00.

Aldjawi Marsch  
 Siaran Betawi  
 Lenggang Melenggang  
 Kasidah Lilazzatoun  
 [title not given]

[title not given]  
Kasidah Jagoellama

PLAYLIST 20. GAMBUS [not explicitly “modern,” but playing “the newest Arab and Melayu songs”]

*Gamboes Orkest “Pemoeda,” jang dipimpin oleh toean H. M. Jasin All Djawi*  
[=Aldjawi] memperdengarkan lagoe-lagoe Arab dan Melajoe jang paling baharoe. [Gamboes Orkest “Pemoeda,” directed by tuan H.M. Jasin All Djawi, presents the newest Arab and Melayu songs.]

NIROM Oostersche Programma (Batavia/Bandoeng), 9 June 1938, 20:00–22:00.

Assalamoealaikoem  
Ala Ja’ Aini Djoed  
Lahmin Ha  
*Intermezzo*  
Boehnja Poelau Djawa  
Di Indonesia  
*Intermezzo*  
Allaj Loe Feraum  
Agistoe Fi Manami  
Agallili  
*Intermezzo*  
Nasibnja Jasin All Djawi  
Terang Boelan di Poelau Djawa

Orkest Melajoe Modern ‘Sinar Sumatra’: ‘[The group’s] Melayu songs are played with all modern instruments. But that is not all! The lyrics of modern Western songs are translated into Malay. ... [The director] always tries to serve up the songs currently most favored by listeners in general.’<sup>86</sup> If the words were translated from Western songs, it seems highly likely the music itself was also Western.

To sum up, the essential procedure for making an Indonesian (or Chinese, or Arabic-language) music modern was to fuse it, in one way or another, with Western popular music. The striking point here is the equation of modern with *popular*, and hence with mass media, the indispensable

<sup>86</sup> ‘Lagoez Melajoe dimainkan dengan perkakas jang serba modern. Boekan itoe sadja artinja penjiaran ini! Dari lagoez Barat jang modern perkataannja diterdjamaähkan kedalam bahasa Melajoe. Toean Mohamad Noerdin, pemimpinnja, senantiasa beroesaha melajangkan lagoez jang pada saat ini sangat digemari oleh pendengar seoemoemnja’ (*Soeara-Nirom* 1939b).

means of dissemination of popular music. Modernity, on the radio, had nothing to do with Western artistic *modernism* – with Stravinsky or Joyce or Mondrian – but everything to do with Western popular entertainment. Thus the opposition of *asli* and *modern* in radio discourse of the colonial era is a false antithesis, as is the opposition persisting in twenty-first-century Indonesian discourse between *traditional* and *modern* music or other arts. The modern can follow from and extend and re-envision the traditional, just as that exceedingly modern – modernistic – music, *kebyar*, springs from and reformulates the traditional Balinese idioms and repertoires that preceded it. The opposite of the *asli* or traditional in Indonesia, whether in the 1930s or the 2010s, is not the modern but the popular, which posits radically different frames of reference, aesthetics, functions, and modes of involvement.

### *Modern Times*

Did radio and gramophone usher their audience into the modern age? In one sense absolutely they did. These media were technologically modern, and they promoted – indeed enforced – modern ways of relating to music: in your home rather than at a celebration; listening to invisible musicians (or, for musicians, performing for an invisible audience); listening, in the case of gramophone records, to performances that could be repeated note for note; listening, if you were a woman, to music that you might not have been allowed or would not have dared to go to hear in person. And, as Jennifer Lindsay points out in the passage I quoted as an epigraph, they ‘democratized’ the court arts, allowing anyone with access to a radio to listen; moreover, to paraphrase her formulation, by broadcasting the music of specific localities, radio put the local and the modern in dialogue.

But while the medium itself was ineluctably modern and democratic (at least for anyone who could afford a radio), the content was often strongly conservative: witness the many gamelan broadcasts from the court bastions of Javanese tradition, or the *tembang Sunda* concerts that tethered the ‘extras’ (*panambih*) to the classic repertoire and thus restrained them from independence, though (judging from the quantity of gramophone records devoted to them) they were what the public most enjoyed. I think it likely that there was, at least at NIROM, a deliberate effort, a policy, to balance popular with traditional, in order to maximize the audience by appealing to both adults and youth, and also to assert the continuing value of the traditional. This assertion is the burden of the speech by Soetardjo, the director of PPRK, at NIROM’s official handover of *siaran ketimuran* in November 1940:

In the last century, Eastern culture was greatly influenced, indeed sometimes forced, by Western culture to become modern, advanced and proper [*sopan*]. Evidently [people] thought that by imitating everything that came from the West they would become advanced and proper [=respectable?]. Among our youth there are not a few who enjoy and value jazz more than the music of the East. It is probably not too much to say that there are also young people who find gamelan and other Eastern music completely alien. For example, they consider the sound of the gamelan boring. If our young people, who will be the seed of our people [=nation?] in the future, do not change their attitude and their direction, I fear that our nation will be disturbed and weakened.<sup>87</sup>

Even as it embodied modernity in its medium and in the social relations it facilitated, and even as it promoted what it defined as the modern in its *kroncong*, *Hawaiian*, and popular music programs, radio conveyed ambivalence about the modern age. So did other arts and other media – gramophone records, theater, popular novels. *Lain dahoeloe, lain sekarang* (Times change), a radio play broadcast over NIROM in November 1939 by students in Bandung, had the moral, ‘be modern if you wish, but don’t forget tradition’ (*modern tinggal modern, akan tetapi adat istiadat dangan ditinggalkan*) (Soeara-Nirom 1939e). Another radio play, broadcast over NIROM in August 1938, was titled *Gadis modern* (Modern girl):

This story will show how a girl comes to ruin because she does not obey the wishes and instruction of her father and instead follows her own wishes and her own opinions. Her father gives her wise advice, but her mother spoils her, and she [the girl] prefers to follow the spirit of the time [*kemaoean zaman*] rather than heed her father’s advice.<sup>88</sup>

<sup>87</sup> ‘Berangkali [sic] disini pada tempatnja, kaloe saja peringetken, bahoea dalem abad jang paling achir ini keboedaja'an Timoer banjak dipengaroei, malahan djoega ada kalanja terdesek oleh keboedaja'an Barat marika menjadi modern, madjoe dan sopan [sic; garbled?]. Roepanja marika mengira, bahoea meniroe segala sesoeatoe jang dateng dari Barat itoe menjadi teradjoe atas kemadjoean dan kesopanan marika. Dikalangan pemoeda kita ada malah boleh djadi tida sedikit jang lebih gemar dan menharga [sic] moesik Jazz dari pada mendengerken boenjian-boenjian Ketimoeran. Agakna tida berlebih-lebihan, djika saja kataken, bahoea ada djoega pemoeda pemoeda kita jang asing sama sekali pada gamelan dan laen boenji boenjian Timoer. Soeara gamelan misalnya katanja membosenken (*saai*). Kaloe pemoeda kita jang menjadi bibit ra'jat kita di kamoedian hari, tida merobah sikep dan haloean ini, saja koeatir kebangsa'an kita aken terganggoe dan nistajja menjadiken lemahnya (*label*) bangsa kita’ (Hong Po 1940).

<sup>88</sup> Tjeritera ini akan menoendjoekkan, bagaimana seorang Gadis telah terdjeroemoes kedalam djoerang ‘neraka’ oleh karena tiada menoeroet kemaoen [sic] dan pitoeah orang Toeanja, ia menoeroet kemaoeannya sendiri dan menoeroet pendapatannya sendiri sadja. Diberi naséhat oleh Bapanja, akan tetapi sebaliknya dimandangkan dengan mandja jang salah oleh Iboenja, lebih soeka menoeroet kemaoeuan zaman dari pada menoeroet naséhat’ (Soeara Nirom 1938c). The play was written by B. Soetan; it may be the same story used by Chang Mung Tze (1939) in the novel *Nonna modern?* (Modern miss?), discussed below.

These two themes – ‘times change’ and ‘the modern girl’ – recur over and over in late-colonial popular culture. They are in fact often melded, since a key example of changing times is that young women no longer behave as they used to: they disobey their parents, refuse arranged marriages, resist limitations on free association (*pergaolan bebas*) with the opposite sex. The following song lyric, published in a VORO program guide (*Pewarta V.O.R.O.* 1936a) under the rubric ‘Songs for our young people,’ shows the two themes combined:

*Doeloe dan sekarang / Then and now*

Krontjong-tango – HMV NS 79, issued April 1936  
S. Abdullah & the ‘His Master’s Voice’ Soerabaia Orkest

|                                    |  |
|------------------------------------|--|
| Nonah-nonah di zaman dahoeloe      | Young women in the old days                          |
| Ta’ boleh sembarang keloear pintoe | Could not go out of the house at will                |
| Roepanja alim sangat pemaloe       | In appearance they were pious and<br>very modest     |
| Apa jang dipikir trada jang tahoe. | What they were thinking, no one knew.                |
| Nonah-nonah zaman sekarang         | Young women today                                    |
| Pandai berias roepanja garang      | Skillfully put on makeup to look fierce              |
| Soeka bertjanda soeka bergadang    | They like to joke and stay out all night             |
| Gila berdansa ta’ boleh dilarang.  | They’re crazy for dancing and can’t be<br>forbidden. |

Another lyric, concerned only with the ‘modern girl’ side of the coin, was published in a catalogue advertising new gramophone records on the HMV label:

*Gadis modern / Modern girl*

Slowfox Krontjong – HMV NS 477, issued November 1938  
Miss Eulis

|                                     |  |
|-------------------------------------|--|
| Gadis moderen ganti pakeannja       | Modern girls have changed their<br>clothing            |
| Sarong kebaja soeda diboeangnja     | They’ve thrown out their sarongs<br>and kabayas.       |
| Pake rok pande sampai dilotoetnja   | They wear short dresses down to<br>their knees         |
| Kaloe naek speda kalihatan pahanja. | When they ride a bicycle you see<br>their thighs.      |
| Atoeran barat selaloe di pakekan    | They do everything in the Western<br>way               |
| Adat kabangsaan poera2 diloepakan   | They pretend they’ve forgotten the<br>traditional ways |

|   |   |
|---|---|
| Salam dan hormat soeda di gantikan        | They no longer use respectful greetings and speech  |
| Omongan tjara barat, selaloe di goenakan. | The Western way of talking is what they always use. |

These songs are arranged as dance tunes (foxtrot, paso doble, rumba, tango) and played by a dance band, and they are broadcast on the radio or played on the gramophone. Both the songs themselves and the media that disseminate them *depend* on popular music for their appeal and success. Purporting to be critical of modernity, the songs are nevertheless wholly modern in their medium. There are many other such songs. *Boeanja pergaoelan* (The fruits of [free] association), *Gadis djaman sekarang* (Girls today), *Prampoean dan mode* (Women and fashion) are further examples of the ‘modern girl’ (or ‘modern woman’) theme, but others range more widely: the world-wide economic depression (*Tempo soesah*, ‘Hard times’); sexual license and exploitation (*Malam2 di Tandjoeng Priok*, ‘Nighttime in Tanjung Priok’; *Kepalsoeannya lelaki*, ‘The dishonesty of men’); the world’s violence and cruelty (*Boeroeng Koetilang*, ‘Songbird’; *Kekedjaman doenia*, ‘The harshness of the world’). Some use the Muslim idea of *dunia fana*, the impermanence of this world and the permanence of the next, to criticize the modern pursuit of pleasure (*Djalannja pengidoepan*, ‘The course of life’; *Djalannja doenia*, ‘The way of the world’).

In these songs, the inherent dissonance between their overt content and their presentation negates or trivializes the content: rumbas decrying the rumba. Here is a striking instance of such self-cancellation. It is a two-sided gramophone record, one song on each side. On one side is a tango about famine, and on the other a foxtrot about the fun of going on a picnic every week.

*Bahaja lapar / The danger of famine*

Tango Krontjong – HMV NS 397, issued May 1938

Gadjali & the H.M.V. Orchestra

|                               |   |
|-------------------------------|---|
| Banjak padi beroedang goedang | When there's lots of rice in the<br>storehouses |
|-------------------------------|---|

|                           |                         |
|---------------------------|-------------------------|
| Orang pada tida perdoeli. | No one thinks about it. |
|---------------------------|-------------------------|

|                                 |                                  |
|---------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| Bahaja lapar dateng menjerang   | When the danger of famine looms  |
| Nasi semangkok berharga sekali. | A bowl of rice is very precious. |

|                                     |                                   |
|-------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| Brilliant, permata jang dikagoemken | Gems and jewels that were admired |
| Tra ada jang maoe beli.             | No one wants to buy them.         |

Kaloe soeda begitoe baroe rasaken      Only when things come to this do we  
realize  
Beras dan padi perloe sekali.      That rice is very necessary.

*Bikin picnic / Let's make a picnic*

Slowfox Krontjong – HMV NS 397, issued May 1938

Gadjali & the H.M.V. Orchestra

|  |   |
|--|---|
| Marih kita orang bersama berdjalanan di<br>ini hari          | Let's go on a trip today                          |
| Djangan sampe kaloepahan<br>membawakan barang makanan.       | Don't forget to bring things to eat.              |
| Marih kita pergi ke kali, kali aernja<br>jang djerni         | Let's go to the river where the water is<br>clear |
| Di sitoe bikin satoe picnic mentjari<br>kasenengan           | There we'll make a picnic and have<br>fun         |
| Ini picnic ada satoe sport, satoe sport<br>jang baik sekali. | A picnic is sport, a very good kind of<br>sport.  |
| Bikin kita orang sekalian dapet banjak<br>pengalaman         | It will give us lots of experiences               |
| Maka itoe setiap minggoe sedikitnya<br>moesti sekali         | So we should do it at least once a<br>week        |
| Pergilah Toean bikin picnic mentjari<br>kasenengan.          | Go on, Mister, make a picnic and<br>have fun.     |

The ambivalence of popular culture towards modernity is understandable, for the modern world posed serious challenges to longstanding Indonesian and Chinese-Indonesian ideas of how to live. Cherished customs and assumptions came under attack. Many of the challenges had to do with women, as ‘modern girls’ questioned the notions of subservience to their husbands, arranged marriages, and the restriction of their sphere of activity to the home. But modernity in DEI popular music is nothing more than dancing and pleasure (let’s make a picnic), and the criticisms of modernity are both formulaic and vapid: modern ways may lead to trouble, and they are Western. (As if the music these songs are couched in were not.)

Popular literature sometimes grappled more seriously with modernity. For example, we see a different notion of the ‘modern girl,’ or, more precisely, of her potential, in a prefatory note that the novelist Liem Khing Hoo, for nine years the editor of the monthly series of pocket novels *Tjerita Roman* (1929–1941), inserted into the November 1939 issue and signed with his pen-name, Romano. The note again accuses modern girls

of shallowness, but for once it offers an idea of the constructive possibilities of modernity:

Being modern is not just being good at dancing, taking trips, going to the movies, hanging around with your male friends. There are many things women have not yet worked on: social improvement, increasing their own inner resources and knowledge of the world, improving the economic situation, etc.<sup>89</sup>

The novel this note prefaces is Chang Mung Tze's *Nona modern?* (Modern miss?), which takes the typical attitude of 1930s novels towards the modern girl. It features a headstrong girl from a wealthy Chinese family in Java (in 'the city of S') who, indulged by her mother, disregards her father's advice and runs away with a charming gambler. Eventually he is revealed as a deceiver who wants her to prostitute herself to cancel his losses. In despair and disgust she poisons herself and him. Although in her carefree life before she meets the gambler she plays piano, drives a car, speaks English, and enjoys dancing and tennis, the author does not blame these modern pursuits for her downfall: her life is destroyed by her refusal to obey her father's restrictions on her association with young men.<sup>90</sup>

Another popular novel, *R.A. Moerhia* by Njoo Cheong Seng (2005 [1934]), has virtually the same plot situation – conservative father, rebellious (tennis-playing!) daughter – but here the family is Javanese and living in Medan, and the dénouement is different: the daughter marries a Dutchman, who deserts her, returns to Holland, and marries again. In the end she kills herself. (What else can a willful young woman in a Chinese-Malay novel do?) Here the central issue is not obedience but rather the accusation by Moerhia's family (who are nationalists) that she is forgetting her Indonesian-ness – forgetting that her skin is dark, her elder brother says – and becoming *gila-Blanda* (Dutch-crazy).<sup>91</sup>

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<sup>89</sup> 'Sedikit oetjapan: Boeat bisa diseboet modern, boekan tjoema itoe pande dansa, pesiar, nonton bioscoop, galang-geloeng dengen kawan-kawan lelaki, tapi masih ada banjak hal jang kaoem prempoean belon kerdjaken, seperti: perbaekin sociaal, mempertinggiken tingkatan batin dan pengetaoean hidoe, memperbaekin tingkatan economie d.l.l. [signed] Romano' (in Chang Mung Tze 1939). For Liem Khing Hoo, see Salmon (1981:239).

<sup>90</sup> I find this novel interesting because although the author sides with the girl's father, he is willing to show him as cold, rigid, and ultimately vindictive. Until the plunge into melodrama at the end, the novel depicts convincingly the way changing times can thrust people into conflicts they cannot find their way out of.

<sup>91</sup> The novel's epigraph is an Indonesian translation of Kipling's famous line beginning, 'East is east and west is west.'

*Nona modern?* and *R.A. Moerhia* exemplify what Claudine Salmon describes as the general ambivalence of pre-war Chinese-Indonesian novels towards modernity (phrased here as Westernization), particularly with regard to the emancipation of women:

Everything suggests that westernization was accepted when it brought with it technical improvements, or improvements in the economy and the realm of daily life, but that it created problems at the cultural level. ... Westernization was considered dangerous when it affected women's status and their role in *peranakan* society. ... Most of the authors would not resign themselves to accept the effects of Westernization as regards the social position of their wives and daughters. (Salmon 1981:55–6)

The difference between popular music of the 1930s and the popular novels of the time is that the novels – those that were not simply sensationalist – were not *selling* the West at the same time that they disparaged it. In contrast, radio and records in the 1930s got double duty out of modernity, simultaneously promoting it and claiming to deplore it. For media dependent on reaching as wide an audience as possible, this ambivalence, it seems to me, is suspiciously convenient.

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## CHAPTER THREE

# 'DIRTY DANCING' AND MALAY ANXIETIES: THE CHANGING CONTEXT OF MALAY RONGGENG IN THE FIRST HALF OF THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

Jan van der Putten

*Dedicated to the loving memory of Amin Sweeney, who devoted his life and soul  
to the study of Malay verbal arts and music*

### *Introduction*

'Dirty' in this combination with dancing connotes an 'erotic, titillating, sexually stimulating' quality of dance movements generally accompanied by music. It does not soil the dance floor or leave a big mess afterwards, but is envisioned to taint the minds and hearts of the participants and the spectators. As Mary Douglas famously contended, 'dirt' or 'uncleanliness' refers to 'something out of place', something that is not in concordance with a prevailing value system in a certain society or culture. Such a system of course is constantly under pressure of change, innovation and in need of modification to cope with new developments and experiences (Douglas 1985:36–40). Generally speaking, cultural systems are conservative in nature and will be consolidated by social agents in order to give a certain sense of stability to a community and confidence to its members. Authorities will attempt to gradually implement change, so that the texture of the society will not be affected and the people do not panic too much whenever they are confronted with the perennial cultural changes. However, time and again these attempts fail and outbursts of social anxiety may take place. Such upsurges of concern may be termed 'moral panic' referring to situations in which social practices or groups of people perceived as the instigator of such practices, are considered as the cause of (imminent) social upheaval or the 'embodiment of evil'. Entrusted members of the society take their responsibility to eradicate such 'evil' and will then embark on a 'moral crusade' in the available mass media to save the society from perils and further moral degradation. To be sure, negative

interpretations of changes in a society not always emerge spontaneously as a response to such changes but may well be socially and culturally defined. These ‘moral panic attacks’ are launched by intellectuals and powerful social agents for specific purposes, e.g. to galvanize public support to prevent the society from sliding into a (perceived) state of moral decay, or divert attention from other problems, and take place in particular social contexts. These social agents will have their own agenda for pursuing their crusade and single out a certain group of people as their ‘folk devils’ (see S. Cohen 2002; Macek 2006).

In the first half of the twentieth century Malaya witnessed several outbursts of cultural anxiety that ostensibly were triggered by a global trend of popular culture emanating from and fuelled by a western entertainment industry that distributed their products through a global network of urban centres. This ‘global’ popular culture seems to have experienced quite a sudden surge in the interbellum period, also reaching the shores of the Malay World and spreading rapidly through its urban centres. This ‘entertainment wave’ enhanced the cultural and ethnic hybridity and cosmopolitan outlook that already existed in these urban centres, where members of Eurasian and Interasian groups were instrumental in absorbing global trends and localizing these in their own social practices (cf. M. Cohen 2001; Lewis 2009; Van der Putten, forthcominga).

A booming entertainment industry sprang up all over Southeast Asia propelled by new developments in audiovisual technologies making newspapers and magazines, gramophones, records, radios and later also sound movies affordable for large groups. Chinese transnational capital was largely responsible for the development of amusement centres where a wide range of forms – from Teochew operas to *wayang kulit*, boxing matches to ballroom dancing, film screening, circus acts etc. – was made available to large parts of the population: entrance fee was only 5–10 cents, but extra fees applied if one wanted to watch a movie, boxing match, theatre play or dance (see Yung 2008; Wong Yunn Chii and Tan Kar Lin 2004). These parks are considered to have been melting pots of different ethnic groups and provided entertainment to all cultures with their respective popular forms (Rudolph 1996).

The first few decades of the twentieth century witnessed a huge popularity of social dance practices spurred by the European and American ballroom dance industries. Southeast Asian social dance practices partly originate in itinerant professional female dancers accompanied by a few musicians, who performed at people’s homes or at the side of the road.

In the Malay Peninsula these *ronggeng* dances were incorporated into social practices at the courts where we find them described as part of official ceremonies. By the 1930s *ronggeng* had become part and parcel of a thriving colonial club and party culture, and became one of the popular attractions in the amusement parks.

In this chapter I will explore the social context of popular dance practices in Malaya of the first half of the twentieth century and analyse how this form of entertainment was received and reacted upon by members of the Malay community. As I have argued elsewhere (Van der Putten 2010), the Malay community went through a period of intensifying social tensions triggered by the influx of large numbers of immigrants, economic fluctuations, political emancipation and religious reformation, which led to a reconfiguration and reconceptualisation of Malay cultural identity. It seems reasonable to assume that a cosmopolitan, hybrid and wild aura of cultural practices distributed through the amusement parks was incompatible with a parochial attitude and an identity that championed modesty and was based on ethnicity and religion as promoted in the Malay press. However, we must also take into account that the Malay press was Islamic reformist in character with a particular cultural agenda and may have had a limited impact on social practices at large. By looking into three incidents that may be viewed as 'moral panic attacks' on the *ronggeng* dance practices launched from certain quarters within the Malay community, I hope to show how *ronggeng* was used by different social agents to further their cultural agendas, ranging from religiously conservative to politically modern or progressive.

### *Ronggeng*

The practice of itinerant groups of professional dance-women and a few musicians in the Malay world has a long history, and in many regions we can find localized forms that are still being performed in new social contexts (Brakel-Papenhuyzen 1995; Spiller 2010:86–9). The practice is also known from the Malay Peninsula where it is commonly referred to as *ronggeng* or *joget*, and from the late nineteenth century described as a social dance of a few dancing-women performed on a make-shift stage where males were invited to participate for a certain fee. In the first few decades of the twentieth century it was integrated into a wave of commercial entertainment which created special venues where male patrons could dance with their favourite dancers after paying a certain fee per

dance; this phenomenon was called ‘taxi-dancing’.<sup>1</sup> The phenomenon of taxi dance halls disappeared in the 1960s and in present-day Malaysia *ronggeng* dances have been ‘sanitized’ of their perceived depraved moral connotations and ‘modernized’ to accommodate contemporary tastes to function as an identity marker for a multi-ethnic population. These changes to the dance practices do not seem to have been very successful as present-day *ronggeng* is considered to be a diluted form of the ‘original’ that is only performed at official occasions, tourist shows and international festivals. However, the music style of the dance and the songs that were performed to accompany the dance, now branded as ‘Irama Malaysia’, do seem to find a popular ear with the population as they are performed by stars such as Siti Nurhaliza (Tan Sooi Beng 2005).

As a social practice the dance of a professional dance-woman inviting males to participate was of course highly susceptible to criticism in any society as it is considered dangerous for the core of social structure, the family. The dance is also intrinsically erotic, which on a symbolic level may be described as an encounter of an uncontrollable passion embodied in the female dancer with the perceived restraint, reason and sexual prowess of the male. Spiller’s following analysis of a Sundanese *ronggeng*’s display of femininity eloquently captures this encounter:

*Ronggeng* bind together the various elements of dance events by performing femininity in several sensory modes. Visually, *ronggeng* accentuate their feminine attributes through extraordinary dress and grooming. Aurally, *ronggeng* voices incite desire through melody and poetry. Tactilely, *ronggeng* interact with men on a one-to-one basis, dancing in close proximity to – even touching – their partners. As objects of desire in multiple dimensions, *ronggeng* force the male participants to make a choice: either to indulge their desires or to transcend them. (Spiller 2007:41–2)

Although most sources on the Malay *ronggeng* stipulate that touching was prohibited, *ronggeng* dancers were generally considered having low moral standards and easily offering sexual favours to their male clients. R.J. Wilkinson, the unchallenged authority on Malay language and culture, considered Malay *ronggeng* a debased form of a Javanese original in which respectable Malay girls would not partake (Wilkinson 1910).<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> This term was imported from the United States where this ticket-a-dance system had been dubbed taxi-dancing since the dancer would be paid for the time she spent on the dance floor similar to a taxi driver who would be paid by the passenger for the time in the taxi (Cressy 1997 [1932]:28).

<sup>2</sup> It does not seem very far-fetched to assume that Indian dancing girls, generally referred to as nautch girls in colonial literature, were in the back of his mind. Protestant

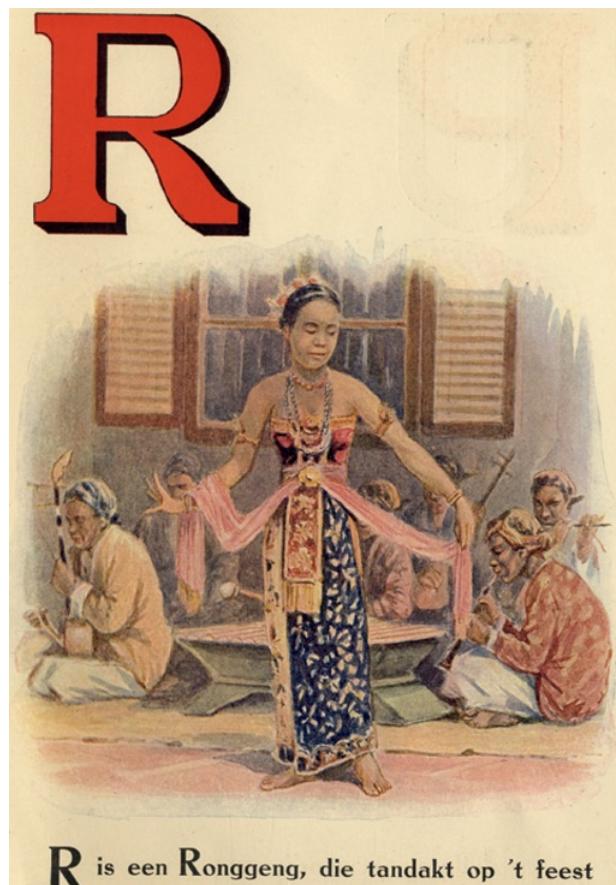
It is impossible to ascertain how, when and by whom *ronggeng* practices were introduced in the Malay peninsula, but I suspect that it may have been at quite an early pre-colonial stage when Javanese court traditions dominated cultural expressions in the Malay world. Around the turn of the twentieth century *ronggeng* performances were part of the palace culture of the Malay sultanates which one British reporter depicted as a nautch or *joget*, something rarely accessible to outsiders and quite different from the ordinary theatrical performances (*Mayong*) and the dancing and singing that went on during the Carnival season (*Boria*) (*The Straits Times*, 1 July 1898, p. 3). Around the same time *ronggeng* was also reported as part of 'quaint customs' of Malays during the annual Mandi Safar festival of Malacca, where the lady reporter seems genuinely overawed by the spectacle she witnessed at a beach near the town:

This is what we saw, and it was a wonderful sight too. One can picture the scene by an illustration: It is a coconut plantation, and there are scores of bullock carts, with good-tempered bullocks standing idly by unyoked. Each family claims the space of ground between four trees, and upon this, to a height of several feet, an encampment is formed of coloured stuffs of every description. Within the shelter of each of these – and they were numbered by hundreds – family groups, either women and girls, or very young boys and girls, danced either the boriah, joget, or ronggeng, their bodies undulating like the swaying leaves that formed a canopy high above their heads. We peeped into the nearest place for the medley of sounds that the Malay loves reverberated in the hot air. Here we saw a mother and her three daughters with the most sweetly serious faces, dancing the national dance. The girls were fascinatingly young, and in the four corners of the enclosure sat others playing, one a drum, another a concertina, a third a gong, with a polished brass [...] raised in its centre, and the fourth the Malay rebana. (*The Straits Times*, 13 April 1907, p. 7).

The 'national dance' she witnessed was *ronggeng* which by that time also had obtained a strong foothold in European, Asian, and Eurasian communities whose members celebrated Easter, Deepavali, football matches, birthdays, weddings, etc. with a *ronggeng* at night. From the welter of English-language newspaper reports one gets the image that no function would be complete without a *ronggeng* and that it had captured the colonial mind (Image 3.1).

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missionaries in cooperation with conservative Brahmins launched an anti-nautch campaign in the 1890s, as was also reported in the English press of the Malay Peninsula (cf. Oddie 1979:102–9).



3.1. How *ronggeng* captured the imagination of the colonial mind: a *ronggeng* dancer used to illustrate the letter R in a Dutch spelling book for children (*Nieuw Indisch ABC / teekeningen van J. van der Heyden*, 1925).

The last decades of the nineteenth century also witnessed a rapid increase in European, Australian, South and East Asian troupes touring the Malay world, where they introduced a commercial popular culture in the settlements that mesmerized substantial crowds of settlers and sojourners. It was the time when Chinese Opera troupes, Parsi *Wayang* groups and European, American and Australian Musical and Theatre companies and circuses toured the big urban centres of the British Empire. A local commercial entertainment network was established which was also served by local troupes performing hybrid forms such as

*bangsawan, mendu, wayang wong, and mayong*, in combination with ventriloquists, film screenings, circus acts and other elements of vaudeville theater.

Musical accompaniment was crucial to these forms, while dances were also part and parcel of *boria, bangsawan* and other forms. It seems only natural that the popular *ronggeng* of the function and party circuit would also be introduced into the entertainment wave that only was gaining momentum in the first two decades of the twentieth century. The heydays were still to come when amusement parks mushroomed in urban centres throughout the peninsula in the 1930s. In these parks the different forms converged and all were given its own venue: cinemas, stages for Teochew or Cantonese operas, Indian dances and Malay *bangsawan*, cabarets and ballrooms, restaurants and beer gardens, a place for fairground attractions, and a stage where *ronggeng* or *joget* girls would be waiting for their clients open for anybody to see who would have paid the 5–10 cents entrance fee.

Contemporary descriptions follow an entrenched racial division in the colonial society of that time between the cabarets, where most commonly Chinese and Eurasian women and girls danced foxtrots, charlestons, jitterbugs and tangos with their clients to western music, and the *ronggeng* stage outside where Malay girls would dance *inang, asli, joget*, and *zapin*, slow and composed at first, but after a while the rhythm would pick up

The orchestra swings farther into its Oriental tango, the couples face each other, shuffle their feet, advance and retreat, but never touch. They sway from one end of the floor to the other, their feet beating staccato time to the music. The women hold their hands behind their backs, the men dance hands on hips. The drummer for the first time shows some animation. He starts to increase his hollow beats, sweat trickles down the face of the swaying fiddler. Louder and faster the drums are beaten and faster is the dance. The drums work up to an ear-splitting rumble, a roar of sound which continues for probably a minute before the drummer, without warning, drops into a slow, halting half-beat. The couples facing each other walk sideways with short steps, advance and retreat and shuffle again, and the drummer alters his time, quickly working up to a booming climax. In the last stage of the *ronggeng*, the dancers leap up and down, whirl round each other, hop on one leg, the violin wails above the throbbing of the drums, and the dance ends about one hour after it started with the audience more exhausted than the dancers. (McKie 1950:215–6)

McKie here gives a rather ornate description of a 'traditional' *ronggeng* performance by three dancers accompanied by two men on violin and drum. Professional bands in the amusement parks would have more

women and more musicians to accompany their dances who in the 1930s also started to play new tunes popularised by the record industry and films. Soon rumba, samba and conga rhythms would influence the *ronggeng* which after WWII transformed the dance into a new form known as *joget modern* stirring up quite a craze in the Malay peninsula (see below). In the new form of *ronggeng* popularised in the 1930s the dancers seem to have dropped the singing of impromptu *pantun* verses which became incommensurate with the shorter time of the songs due to the effects of their commodification through the record industry (Keppy 2008:153). In the traditional *ronggeng* performance the dancers would dance while singing *pantun* conveying possible amorous messages to which the male would cleverly respond in a mock battle of exaggerated femininity and masculinity. To be sure, such battles could easily transcend the dance sessions and result in amorous trysts and sexual relations. It may also be surmised that before such frantic encounters males would take alcohol to bolster their morale, which could easily lead to more agitation. Below I will discuss how *ronggeng* triggered moral scares and even panics within the Malay community as evinced by reports in the newspapers.

### *A Slip-Up by an Editor in 1920*

Being a social dance charged with erotic tensions *ronggeng* could not but trigger criticism from conservative social agents. Above I already referred to Wilkinson who clearly did not consider *ronggeng* as a form of entertainment that could lead the Malay community into a modern era, a task he arguably had set himself to accomplish (Van der Putten forthcoming b). Ironically, the nearly thousand guests attending the farewell party the Muslim community organised for him at the Alsagoff family mansion at Bukit Tunggal were entertained with 'mayong, main silat, wayang kulit, Indian dancing and singing and juggling', and the perennial *ronggeng* (*Singapore Free Press*, 3 January 1916, p. 10).

It also seems ironic that Wilkinson's criticism was quoted in a libel case against Sadullah Khan, a former editor of *Utusan Melayu*, in 1921. The editor was summoned to court by two high-ranking Malay citizens who felt wronged by letters *Utusan Melayu* had published in November 1920. They were reported to have financed a *ronggeng* party at the prestigious Sultan Suleiman Club in Kuala Lumpur which had evoked the anger of the unnamed letter writers. In his defense Sadullah Khan stated that he had

fallen ill one day and had gone home leaving instructions for the foreman to publish an editorial about *ronggeng*. He stated that the foreman erroneously published the letters instead, ostensibly not knowing that they contained grave insults to the two plaintiffs. So far I have not been able to consult these letters, but we get a glimpse of their content in one of the newspaper reports about the court case, which needs little elaboration: 'among Mohammedans anything connected or associated with pigs was extremely offensive' (*The Straits Times*, 19 November 1921, p. 10). Also Sadullah's editorial on *ronggeng* remains a mystery but it cannot be very complimentary to the dancers as in court he vented his opinion that all *ronggeng* were prostitutes and organising a party was harmful to the Islamic faith (*The Straits Times*, 7 December 1921, p. 7). But Sadullah's defense was to no avail and he was sentenced to paying the costs of the proceedings as well as the demanded compensation of \$1,000.

Most interestingly in this otherwise quite unrevealing case is that a subscription was started by a Muslim organisation because Sadullah Khan was unable to pay the compensation. After a few months a total of \$802 was raised by members of the Anjuman-i-Islam organisation, a reformist Ahmadiyya club that had been established after the visit of the Muslim missionary Khwaja Kamaluddin to Singapore in 1921 (*The Straits Times*, 4 January 1922, p. 9; *Singapore Free Press*, 30 March 1922, p. 3). Another member of this organisation that predominantly had its members from Jawi Peranakan circles, was Muhammad Yusuf bin Sultan Maidin, who a year later would launch his own attack on the popular dance and theatrical performance *boria* in Penang. In two self-published booklets he expounded all the woes that this performing art form originating in Shi'a rituals was causing among the Malay youths in Penang and other areas where *boria* had become popular (Van der Putten forthcoming a). Although Sadullah's alleged slip-up, as well as Muhammad Yusuf's well-planned attacks may have failed to curb the popularity of perceived morally degrading theatrical forms, these efforts galvanized a certain moralizing stance about popular culture among reformist Muslims and Malays in general.

#### *The Woes of Women and the 'National' Malay Dance*

These first attempts to spur support for such an 'anti-performance movement' were certainly still remembered a decade later when we find indications of a more deliberate attack on *ronggeng*. This incitement of a

moral scare was published in two consecutive installments on the front page of the periodical *Saudara*, which was established by the well-known Sayyid Sheikh al-Hadi and edited at the time by the famous journalist and short story writer, Abdul Rahim Kajai (see Wan Abdul Kadir 1988:131–3 and Van der Putten 2010). Kajai provided prime newspaper space to someone with the alias of Islam al-Din who starts his attack by referring to Muhammad Yusuf's books 8 years before and a fatwa three Penang-based ulamas issued against *boria* in 1920. He expresses his surprise that *boria* received so much attention while the 'national' dance which is much more harmful to the Malay people hitherto has escaped the attention of any of the authorities. 'Boria is only once a year (in the month of Muharram), but my mother's group (*kaum ibuku*) is much more at risk from the consequences of *ronggeng* and, if neglected, may produce bastard children as unbelievers lead the *ronggeng*-women astray'. He further argues that *ronggeng* may disrupt family relations when the wife and children want to visit a performance and the husband cannot hold them back. At such a party most Malays stand outside at the fence to see how the *ronggeng*-women dance with (Peranakan) 'Chinese, Christians, Whites and Blacks', and perhaps a few invited Malays. The mainstay of the Malays cannot afford to organize a *ronggeng* party while the Malay *ronggeng* women are lured into debauchery by infidels who give them alcoholic beverages. Clearly then, he states, *ronggeng*-women are engaged in prostitution which is a blemish on the Malay 'nation' (*bangsaku*). Why do none of the other races act as *ronggeng*-women or have such a dance, if it was not harmful? Indeed, the westerners do have mixed dancing but only in certain secluded places and never other races are allowed to join in. 'So why does my people still allow such practices, how ignorant and debased are the Malays that they do that?' (*Saudara*, 21 March 1931, p. 1)

In the second installment he continues by referring to a few innocuous pantun texts sung by *ronggeng* women which he feigns to misunderstand, before rhetorically asking them if they don't realize that they are an embarrassment to the Malay 'nation', and if they know of nothing else to do for a living. Next come Islamic advisers, justices of the peace and other respectable members of the Malay community who are summoned to take measures, for 'if they are not punished all of them (*ronggeng* dancers and their assistants) with severe punishments, inevitably the Malays will perish in the near future' (*Saudara*, 28 March 1931, p. 1).

The most obvious anxiety expressed by Islam al-Din is that the Malays would be swept away from their own homeland if they did not brace themselves against the onslaught of aliens who had flocked to the

Peninsula in previous decades. The Great Depression with its worldwide economic regression and subsequent mounting tensions along fault lines in societies, also seems to have served as a catalyst for the development of political awareness and new economic ventures of Malays. Based on articles in Malay reports found in the Malay periodicals *Saudara* and *Majlis*, I have argued that in the reconfiguration of cultural practices in the 1930s Malay intellectuals seem to have reserved no place for *ronggeng* due to its intrinsic eroticism, whereas the theatrical form *bangsawan* successfully gained access to a 'new' Malay culture (Van der Putten 2010). The *bangsawan* repertoire was modernized during this period from staging (foreign) fantastic stories with fairies flying through the air to more realistic and perhaps moralistic Malay plays that taught spectators parts of the glorious history of the Malays. At least this is the impression one gets from reading these periodicals owned and used by groups of reformist Muslim agents who for sure influenced public opinion to a certain extent but were in no position to make big changes in Malayan society.

The role of these reformist groups was diluted and surpassed by market forces and measures taken by the British colonial government, whose policy was to protect Malay rights and implement affirmative action to enhance the economic position of the Malays who were also urged to develop strategies to improve their situation themselves. One of the fields open to them was the burgeoning entertainment industry which did not require any formal education and could bring fame and wealth to some of the highly talented amongst them. These are reasons why we find a relatively high concentration of Malays among the people involved in the industry, while transnational capital provided the financial means for its surge in the 1930s.

The entertainment industry became further commercialized by the increased availability of new media such as the gramophone, radio and films. These media had a profound influence on the popular music and *ronggeng*-dances that were increasingly mixed with non-Malay rhythms and melodies. The radio and record industry not only popularized but also standardized them in the sense that the texts became fixed and the length of the songs was dependent on the time recordable on 78rpm records, instead of *pantun* that could be made up at the spur of the moment and elongated to accompany the movements. In the amusement parks the *ronggeng*-women would be paid per dance which had a certain time limit of 3 minutes that paralleled the time a standard song would take, crooned by a lady singer through a sound system (cf. Keppy 2008:153).

By the end of the 1930s *ronggeng* had clearly transcended dance practices per se, and had also become a music genre that would be broadcast on the radio in special programmes (see Radio Malaya programme in *Singapore Free Press*, 27 March 1939). It had also mixed with other rhythms and was performed in shows together with other 'genres', such as *boria* witness the following announcement of the 'Penang Borea Carnival Show' at Happy World in Singapore:

Exhibiting Borea 'Karangan' & Choruses. Special Extra Turns and Comic Entrees, latest Kronchongs and Stamboels by the 'Penang 4,' Special Singings with appropriate music accompaniment. Introducing Misses Hasnah and Moona, the Young and Beautiful Ronggeng Sisters, Penang's famous Highly-Paid Favourites who will sing New Songs and also give Exhibitions of Modern Ronggeng and the latest 'Volcano' Rumba dances. (*Singapore Free Press*, 9 June 1939, p. 7)

### *Joget Modern as Site of Contestation*

Although the above announcement does mention the term 'Modern Ronggeng' performed by the *ronggeng* sisters, Hasnah and Moona, post-WWII reports in the English-language press without exception report that a new form of *ronggeng* or *joget*, generally referred to as *joget modern* or *modern joget*, suddenly sprang into being in 1949 in one of the clubs in Kuala Lumpur. Apparently the king of *kroncong* Ahmad CB in tandem with the legendary violinist Hamzah bin Dolmat introduced these Malay dances to rumba and samba rhythms in Singapore (Webb Jones 1953: 78–9). Subsequently, a craze swept the Peninsula during that year causing quite a stir in public opinion with the usual conservative religious distrust of such a new form. However, this time conservative anxieties were countered by a flurry of reactions from Malays and others instilled with a new confidence and enthused by a fervor of a new post-war age. Below I will discuss these reactions but first I will give a few quotes from newspapers reports about the craze that swept over Malaya.

With an acute sense of drama a certain Ken Jalleh reported about 'Ratna' who had recently become a *joget*-girl, and also gave information about how the new form came about and what it had changed. He reported that for ages the *ronggeng* had not changed but then suddenly a new development unfolded:

[...] new Latin American rhythms swept post-war Malaya. Malaya everywhere got the craze for sambas and rumbas – and the popularity of their

national dance declined sharply. Ronggeng proprietors, going broke, sought for new ways of attracting patrons, but without changing the atmosphere of the Malay ronggeng party. First, they improved their music. More musicians were added. Rhythms changed gradually. Then suddenly, the conquest was complete. Rumbas, sambas and congas invaded the ronggeng. Modern joget was born. [...] There are at present five modern joget halls [in Singapore]. Two in the New World, one in the Great World, one in the Happy World and one at the new Lunar Park at Geylang Serai. The proprietors are reaping a good profit. In the days of the old ronggeng, a 10-minute dance cost 40 cents a dance. Today in the modern joget, each dance lasts about three minutes – but the cost remains the same, 40 cents. The penari is paid at 15 cents a coupon in halls which have the coupon system. Otherwise she is engaged on a fixed rate of \$5 a night irrespective of how [many] times she dances. Musicians earn from \$3 to \$5 a night. (*The Straits Times*, 2 October 1949, p. 8)

The same year the traditional feast at the end of the fasting month was celebrated in Happy World with modern *joget* and a costume contest attended by hundreds of Malay youths:

So popular has the modernised ronggeng become that a second platform was set up this week and 10 more girls were employed to cope with the demand. Two special rhumba bands each with a crooner and a dance band leader are now accompanying the ronggeng dancing. [...] One of the girls, Ning, said that all the girls preferred it to the old-style ronggeng which was danced with a three-piece band comprising a ronggeng drum, a gong and a violin. 'Dancing to rhumba rhythm comes naturally to Malays' she said. 'It is very easy and the Malay and Chinese men get much more kick out of it than out of the old ronggeng.'

In the Malay pondoks (clubs) costume competition at the New World last night, four of the six teams wore immaculate white sharkskin double-breasted suits. The General Manager of the New World, Mr Lin Bock Chye, said the Malays were 'going American' in their dressing. 'We meant the contestants to wear full Malay gala dress and had expected there would be interesting points of comparison in the traditional dress of such groups as Boyanese, Javanese and Straits Malays,' he said. Of the two teams in Malay costume, one wore songkoks and the other tanjaks. Tonight six more teams will parade and the results of this, and other competitions, will be announced and prizes (cups, radio sets and sarongs) will be awarded. (*Singapore Free Press*, 28 July 1949, p. 5)

Unsurprisingly, this rage met with concern and anxiety from conservative Malay quarters such as the Chief Kathi, the highest Muslim authority of Singapore, Tuan Haji Ali, who considered it a 'bad moral influence on young people' which would pose a social problem. The Malay Union woman leader Che Fatimah said that the government should promote the

original form of *ronggeng* to prevent youngsters from neglecting their studies (*The Straits Times*, 23 September 1949, p. 3). The controversy was triggered by Inche Sardon bin Haji Jubir, a person of political authority as member of the Legislative Council of Singapore, who had suggested that *Joget modern* should be banned in Singapore because of the effects on Malay school children who were ignoring their obligations because of the dance craze. Quite an innocuous and well-intentioned admonition it seems but surprisingly it triggered a flurry of irritated reactions from readers who judged the new dance a sign that Malay youths had finally adopted modernity, or considered it just a temporary fad that would not affect the moral condition of the Malay community – still, pawnshops were doing good business apparently. These commentators vented harsh criticism to Inche Sardon's suggestions as they would put *joget*-girls out of their jobs. *Ronggeng*-women themselves were given an opportunity to 'speak their mind' and told their legislative representative to 'lay off' and tackle some serious problems. *Ronggeng*-women, such as Che Putih, a widow supporting two children and her mother, and Che Latifah, a house-wife with three children, were presented as persons making an honest and honourable living from dancing. If *joget modern* were banned the only option open to them was to become a waitress in a coffee shop, or worse (*The Straits Times*, 25 September 1949, p. 3; *The Singapore Free Press*, 16 September 1949, p. 5). After a few weeks of similar reports in the English press as well as the Malay *Utusan Melayu* chiding the Malay representative in the Legislative Council and ridiculing him in two cartoons, Inche Sardon (Encik Sa'dun bin Haji Zubir) sent a letter to the *Singapore Free Press* claiming that he had never suggested that *joget modern* should be banned only that it could be bad for school children and that regulations surrounding amusement parks should be strictly observed so that they would not allow under-aged children to enter the dance floors.<sup>3</sup>

No, refuted Inche Sardon, he was a modern young Malay guy, how could he have argued against *joget modern*? What he had done was to question and protest against the opening of a new amusement park at the grounds of the Great Eastern Trade Fair in Geylang Serai, because it was in the middle of a Malay area and could therefore affect the surrounding Muslim population more than other parks in Chinese areas. Purportedly to prove his point he organised a *joget modern* at his house for a Malay

<sup>3</sup> Some time later there are indeed reports about a ban for 11-year olds in Bukit Bintang Park in Kuala Lumpur, and a 12-year old girl in Penang who paid for her education by acting as *ronggeng*-girl (*The Straits Times*, 4 November 1949, p. 4; and 5 August 1951, p. 3).

Union tea party, but tellingly enough nobody wanted to dance and after playing two sambas the band and dancers packed up and left (*The Straits Times*, 18 October 1949, p. 4).

It seems quite clear that the English language press together with the nationalist and rather progressive *Utusan Melayu* tried to quell this surge of cultural concern to safeguard the commercial interests of the entertainment industry. Among Malays the protests seem also fuelled by a desire to take part in the modern world after the war. Some reactions stirred up by Inche Sardon's 'storm in a teacup', as he called it himself, defy the moral implications of it:

This modern *ronggeng* is but symptomatic of the time: a time in which Malay wear sharkskin jackets and bow ties instead of sarong and baju, and young Malay women run and jump and play hockey instead of sitting demurely at home engaged in needlework. This samba-cum-rhumba variation of a traditional dance form is an inevitable reaction to the time and place in which young Malays now live, a time and place in which Western influence is paramount. (*Singapore Free Press*, 24 September 1949, p. 4)

The Malay youths as a group adopted modernity and showed it in their dress and leisure activities, a new confidence seems to have taken root in them which may have something to do with the political and social revolution that was going on in the much admired Indonesia. Also, 'women of ill-repute' were given a voice in the press and their interests and rights were allegedly being protected. A social welfare officer in Selangor was reported to be quite active in taking care of them as she tried to stop girls under the age of 17 to become joget-girls and even to form a trade union after they first had taken religious classes (*The Straits Times*, 29 June 1950, p. 7, and 22 August 1950, p. 4).

This controversy around *joget modern* and the *ronggeng*-women's morality was not only expressed in the newspapers but also in Malay films that were produced in Singapore and in Malay short stories and novels that poured out of Singapore and Penang. Below I will discuss two examples of the opposing camps in this dispute, both were meant to join in the commotion around *joget modern* and influence public opinion in a more 'nuanced' and certainly elaborate way.

#### *Literary Reflections*

After the war the popular press in the Malay peninsula was revived with vigour to publish a host of new magazines, newspapers, and short novels.

Two main players in this post-war revival were Syed Abdullah bin Abdul Hamid al-Edrus (aka Edrus and Ahmad Luthfi), and Harun bin Muhammad Amin (aka Harun Aminurrashid), who would both play active roles in the forming of public opinion in volatile Singapore public life through the many periodicals and novels they published during the next decades (cf. Barnard and Van der Putten 2008). Edrus was a 'rather' controversial author who got some of his books and periodicals burned in a public gathering of members of UMNO in Johor, led by the future prime minister Tunku Abdul Rahman, because they were considered to describe erotic trysts too openly. Being a staunch reformist Muslim Edrus wanted to attract attention of as many people as possible (especially youngsters) to social ills, so that they became aware of these and would deal with them. Through the sales of these popular novels he financed his other publications predominantly comprising instructions to be a good Muslim and the history of Islam. He was very prolific and is renowned for authoring 24 novels in the time of 18 months which he dictated to his secretary to keep up production.<sup>4</sup> The fastest novel he wrote was *Empat kali haram* (Four times *haram*), written in 11 or 15 days and published as a counter attack on the mufti of Johor who had issued a quadruple fatwa on his book entitled *Janda* (Divorcee): which was judged *haram* to buy, read, use and write. In the book Edrus under his penname Ahmad Luthfi relates the story of a sanctimonious religious teacher in Johor who basically marries every girl he meets and divorces every fifth wife, as Muslim law does allow men to be married to four wives at the same time. Another title in this collection of 24 books was published in October 1949 and deals with the dance craze in the newly established amusement centre, Lunar Park, in the middle of the Malay quarters Geylang Serai in Singapore. This *Geylang Serai karam* (Geylang Serai going down) contains the story of the 16-year old school boy Ali who one night attends the dancing at Lunar Park, dances 12 times with the same girl, Maimunah, falls head over heels in love with her, can't sleep, can't concentrate in school, and needs to go to the *joget modern* stage every night to dance and take Maimunah out. In need of money and already having pawned his new 50-dollar sharkskin suit, Ali steals money and a watch from his father who finds out and punishes him severely. His mother and grandma protect him but the situation goes from bad to worse, and eventually the family breaks up. Being unable to cope with his family life anymore the father leaves, and his son is caught transporting guns for a burglary and is convicted to 8 years in prison.

<sup>4</sup> See Van der Putten 2007 and *The Straits Times*, 23 October 1949, p. 5.

Ahmad Luthfi indicates two reasons that are the basis of this sad story: The character of Maimunah who is depicted as a mature woman (though no details are given about her age or personal background) toying with the boy, taking his virginity and feeding on his youth, strength and vigour so that she will be 'forever young':

Maimunah was anxious not because she was angry but because she was interested, knowing how rude and clumsy men were who had no experience with women. She had decided to make Ali her victim, because some of these older people think that they will become young again if they have sexual union and follow their urges with young people. [...] Maimunah got up and looked at Ali walking away, thinking that it would not be long before she would consume her prey.<sup>5</sup> (Ahmad Luthfi 1949:60–2)

Basically this lewd *femme fatale* turns the young and naïve Ali into a virile, drinking dance-addict who eventually pays dearly for his obsession with imprisonment during which time he turns religious. The author unfolds this stereotypical plot to expose the social woes that an amusement park in the middle of a Malay kampong will cause, which is the second basic cause for the drama unfolded in the novel. The dance craze is at a high and every night people flock to the park to watch the dances, meet friends, and have a drink and some food. Most of these people are Malays who are not well off, and youngsters who want to show off in their best clothes to find out a partner, of course, illicitly as the proper religious rules are not followed. Another group consists of school kids who stay on till very late, gather and are involved in all kinds of mischief. They also have free access to the *joget modern* stage, alcoholic drinks and other things *haram*. Of course, this will severely disrupt their education, wreck the family and perpetuates the destitute situation most Malays live in. Cabarets do not allow underage youngsters access to their premises and this should also be implemented for open-air *joget modern* stages, Ahmad Luthfi argues in the introduction and epilogue of the book. He also calls for measures to be taken by the municipal authorities to revoke permits for the park and close it down as the people he interviewed in the neighbourhood are all

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<sup>5</sup> The translation is mine from the following original: Maimunah geram bukan kerana marah tetapi hatinya telah terpikat mengetahui kekerasan dan kekasaran mereka yang baharu hampir kepada perempuan itu. Dan dengan yang demikian tentulah pada pikirananya Ali akan menjadi korban kepadanya kerana telah menjadi sifat kepada setengah2 lelaki dan perempuan berpendapat apabila mereka yang telah tua atau yang telah berumur sedikit dapat bersekedudukan mengikut kemahuhan tabi'i dengan orang yang muda itu, maka kononnya badannya terasa muda juga. [...] Maimunah berdiri memandang sahaja Ali berjalan itu dengan hatinya bahwasanya masanya telah hampir yang Ali akan menjadi korbannya.

very upset. This call apparently did not fall on deaf ears with Inche Sardon who purportedly asked questions in the legislative council about the park and *joget modern* around the same time.

In *Minah joget moden* (Minah a *joget modern* girl), published in early November 1949, the author Harun Aminurrashid takes quite a different, much more positive stance on *joget modern*, although he is certainly not uncritical about the social problems caused by the rage. Harun who also in the periodicals that he edited and published tried to galvanize support for Malay artists so that the art scene could serve as a high-quality modernizing force in society, as he claimed was the case in well-respected Indonesia, gives a more balanced picture of the dance craze.<sup>6</sup> The novel tells the story of Rosminah, a girl born in a family with a grandfather who worked as stage director of a *bangsawan* theatre where he taught Rosminah all the dancing, and a devout Muslim mother, who raises her by instilling fear in her about how sinful and doomed the artistic scene is. Minah marries a cousin on her mother's side in a happy marriage blessed with two children. But soon her husband falls ill, Minah can hardly get by from the money she earns from sewing, and her family does not give any help. Some of the neighbours are more inclined to give her some financial aid, especially the *joget* girl who lives next door. This *joget* girl also persuades her to come to the stage and Minah starts to work as ticket seller but soon her talents as singer and dancer are discovered, she becomes a *joget* girl and earns enough money to take good care of her family. Of course, the members of her extended family as well as most people in the community look down upon her and call her a lewd sinner. But Minah does not give in to the temptations that come with the job, and stays faithful to her husband and family. She escapes the attempts of molest by a rich Arab businessman who coveted her since he first saw her (he is killed by another *joget* dancer) and another assault by someone from the *joget modern* at her house. After some time her husband dies, and after three years she remarries another respectable man who appreciates the art scene and the artists for what they are. Still she retires from the *joget moden* to care for her husband and children.

Clearly Harun promotes his mission to make the people see that not all *joget*-girls are the vamps who feed on young males as described by Ahmad Luthfi, but can be very respectable people. However, he does not deny that there are all kinds of problems with *joget modern* which entails more

<sup>6</sup> See Barnard and Van der Putten 2008 on the influence of Indonesian art and literature on developments in the art scene in Singapore.

social freedom for the youngsters. He also advocates a much more positive view on *joget modern* that may provide an earnest living to many women who may fall victim to lascivious men, here in the person of the lecherous Arab Sayyid – a *topos* in Malay literature of the late 1930s–50s – who is killed after trying to grab Minah. Clearly the message here is that the rights of *joget*-women need to be protected, so that they can further develop their trade. The author also argues that the *joget* is a means for Malay youths to express and channel their energy. The dance should be developed into an art form that is definitely Malay in character, albeit influenced by western dances. Below follow some quotations of the speeches by Mat Biola,<sup>7</sup> the leader of the *joget modern* troupe and Minah after she won the first prize in a contest:

[Mat Biola:] *joget modern* is an art form of mixed Western and Eastern parentage. I do not wish to ruin our own art and culture by introducing the new form, but intend to fashion the aspirations of the youngsters who want change and are not bored with our virtuous art and culture. I hope the *joget modern* can prevent our hungry-for-change youths from hurling themselves into forms like Western dances [...] in our eyes it doesn't look right that Easterners go for [Western] dancing and it goes against our traditions and religion when an unmarried couple embrace each other in public [...] Our youngsters wish to be happy and strive for solid changes equal to the youngsters in this atomic age, therefore it is not right to look down upon and disparage the creations of Malay artists. (Harun 1968:92–3)<sup>8</sup>

[Minah:] ... not everyone has the talent to become a true artist and therefore I hope that you do not look down upon our artists. I hope from now on you will support their efforts. If you do not improve their situation and appreciate their achievements, surely the foreign people will mock the efforts of our nation even more. (Harun 1968:94)<sup>9</sup>

<sup>7</sup> This character may well have been modelled on Hamzah Dolmat who has been instrumental in the development of popular music in the Malay peninsula.

<sup>8</sup> ...*joget moden* ada-lah kesenian champoran Timor dan Barat, saya membawa perubahan ini bukan pula untok hendak merobohkan kesenian dan kebudayaan kita, tujuan saya membawa *joget moden* ini ia-lah menciptakan kemahuan pemuda pemudi kita yang ingin perubahan dan bukan pula jemu kepada kesenian dan kebudayaan yang berasih itu. Saya harap dengan *joget moden* ini dapat membawa pemuda2 kita yang ingin perubahan supaya tidak terchebor kepada kebudayaan Barat bulat2 ia-itu dansing... di mata kita orang Timor dansing itu adalah ta' manis dan salah pada adat dan ugama kita, apabila lelaki dan perempuan yang bukan suami isteri berpelokan di-tengah ramai... pemuda2 kita hari ini ingin gembira, ingin perubahanyang chergas dan sat-tara dengan pemuda2 di-zaman atom ini, oleh itu tidak patut usaha chiptaan seniman seniwati Melayu ini dipandang rendah dan dichela...

<sup>9</sup> tidak semua orang yang ada kebolehannya menjadi seniman dan seniwati yang sajati, oleh itu saya berharap jangan-lah memandang rendah kapada seniman seniwati kita, yang elok-nya dari sekarang saya harap perbetul dan sokong-lah usaha seniman seniwati kita, jika lau tidak dari puan2 dan tuan2 sendiri membaiki nasib seniman seniwati dan

### *Conclusion*

It seems impossible for social dance practices not to draw a controversy in mass media in any type of culture – examples from the West are abundant. Some social agents will deem a practice ‘out of place’, i.e. ‘dirty’, others will find it in concordance with modern values that the people need to address or embrace. In this chapter I have looked into the controversies surrounding *ronggeng* or *joget* and considered them in the framework of moral panics or scares as developed by Cohen in relation to social upheaval in Britain of the 1960s. Technically, perhaps, only the controversy around *joget modern* qualifies for this model as there is a flurry of responses in the press about its introduction and sudden immense popularity. However, I have shown that in the mass media of the Malay Peninsula conservative forces launched earlier attacks on the *ronggeng*-dances, music and especially female performers which purportedly were motivated by religious and moral purification, but certainly also by a political agenda as Malay intellectuals felt the need to counter increasing pressure of big immigrant communities and the economic downturn of the beginning of the 1930s. These early attempts on moral scares clearly play up the dangers of social interaction between Malay women and men from other faiths and races, although doubtlessly there were cases that ‘Malay fears’ were proven right. I think it is reasonable to conclude that in the 1920s and 1930s the attacks had little to none social consequences in the society at large as the anxieties were expressed by a relatively small group of religious conservatives. After WWII traces of conflict became much more apparent when an issue raised by conservative quarters triggered strong reactions from members of the Malay community inspired by economic motives and nationalist feelings. These liberal Malays considered the dance practice as a sign of modern, youthful energy, the impetus behind major social and political changes in Southeast Asia, such as the Indonesian revolution (1945–49), which seems to have had a profound impact on left-wing Malay intellectuals. Indonesian artists were instrumental in cultural developments in the Malay peninsula and some of their revolutionary spirit must have inspired their Malay brothers and sisters to welcome the call for change and embrace a sonic and kinetic modernity.

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memandang tinggi usaha dan kepandaian seniman seniwati kita, sudah tentu bangsa asing lebeh2 lagi merendahkan usaha bangsa kita.

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## CHAPTER FOUR

### DISQUIETING DEGENERACY: POLICING MALAYSIAN AND SINGAPOREAN POPULAR MUSIC CULTURE FROM THE MID-1960S TO EARLY-1970S

Adil Johan

#### *Introduction*

On the 22nd of October 2013, I visited a modest exhibition on Malay youth music from the mid to late 1960s in Singapore's Esplanade Library. The minimalist and silent exhibition created by the Malay Heritage Centre of Singapore featured five two-sided colour panels displaying photographs and historical information about the Malay rock and roll bands of the *pop yeh yeh* music era. It was part of a series of nostalgic Malay cultural exhibits sponsored by the Malay Heritage Centre<sup>1</sup> intended to shed light on a vibrant but often occluded period of cultural history in the Malay Peninsula. Much like the quiet atmosphere of the 'musical' exhibition, the Malay youth of the *pop yeh yeh* era expressed a culture that was in need of silencing by the aggressive cultural policies implemented by the government authorities of Malaysia and Singapore. The following pages, in response to this renewed interest in *pop yeh yeh*, intend to give a voice to the contestatory discourses and issues that were articulated by Malay youth in the 1960s.

This chapter seeks to provide some much needed amplification of the study of Malaysian and Singaporean music in this era by observing the ways in which Malay youth of the mid-1960s to early-1970s were implicated in cultural policies and conservative regimes. Moreover, such youth negotiated their differences with the older generation in divergent ways: some actively and proudly fashioned themselves with the subversive styles and sounds of the West while others voiced conservative concerns about such trends, effectively policing their peers with discourses of morality and tradition. While this chapter is not primarily concerned with

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<sup>1</sup> Information about the Malay Heritage Centre's ongoing exhibits can be found on their website: <http://www.malayheritage.org.sg/exhibitions.htm>.

government policy in relation to music, I discuss the ideas of two Malay film music icons:<sup>2</sup> Zubir Said and P. Ramlee, whose ideas on Malay music culture inspired the implementation of the Malaysian National Culture Policy (NCP) that was drafted in 1971. Their reactionary comments on the erosion of Malay culture by youth-related lifestyles and musical dispositions provides an ideological frame of reference for the discourses of cultural nationalism that demonised *pop yeh yeh* youth.

I then proceed to discuss youth music culture in 1960s Singapore and Malaysia followed by an observation of the 'yellow cultures'<sup>3</sup> or subversive youth trends that caught the negative attention of Singaporean and Malaysian government authorities. The 'beat music' of English-language bands primarily based in Singapore in the 1960s emulated music from British rock bands such as The Shadows and The Beatles. In time, English songs were adapted to Malay, and eventually, by the mid-1960s, Malay youth started writing and performing original compositions in the styles of previously emulated Western rock bands. Attendant with such music was a vibrant array of youth fashions that included tight-fitting attire, sunglasses, mini-skirts for women and long-hair for men. The Singaporean and Malaysian state active in policing what was deemed degenerate 'yellow cultures' resulted in youth harassment and the banning of music performances. Youth themselves were also active in the 'policing' of their peers as fan letters in the Malay music magazine *Bintang dan Lagu* [Stars and Songs] indicate.

Finally, to provide an insight to the discourses on Malay youth and moral degeneracy in the mid-1960s, I turn to the movie *A Go Go '67* (1967) directed by Omar Rojik for the Shaw Brothers' Malay Film Productions. This film was made during the waning years of Malay film production in Singapore and indicates an attempt by the film industry to attract a youth audience whose consumption patterns were straying from Malay cinema while being drawn towards local electric-guitar-band performances and their numerous vinyl record releases. My research suggests that the once popular means of disseminating Malay music through film<sup>4</sup> was being

<sup>2</sup> Zubir Said was one of the first Malay film music composers in the 1950s and P. Ramlee was a prominent icon of the Malay film industry from the 1950s to 1960s, acting, directing, writing, singing, and composing for the numerous films in which he was involved.

<sup>3</sup> Jones's (2001) book, *Yellow Music*, describes how the term 'yellow' was used in China during the Republican era to associate a degenerate and 'pornographic' quality to the popular music of Li Jinhui that blended 'American jazz, Hollywood film music, and Chinese folk music' (Jones 2001:6).

<sup>4</sup> In the 1950s, numerous singers for Malay films including P. Ramlee recorded film songs for record labels such as HMV, EMI, Columbia, Parlophone and Pathé (Sarji 2011:

usurped by a renewed<sup>5</sup> local record industry and its attendant *pop yeh yeh* culture. The transition from film music to 'guitar-band music' contextualises the reactionary comments of film-music icons such as P. Ramlee, whose once non-traditional cosmopolitan musical and cinematic practices in the 1950s were being replaced by louder sounds and less conservative fashions.<sup>6</sup>

Malaysian government policy in the 1970s operated within a framework of Malay ethno-nationalism that required clear delineations of what constituted 'pure' Malay culture. This led to the excessive removal or avoidance of elements that were regarded as 'foreign', 'un-Malay' and non-Islamic (S. Tan 1993:177–8; also see S. Tan 1992, 1989). State enforced 'ideologies' of purity 'can give rise to the opinion that safeguarding - that is, "guarding safe" a tradition – straight jackets it into a petrified form, forbidding it to be subjected to any processes of innovation and change that would feature in living, vital cultural' practices (Grant 2012:37). Youth cultures feature prominently as a threat to these 'national' traditions as youths are often at the forefront of change and innovation, regardless of whether they have overt political intentions to upset the status quo or revolt against authority.

In Malaysia and Singapore, there has been a marked disjuncture between development-oriented national agendas that are based on capitalist ideologies and the derogatively 'modern' young populace that are 'relentless' in the 'fashioning of... youthful selves through (the) consumption' of popular culture (Stivens 2012:170). These 'self-fashioning' youths spark 'moral panics' (Stivens citing Young 1971 and Cohen 1972) and 'social anxieties' in state authorities that respond by retaining and enforcing hegemonic state-sanctioned boundaries of modernity and morality (Stivens 2012:174). In line with this youth-state contestation, the role of the Malaysian government in controlling the 'threat' of youth cultures run parallel to their initiatives to regulate the performing arts:

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290–8) For a detailed account of the 78 RPM record industry in Malaya prior to World War II, see S.Tan (1996).

<sup>5</sup> The record industry was 'renewed' through the proliferation of 'beat music' bands in the 1960s. More research is required regarding the record industry centred in Singapore from the 1950s to 1960s but Pereira (2011) informs me that there were numerous independent record labels sprouting in Singapore in the mid-1960s that capitalised on the proliferation of local youth bands.

<sup>6</sup> Kahn (2006:126–31) discusses the notion of 'other' Malays that fall outside the conventional sphere of traditional 'Malayness', and uses P. Ramlee's films as complex case-studies that express a hybrid Malay culture that was Westernized yet rooted to a conception of indigeneity that recurred as a narrative of an idyllic Malay village (*kampung*) life in contention with an urban modernity.

By introducing various policies, guidelines and institutions in the 1970s and 1980s, the government has tried to centralize and control the performing arts. Those art forms which are in line with the national culture policy and performances which adhere to the stipulated guidelines have been promoted and encouraged. However, those which are considered “anti-Islamic”, those which are alleged to stimulate “violence” and those which are generally “undesirable” have been banned or censored... Even the popular music industry, dominated by transnational companies and shows promoters, has been subjected to the same intervening institutions and restrictions. (S. Tan 1992:303)

Tan's observations point to the pervasiveness of Malaysian state intervention in the arts and alludes to the role of state policies in constraining youth music cultures. Criteria for inclusion and exclusion are ambivalent; thus subjecting a range of cultural practices to prosecution, censorship, or repression. Hence, the youth who participated in musically-oriented counter-cultures – that were transmitted through a commoditised global market system of cultural consumption – would be at the centre of the government's initiatives to perpetuate a hegemonic notion of national culture. Furthermore, tensions existed (and continue to exist) between the state and the recording and entertainment industries interested in marketing 'subversive' but highly marketable trends to local youths.

This chapter seeks to reveal how young Malaysians and Singaporeans were actively shaping locally unique musical practices based on trends from the West that were at odds with state-defined notions of national culture. Conversely, it is apparent that youth agency was not fully present as the marketing initiatives of the entertainment and print industries mediated the representations of 'degenerate' youth in conflict with the 'repressive' state. My study seeks to unravel these issues historically and discursively, with a focus on Malay youths whose bodies and cultural practices were at the centre of contestation between state-sanctioned moral policing and the consumption of globally commoditised musical and cultural trends. Malay youth cultural practices of the 1960s initiated such contestations to national cultural ideology in Malaysia and Singapore; providing a 'template' for the discursive and physical repression of future youth cultures in Malaysia.

#### *The Ideas of Zubir Said and P. Ramlee: Precursors to National Culturalism*

Some of the earliest ideas for a national-culturalism emanated from the ideas of Malay music icons, Zubir Said and P. Ramlee. Aside from being

prominent creators of post-war Malay music, towards the mid-1960s, they became prominent critics of Westernisation in Malay music practices. Ironically, while both musicians sought to infuse a 'Malayness' to their musical creations, they adapted a diverse range of musical styles from the West and other Asian film-music practices such as Hindustani film songs.<sup>7</sup> Despite their cosmopolitan musical backgrounds, the ideas that they proposed about developing and preserving a national culture would become standardised in the discourse about Malaysian national cultural policies post-1971. In this section of the chapter, I will examine some of their ideas that set the discursive tone for Malaysia's National Culture Policy of 1971.

Zubir Said was a musician and composer of Minangkabau descent who migrated from Sumatra to Singapore to become a prominent film music composer for Cathay-Keris Malay language films from the 1950s to 1964 (Low 2012:24; R. Zubir 2012). Before becoming a citizen of Singapore in 1967, he wrote a state anthem that would become the national anthem, *Majulah Singapura*. Since then, he has been revered as a Singaporean national icon. Recently, there has been renewed interest in him through a comprehensive biography of him (R. Zubir 2012) and a series of events to commemorate his cultural contributions to Singapore: a musical tribute concert at the Esplanade concert hall (12th October 2012) and a ten-day film screening highlighting his film music (National Museum of Singapore, 10–20th October 2012; see also National Museum of Singapore 2012).

Such celebrations of Zubir Said as a Singaporean national icon, in retrospect, are paradoxical to the Malay-nationalist initiatives that he proposed for the development of Malay music and arts. Of course, his ideas were proposed during a period when Singapore and Malaysia were on a shared national trajectory past British colonial rule. In 1957, the Federation of Malaya was declared independent from British rule. Singapore, along with the Borneo states of Sabah and Sarawak joined the federation to form 'Malaysia' in 1963. In 1965, Singapore separated from Malaysia to

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<sup>7</sup> For an account of the diverse Malay and Western musical styles used by P. Ramlee see Sarji (2011:275) A more contentious observation by Ef (2011:xix) argues that despite the internalisation of foreign musical styles by Ramlee his music ultimately expresses 'soulfully Malay' qualities. McGraw and Suriyanti Azmi (2009) however, argue that Ramlee's film music expressed a more heterogeneous but uniquely Malaysian musical aesthetic. Zubir Said, while working with the modern medium of film music and orchestration actively utilised and adapted 'traditional' Malay instruments and styles for his film scores. Peters (2012) analyses his film music stylistically as a 'synthesis of musical systems in neo-traditional music', while Rohana Zubir (2012) provides a detailed musical biography of her father emphasising his contribution to Singapore's national music repertoire which included the country's national anthem.

form an autonomous 'island-state'. This complex history of national boundaries between Singapore and Malaysia are further complicated by the politics of ethnicity, whereby ethnic Malays form an increasingly marginalised minority in the former and are a ruling majority in the latter. Thus, prominent in the discourse of Zubir Said's writings was a notion of ethno-nationalism centred on Malay culture.

At a presentation given in 1956/57 on the use of the Malay language in music, Zubir Said observed a decline in the standards of Malay language compared to the 'glorious days of the Malay Sultanates (*zaman gemilang Kerajaan2 Melayu*)' stating that as a result of courtly patronage, musicians and artists were highly valued, while 'Malay singing and songs occupied a good position in the field of arts (*nyanyian2 dan lagu2 Melayu mendapat kedudukan baik pula dalam bidang kesenian*)' (Z. Said 1967:20). In the context of modern Malay society, he further stated:

The result of changes in the organisation of society leads to changes in the development of Malay sung arts. Singers (artistes) and poets do not receive adequate patronage and born in society are artists that do not take responsibility in the value of their creations. These changes have brought detriment to the songs and language used in songs due to the intrusion of foreign elements.<sup>8</sup>

To overcome this decline of local music culture, he proposed the following actions be taken by the state and the artistic community:

1. National elements need to be implanted as much as possible into Malay singing to preserve its uniqueness.
2. Foreign elements that are destructive must be eliminated and (foreign elements) that are beneficial should be accepted.
3. Songwriters and singers (artistes) must possess adequate knowledge about (the Malay) language (vocabulary) and language usage (grammar).<sup>9</sup>

Zubir Said's suggestions feature the primacy of language in preserving and effectively creating a shared national culture through the arts based

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<sup>8</sup> In the original: 'Akibat perubahanz dalam susunan masharakat menimbulkan perubahanz pula dalam perkembangan seni nyanyian Melayu. Biduan2 dan ahli2 pantun tidak lagi mendapat pemeliharaan yang baik dan dalam masharakat lahirlah-lah seniman2 yang tidak bertanggong jawab dalam nilai chiptaan-nya. Perubahanz telah membawa kerosakan pada lagu dan bahasa yang di-pakai dalam nyanyian akibat kemasukan unsor2 asing (Z. Said 1967:20).

<sup>9</sup> Author's translation from the original.

on Malay ethnicity. The inclusion of 'national' elements into 'Malay singing' provides an insight to the need to actively shape a national consciousness through music. While defining a specific Malay ethnicity is fraught with contestations and ambiguity (National Museum of Singapore 2011; Milner 2008; Barnard 2004), the emphasis of the Malay language as a unifier for a diverse range of peoples that inhabit the Malay Peninsula provides feasible grounds for a national identity. More importantly, this national identity would be forged through literature and music. Moreover, such identities would be solidified by the active preservation and systemisation of knowledge concerning the Malay language.

Another factor that contributed to this national cultural agenda is the selective exclusion of external cultures. This was an inclusive process in which cultural boundaries needed to be clearly marked. However, in the post-colonial nation-states of Malaysia and Singapore, this was problematic due to a multicultural population. In an ambiguous way, Zubir Said's suggestions mentioned the need to remove 'foreign elements' that were considered 'destructive' while retaining 'beneficial' ones. The ambiguity here lies in the subjectivity of what was considered 'foreign' and how 'good' and 'bad' influences on Malay cultural practices could be assessed. As further examples in the paper suggest, the nation-state would play a major role in assessing these criteria of inclusion and exclusion in the arts. Some of these criteria were also drawn from reactionary suggestions by cultural personalities such as P. Ramlee, who was coping poorly with the changing musical tastes of Malay youth.

P. Ramlee was *the* iconic director-actor-singer-composer of Malay films from the 1950s to the 1960s. However, towards the end of his career in the late 1960s, he experienced a decline in popularity due to an impoverished local film industry and the rapid spread of popular music styles from abroad that rendered his musical inclinations outdated and un-marketable. In a speech given at the National Culture Congress in Kuala Lumpur (1971), he expressed his frustrations by denouncing youth music cultures and upholding the need for advancing traditional Malaysian music.<sup>10</sup>

Ramlee started his acting and song writing career in the early 1950s in Singapore, working for the Shaw Brother's Malay Film Productions. He was the first critically acclaimed Malay filmmaker, directing his first film, 'The trishaw puller' (*Penarek becha*) in 1955. Since then, he had won

<sup>10</sup> P. Ramlee, 'Cara-cara meninggikan mutu dan memperkaya muzik jenis asli dan tradisional Malaysia demi kepentingan negara'. Speech given at the Kongress Kebudayaan Kebangsaan, Kuala Lumpur, 16–20 August 1971.

numerous awards for his music, acting and film productions. In 1964, he left Singapore for the soon to be separate nation state of Malaysia, continuing his film career at the newly set-up, under-funded, and inexperienced Merdeka Film Productions studio in Kuala Lumpur. He would make numerous films here until his death in 1973. Critics and historians lament that the 'quality' and reception of his Malaysian productions failed to supersede the standards of his Singapore films. Times and tastes were changing and P. Ramlee in this period – despite his vibrant and diverse cosmopolitan musical influences (McGraw and Suriyanti Azmi 2009) - represented a bygone era of antiquated Malay culture that did not speak to the younger, 'groovier', 'long-haired', 'marijuana-smoking' and 'mini-skirt-wearing' Malaysian youth of the seventies.<sup>11</sup>

P. Ramlee in his presentation observed the decline of traditional music in Malaysia and proposed solutions for this 'problem'. He lamented the encroachment of Hindustani music from India and music from the West that had

rapidly influenced the souls of our (Malaysian) youths to the point that these youths are unaware of their long hair (ala the Beatles), dress in 'Groovy' styles that are unfamiliar, smoke *ganja* (marijuana) and other things. There are also youths that wear short 'mini-skirts' due to the influence of pop musicians.<sup>12</sup>

At the end of his presentation, P. Ramlee stated eight points to address the decline of traditional music in Malaysia that stressed the importance of government intervention and responsibility in this matter:

1. The government must act vigilantly to expand *asli* (indigenous)<sup>13</sup> and traditional music extensively
2. Radio and television must play an important role in broadcasting as much traditional and *asli* music as possible.

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<sup>11</sup> The documentary, 'Biography: P. Ramlee' mentions a concert of the 'Three Ramlees' in the late 1960s, where P. Ramlee was 'boo-ed' by the young audience. Conversely, the Malay Heritage Centre exhibition features a picture of P. Ramlee performing alongside the popular *pop yeh yeh* band, The Swallows (source: EMI Music). Additionally, One of Ramlee's famous songs *Bunyi gitar* (Sound of the guitar) from the film, *Tiga Abdul* (The three Abduls, 1964, dir. P. Ramlee) is arguably a parody or accommodation of the emerging rock & roll style of electric guitar bands.

<sup>12</sup> The original (in Sarji 2011:36) reads: Secara lekas dapat mempengaruhi jiwa muda-mudi kita Malaysia, sehingga pemuda-pemudi tidak sedar pula berambut panjang (ala Beattle [sic]), berpakaian 'Groovy' yang tidak ketentuan, menghisap ganja dan lain-lain. Pemuda-pemudi pula berpakaian 'mini-skirt' yang singkat, kerana terpengaruh dengan pemain-pemain muzik pop.

<sup>13</sup> The *asli* genre meaning 'original', 'indigenous' or 'pure' is both a specific Malay rhythm and a repertoire of song types. *Asli* music instrumentation includes regional

3. A (government-sponsored) program must be implemented that has two simultaneous outlets for the training of *asli* and traditional Malaysian music.
4. All schools (including vernacular schools) must teach *asli* and traditional music as a subject in the curriculum.
5. Nightclubs, hotels, restaurants and any public places must play and perform *asli* and traditional music.
6. Music that is at odds with Malaysian traditions must be reduced.
7. The government must encourage the producers of *asli* and traditional music by providing commensurate endorsement and sponsorship for their musical works.
8. The government must sponsor *asli* and traditional music festivals to (positively) influence Malaysians. (In Sarji:36–7, my translation.)

What is evident in these proposed ‘solutions’ is the constant emphasis and reliance of government assistance and intervention. Thus, Ramlee portrayed an uphill ‘battle’ against commercial popular music and saw government sponsorship as the only solution to maintaining a ‘declining’ indigenous culture. Furthermore, the youth that were increasingly overlooking his music for foreign popular music were at the centre of this problem. They were the generation uncontrollably succumbing to negative Western cultures effectively forgetting their local cultures and values. The only solution he saw to this was an active intervention of the state government.

Thus, through Ramlee’s ‘solutions’ I observe discursively how Malaysian national consciousness was being entrusted solely to the machinery of the nation state. Where Malays once relied on their sovereign rulers to define and symbolize their culture, they now had to turn to the nation-state as an extension or replacement of that sovereignty in the modern world. At the end of the conference in which P. Ramlee presented his national cultural views about music, the National Cultural Policy of 1971 was drafted. This policy has remained as the Malaysian government policy concerning culture and arts to this day (Kementerian Penerangan Malaysia 2008).<sup>14</sup>

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instruments such as the *rebana* frame drum and *gendang* two-headed drum as well indigenised Western instruments such as the violin and accordion. See Matusky and Tan (2004:330) for an example of the *asli* rhythmic pattern and Matusky and Tan (2004:321, 329–30) for examples of *asli* repertoire.

<sup>14</sup> The website of the Ministry of Information Malaysia (Kementerian Penerangan Malaysia) lists the updated policy but states that three main principles of the policy are based on the initiatives set out by the National Culture Congress of 1971.

In the remaining pages, I will explore how youth music cultures in mid-1960s to early-1970s Malaysia and Singapore have featured as the centre of contention in the debate about national culturalism. These youth cultures posed a counter-cultural threat to the two newly emerging countries and hence, a wealth of reactionary as well as conciliatory discourses were expressed about youth freedom and degeneracy in conflict with conservative and locally rooted morality.

### *Youth and Popular Music in 1960s Singapore and Malaysia*

The 1960s in Singapore and Malaysia was a vibrant and creative period for youth music culture. Youth music culture in 1960s Malaya began as emulative practices that would eventually become localised. Rock and roll bands from Britain and America were imitated in the form of cover bands. This was followed by the translation of popular English-language songs into local languages like Malay and later, original songs were written and performed in Malay, English and local Chinese dialects. While other languages were present in Malayan youth music, I will limit my observations in this section to English-language and Malay-language bands based in Singapore and Malaysia with a focus on the musical translatability of youth music and the related youth cultural practices that were deemed degenerate by state authorities.

The 'beat music' of British bands such as The Beatles, Rolling Stones and The Shadows were major influences on the musical styles and band formats that were performed by Singaporean and Malaysian youth in this era. Aside from a pervasive culture of musically emulating Western popular styles among English-language bands, there was also a growing community of Chinese and Malay-language bands that combined these new 'beat' styles and guitar-band ensemble formats with lyrics sung in local dialects. The Malay-language adaptations of British rock would be termed *pop yeh yeh* in reference to The Beatles' *'She loves you, yeh yeh yeh'* (Lockard 1998:224; see also Pereira 2011:1; Matusky and Tan 2004:407).

Along with such loud and rhythmically-driven music, fashion statements such as mini-skirts for women and long-hair for men represented a vivid cosmopolitan counter-culture to the more conservative leaders and law-makers of both nations. The Singaporean and Malaysian nation-states were newly independent and desperately seeking to assert a distinct national cultural identity that was refined in modernity yet rooted to indigenous traditions. The 'beat music' youth cultures however, were

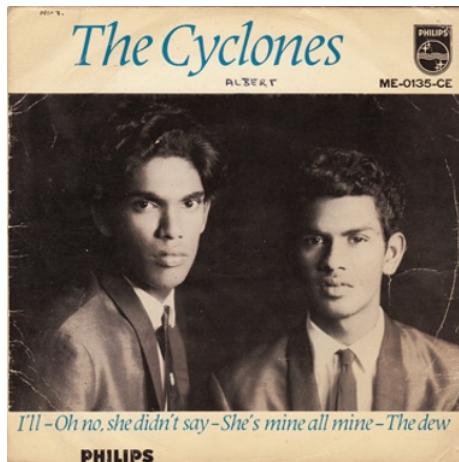
seen as far from refined and far from local by the older generation of local artists and government officials. In fact, youth music culture of the 1960s represented everything the post-colonial Singaporean and Malaysian nation-building project was against. In line with Jones's (2001:101–4) view of the 'doubleness of yellow music' of 1930s China, Malayan youth music signified a degenerate or 'pornographic' cultural expression that was also modern and translatable across national boundaries. The articulation of *pop yeh yeh* culture by young Malaysians and Singaporeans represented a threatening sexual freedom along with a borderless cultural practice that could not be bound by the rigid confines of a national culture and its attendant traditional morality. In the following pages, I will examine a few examples of Malayan youth music cultures that posed a counter-cultural threat to the national cultural state-making agenda of 1960s Singapore and Malaysia.

### *Disquieting Expressions*

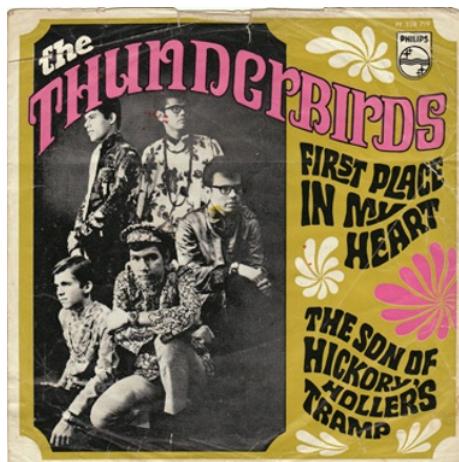
In the 1960s, the centre of production for guitar-band music for the entire Malay Peninsula was Singapore. International record labels such as Philips and Columbia-EMI had recording and distribution operations based in Singapore and were actively promoting and producing local talents. In the early 1960s, a wealth of local bands were recorded performing English songs of American and British artists. A major appeal of this emulative industry was the accessibility of these local bands to local audiences at live shows. Siva Choy, a member of the duo called The Cyclones, relates the following:

...in the early '60s, television had not arrived. You heard (foreign) bands on the radio but couldn't see them. Occasionally, a movie might come into Singapore with bands and things. So what do you do? You look for anything that will substitute. So, suddenly a local band stands up and starts to play Rolling Stones. It was great. No videos, no cassettes. So we became substitutes. Everybody sounded like somebody else. The more you sounded like somebody else, the greater the hero that you became... As a result, people became extremely imitative (Interview in Pereira 1999:18).

One of the more successful English-language bands from the era, The Quests, also modelled themselves after The Shadows. They initially gained popularity by winning talent competitions in which they would play songs by The Shadows (Chua 2001:33–8). In fact, there were many 'sound-a-like' band competitions in early 1960s Singapore: local bands such as



4. 1. The Cyclones (Courtesy of Joseph Clement Pereira).



4. 2. The Thunderbirds (Courtesy of Joseph Clement Pereira).

The Stompers won the Cliff Richard and the Shadows contest, The Astronauts claimed the title of the 'Ventures of Singapore' and The Clifters were winners of the 'Rolling Stones of Singapore' competition (Pereira 2011: 2–3). There was also a 'Beatles versus Rolling Stones' competition that involved a finalist 'play off' between The Thunderbirds (who emulated the former) and Les Kafila (who mimicked the latter)- The Thunderbirds won the competition (Pereira 2011:3).

Other notable groups such as Naomi and The Boys gained successful popularity in the Malay Peninsula with their cover version of the song 'Happy Happy Birthday Baby' by Margo Sylvia and Gilbert Lopez.

The adaptation of popular chart-topping English songs to the Malay language initiated a local recording music industry that was emulative of the West. This emulative industry which set the aesthetic tone for local music practices would eventually be articulated in more uniquely local expressions. In 1967, under the TK label, Ismail Haron who sang with the Vigilantes recorded *Green green grass of home* (Putman Jr.) as *Senyuman terakhir* (Last smile), *La Bamba* (Valens) as *Mari menari* (Let's dance), *Hang on sloopy* (Berns and Farrell) as *Mari sayang* (Come, Love) and *You better move on* (Alexander) as *Pulang pada-ku* (Return to me).<sup>15</sup>



4.3. Ismail Haron's single, *Delilah* (Courtesy of Joseph Clement Pereira).

Ismail Haron based his recording career in the 1960s on performing, adapting and writing Malay versions for popular English songs. His other notable recordings were *Enam belas lilin* based on *16 candles* (Dixon and Kent), *Delailah* from *Delilah* (Mason and Reed) performed by Tom Jones and *Jangan marah Lili* (Don't be angry, Lili) adapted from *Mohair Sam* (Frazier) performed by Charlie Rich.<sup>16</sup> Ismail Haron asserted that despite being labelled the 'Tom Jones of Singapore', he was more inclined to

<sup>15</sup> Interview with Ismail Haron, 19 December 2005, conducted by Joseph Clement Pereira. Oral History Archives, National Archives Singapore; Malay Heritage Centre 2012; Pereira (2011:11).

<sup>16</sup> Interview with Ismail Haron, 19 December 2005; Pereira (2011:12).

African-American performers such as James Brown, Lou Rawls, Nat King Cole, Aretha Franklin and Ella Fitzgerald; however, he was constrained to covering Caucasian artists due to the demands of recording companies (Ismail Haron).

The mid-1960s also saw the growth of Malay bands in Singapore and Malaysia called *kugiran*- an abbreviation for *kumpulan gitar rancak* (lively guitar bands) (Matusky and Tan 2004:407). Like the English-language cover bands these bands usually consisted of a core band fronted by a singer. Such singers were subject to change depending on the performance or recording project. Some popular singers and bands in the mid-1960s from Singapore were Rafeah Buang, Maria Bachok, Sanisah Huri, Siti Zaiton, Ahmad Daud, Jefridin and The Siglap Five, A. Ramlie and The Rythmn Boys, Kassim Selamat and The Swallows, The Terwellos, The Hooks and Les Kafilas. These bands were characterised by their original compositions and vernacular or *asli* (indigenous) approach to Malay singing<sup>17</sup> complemented by overtly Westernized musical style and instrumentation.<sup>18</sup> A notable recording is the song *La Aube* recorded by Kassim Selamat and The Swallows sung in a Baweanese dialect. The song was even a popular hit in Germany; arguably making the group 'the most internationally recognised Malay Pop band of their time' (Malay Heritage Centre).

### *Degenerate Practices*

In 1960s Singapore and Malaysia, prominent and complementary to the music-makers were the youth audiences. These youth adopted fashions that were considered outrageous or provocative, listened to their favourite Western or Western-derived music on the radio, actively collected music records, watched local TV programmes featuring local bands and singers and congregated in musical spaces and events such as band competitions and concerts. The most accessible of these live events were the 'tea dances' that were aimed at young adults, and the most prominent

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<sup>17</sup> By the 1930s, Malay musical culture was 'modernised' through the interactive 'fusion of Malay and Western elements', in which Malayness was presented in 'the singing style, the vocal ornamentation, the singer's emphasis on the last beat of the phrase, the linear texture, the cyclic drum rhythmic patterns, and the use of Malay *syair* texts' while the West was represented in 'harmony or implied harmony in or between the instrumental and vocal parts (a factor which strongly influenced melodic invention), close relationship between the text and the music, and Western melodic instrumentation' (S. Tan 1993:98).

<sup>18</sup> Interview with Ismail Haron, 19 December 2005; Lockard 1998:226.

fashion statements included short mini-skirts and form-fitting outfits for women, tight and slim trousers for men and towards the end of the 1960s, long hair below the shoulders would be a pervasive trend among young males.

The tea dances of 1960s Singapore were held on Saturday and Sunday afternoons for young patrons below the legal drinking age as no alcohol was served. Some venues in Singapore included the notable Golden Venus, a club located on Orchard Road, Celestial Room, The Palace, Springdale, The Prince's at Prince Hotel Garni and New World Cabaret (Pereira 2011:6; Chua 2001:85–8). It was an event where youth could have 'clean fun', enjoy live music, as well as congregate in their trendy clothes.

Joseph C. Pereira, author of two books on Singapore band-music in the 1960s (1999, 2011) is an avid fan, record collector and producer of numerous compilation albums of Singaporean beat music from the 1960s. During my research in Singapore for this chapter, I was fortunate to interview him at his home and view his vast collection of 45 RPM and 33 RPM records. Pereira maintains a modest but enthusiastic network of Singapore 1960s music fans and record collectors across Singapore and Malaysia. Aside from his personal vinyl collection he showed me a collection of albums from the 1960s that had been converted to CDs by another fan. More so related to this study, his insights and personal memories of growing up in the era provided me with an intimate perspective of *pop yeh yeh* culture. He shares his personal experience of attending a tea dance in 1969 at the age of fifteen:

[The tea dance] was held in the afternoon from three to six and it was a basement club... I went with two friends. We paid the grand fee of one dollar which entitled us to a Coke... But the thing was that straight away, I told myself, "I'm out of my league"... [This was] because we were wearing short sleeve shirts and trousers- we looked like tourists! Then we look[ed] at the rest [of the people], and you know, because they were older teens or... [young] adults- these guys and gals- they looked damn cool, man! We looked like a bunch of tourists, wearing short sleeve shirts... Some were wearing fringe jackets, some were wearing corduroy, some were wearing Levi's corduroy [jeans], and tailored slacks... A wide range of fashions... [There were some who wore] sunglasses. All kinds of sunglasses... There were a lot of [young women wearing] mini-skirts. Of course, some of them wore pantsuits.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Interview with J.C. Pereira, 21 October 2012, Singapore, on bands and youth culture in 1960s.

It seems that appropriate fashion was a major factor among youths at these tea dances. Pereira expresses much amazement with the attire of the patrons and emphasised how embarrassed he was to be out of place in his attire ('we looked like tourists!'). Pereira also related to me the set-up of the club that included a 'bandstand', 'dancing stage' as well as 'tables and chairs where people sit and watch' the performances. Most of the dancing was done by male-female couples on dates, while a majority of the audience which was male would sit and observe the bands performing.

Unfortunately, this was the first and last tea dance that he would attend as tea dances were banned by the Singapore government on the 1st of January, 1970 - a few months after Pereira and his friends patronised the Golden Venus at Orchard Road. According to Pereira, tea dances towards the end of the 1960s were notorious for ending up in fights, so the government viewed tea dances as a breeding ground for 'juvenile delinquency'.<sup>20</sup> In fact, state antagonism towards youth culture in the late 1960s to early 1970s was a major factor in the decline of such musical events as the Singaporean and Malaysian

... government campaign... in the 1950s to create a Malayan culture and reject 'yellow culture' or what were seen as *degenerate* external cultural influences began to have an impact. As local music was regarded as being heavily influenced by the West and associated with a culture of drug use and disorderliness, this led to the banning of, among other things, tea dances and other events featuring live music (J. Tan 2010, my emphasis).

Indeed, in the late sixties to early seventies, *The Straits Times* newspaper in Singapore abounds with articles on youth degeneracy in terms of 'yellow culture', 'flower people' ('Lim warns of flower people, yellow culture', *The Straits Times*, 13 January 1968) and the general paranoia about the 'hippie' movement and associated music cultures ('Need to play down "hippie trend" on TV', *The Straits Times*, 18 May 1970; 'Hippism does not start or end with pot and long hair', *The Straits Times*, 20 September 1970). This included the ban of the American film, *Woodstock: Three Days of Peace, Music and Love* ('Singapore censors ban pop colour film Woodstock', *The Straits Times*, 29 December 1970). This leads me to discuss another issue of youth 'degeneracy' and Singaporean and Malaysian youth in the late 1960s to early 1970s: long-haired males.

The rise of long-haired male youth was considered such a problem that Singaporean government offices had a policy of serving 'males with long

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<sup>20</sup> Interview with J.C. Pereira, 21 October 2012.



4.4. Joseph C. Pereira and his personal record collection (photo by author).

hair... last' (Chua 2001:56–7).<sup>21</sup> In Malaysia, Johor state-backed scholarship holders were banned from having long hair alongside restrictions from participating in demonstrations and marrying without the consent of the scholarship committee ('Long hair ban on grant holders', *The Straits Times*, 17 November 1975). What constituted 'long hair' for males? According to an illustrated Singapore government poster titled 'Males with long hair will be attended to last', long-hair criteria for males included 'hair falling across the forehead and touching eyebrows', 'hair covering the ears' and 'hair reaching below an ordinary shirt collar' (cit. Singapore National Library Archives in Malay Heritage Centre). Pereira informs me – from a personal experience he had with his friends – that police officers in 1970s Singapore would randomly harass and find fault with any young males who sported long-hair. These examples indicate that it was the bodies of youth that the state sought to assert its control. Unfamiliar and unconventional appearances were somehow linked to degeneracy and moral decadence ultimately at odds with the state vision of promoting a subservient national culture among youths.

<sup>21</sup> See also <http://www.malayheritage.org.sg/MHCPortal/content/conn/ucmnhb/uuid/dDocName%3ANHBSVRAPP61620000040000> (page 12).

Interestingly, 'policing' of the body also occurred among youths themselves. In the mid to late 1960s Malaysian and Singaporean women were liberating their bodies through 'provocative' or revealing styles of dress. The issue of young Malay women in mini-skirts was a frequent topic of fan letters in the Singaporean-based, Malay-language music magazine, *Bintang dan Lagu* (Stars and Songs). A letter from someone who may be a young woman<sup>22</sup> named Hanis denounces the wearing of mini-skirts as a provocatively revealing Western form of dress with the sole intention of attracting male attention. The writer asks why women should copy the fashions from abroad while ignoring local and more modest fashions (*Bintang dan Lagu*, July 1967, p. 51):

Mini-skirts are a type of clothing that exposes [a woman's] calves to the public. Is this what is called progress? Progress can be achieved without having to wear mini-skirts. And, by wearing *baju kurong* [traditional Malay female dress] we are able to attract males; we don't need to wear miniskirts for this... If we really want to wear short [revealing] clothes, wear underwear, isn't that even shorter [more revealing]?<sup>23</sup>

The writer adds that local society is to blame for encouraging this indecent form of dress by holding 'mini-skirt pageants' (*ratu mini skirt*) and falling victim to the disagreeable influences of the West (*Bintang dan Lagu* 1967, p. 51).

This statement is unique in multiple ways. Firstly, the critique of mini-skirts was voiced by someone who may be surmised to be a Malay woman. She advocated for a style of dress among her female peers that embodied traditional modesty as well as a progressive and modern outlook. Secondly, the writer raised some interesting issues about feminine sexual objectification: why should women expose their legs just to attract men and why should they be paraded in beauty pageants? Thirdly, the issue of Western cultural hegemony was raised, whereby Western fashion was threatening the survival of Malay clothes and cultural modesty:

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<sup>22</sup> It is difficult to ascertain the gender of the letter writer as there is a possibility that the writer may be using an alias, a male writing as a woman, or even one of the magazine editors intending to generate interest in the magazine. For the purpose of this discursive study, I will deduce the writers' identities based on the content of their letter. What is important is to ascertain how magazine readers in the mid 1960s would have interpreted or reacted to such letters.

<sup>23</sup> The original (*Bintang dan Lagu* 1967, p.51) reads: '*Mini-skirt* ialah suatu pakaian yang mendedahkan betis kita kepada umum. Adakah ini dikatakan kemajuan? Kemajuan akan tercapai dengan tidak payah memakai *mini-skirt*. Dan dengan memakai baju kurong kita dapat menarik hati lelaki, tak payahlah dengan memakai *mini-skirt*... Kalau benar2 kita hendak memakai pakaian2 yang pendek, pakai sahaja chelana dalam, bukankah lebih pendek?'

Why must we copy the clothes that come from other countries, like Western countries (?) Aren't there enough clothes in our own country? While Western countries have never ever wanted to use our clothes, why then must we favour clothes that come from the West that are not suitable for us.<sup>24</sup>

The question is whether to view this letter as a conservative statement or a post-colonial feminist one. Ironically, it seems to present both possibilities for interpretation, but I interpret this writer as an autonomous female voice that is paradoxically bound by the cultural restraints of patriarchal Malay culture. Conversely, 'modesty' in Malay culture isn't necessarily patriarchal, as it is the female voice in this case that is actively advocating such cultural values. As such, with regards to the culture of wearing mini-skirts, this writer employs a discourse similar to conservative critiques of youth culture such as the ones stated by P. Ramlee and subsequently implemented government policies that attempted to promote traditional, non-radical-Western values.

In later issues of the same magazine, conservative views towards the mini-skirt trend are expressed. A letter expresses antagonism with mini-skirts in a very curt manner:

For me miniskirts are like jackfruit covers. The top is wrapped tightly, while the calves and thighs are shown to the general public. I feel that instead of wearing miniskirts it is better not to wear anything at all; that is even more attractive for men' (*Bintang dan Lagu*, September 1967).<sup>25</sup>

Another, more neutral letter observes how new male and female fashions are far from different in their tightness and attendant youths' attitude:

While young women are stylish with their miniskirts that reveal parts of their thighs, young males show off their shirts and trousers that are tight or 'fancy', as these young adults like to say. No matter what clothes they wear, no one can tell them otherwise because they will reply with an answer that is unsettling (rude or inappropriate) (*Bintang dan Lagu*, November 1967, p. 48).<sup>26</sup>

<sup>24</sup> Mengapakah kita mesti meniru2 akan pakaian yang datangnya dari negeri lain, seperti negeri2 dari Barat. Tidakkah chukup pakaian yang ada pada negeri kita? Sedangkan negeri2 Barat tidak pernah bahkan tidak mahu menggunakan pakaian2 kita, mengapa pula kita mesti mempertinggikan lagi pakaian yang datang dari Barat yang tidak sesuai dengan kita. (*Bintang dan Lagu* 1967, p. 51).

<sup>25</sup> Buat saya miniskirt itu saolah2 seperti sarong nangka. Diatas tutup rapi, sedangkan betis dan peha ditunjok2kan dikhlayak ramai. Rasa saya dari memakai miniskirt itu lebuh baik jangan memakai langsung, itu lebuh menawan hati lelaki.

<sup>26</sup> Kalau sipemudi bergaya dengan miniskirtnya yang menonjolkan sabahagian pehanya, maka kapada sipemuda, mereka beraksi pula dengan baju dan seluar yang ketat2

Both of the letters quoted above are indicative of a general uneasiness towards these new fashions. It is difficult to ascertain the gender of the letter writers quoted, but it is certain that their stance is quite conservative in relation to the content of the music magazine to which they write. In my general overview of *Bintang dan Lagu* issues from 1966–1967, I saw numerous pictures of female artists in mini-skirts and other form-fitting attire in line with the youth fashions of the mid to late 1960s. Therefore, these letters perhaps only revealed a minority opinion about youth dressing styles and its attendant morality. Furthermore, it is possible that these letters were contrived by magazine editors to entice readers. Regardless, it is interesting to note that there was a debate over the issue in a music-oriented publication targeted at youths. Beyond the music, bands and singers that were prominently featured in the magazine, the discourse of mini-skirts and fashion directly involved the fans or participants of Malaysia and Singapore's 1960s music culture.

The debate over mini-skirts in *Bintang dan Lagu* ended<sup>27</sup> on a more liberal note with an article titled '*Miniskirt, Apa salahnya gadis2 Melayu memakai miniskirt?*' (*Miniskirts, What is the harm in Malay women wearing miniskirts?*) (*Bintang dan Lagu*, November 1967, pp. 4–5). The article summarised previous fan letters against and in support of mini-skirts and made an attempt to investigate the issue. The writer(s)<sup>28</sup> of the article 'investigated' by visiting the predominantly Malay Geylang Serai district in Singapore to see the extent of mini-skirt-wearing among young Malay females. They ascertained that 'the situation' wasn't as bad as previous fan letters had depicted as the amount of women wearing unreasonably short skirts were 'very small' (*Bintang dan Lagu*, November 1967, p. 5). The article concludes by noting that young Malay women are 'still capable of looking after themselves and adapting to the times'<sup>29</sup> (*Bintang dan Lagu*, November 1967, p. 5). Despite conservative reactions towards youth fashions that were seen as detrimental to local culture, values and morals,

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atau 'fensi', kata muda-mudi dewasa ini. Biar apa juu pakaian yang mereka gayakan, tidak saorang pun boleh menegor-sapa mereka kerana pasti mendapat jawapan yang tidak bagitu menyenangkan.

<sup>27</sup> The last available copies of the *Bintang dan Lagu* magazine at the British Library St. Pancras, London are the issues from 1967; thus, 'ending' the mini-skirt debate until more research is done to retrieve later copies. There is also a possibility that this magazine ceased publication after 1967. As archived copies of this particular magazine are rare, more research is required regarding the production history of this publication.

<sup>28</sup> No writers are credited in this article.

<sup>29</sup> '... maseh lagi pandai menjaga diri dan menyesuaikan diri mereka dengan pengedaran zaman' (*Bintang dan Lagu*, November 1967, p. 5).

there remained a discourse that sought to reconcile such youth culture as reasonable or even progressive and adaptive to modern times. I argue that a cosmopolitan agency was present in the debates and discourses among the youth of 1960s Malaysia and Singapore. This agency was articulated in different ways with divergent opinions about morality and the role of youth in the emerging nations of Malaysia and Singapore. Conservative or reactionary voices proclaimed a moralistic positionality by using modern tropes of national culturalism to safeguard traditional values. Arguments in favour of youth cultures sought to reposition the moral compass towards ideas of progress, modernity and adaptability to changing times. Thus, agency exists in both views and such opinions were articulated in cosmopolitan mediums that provided a new space for these oppositional ideas to interact. While the recording industry created music for counter-cultural youths to consume, print media<sup>30</sup> provided a discursive space for youths to expose and express the disjuncture between such counter-cultures with traditional values, national identity and modernity.

The Malay film industry, waning in popularity towards the end of the 1960s, provided a further space for the articulation of this counter-cultural discourse of youth culture. In the following section, I discuss how one Malay film tried to consolidate older values with the trendy youth music and culture of late 1960s Malaysia and Singapore. The film in its attempt to draw a young audience provided a narrative that tried to challenge conservative stereotypes of Malay youth degeneracy by portraying such youths as morally-capable individuals.

### *A Go Go '67*

It is suggested that the popularity of *pop yeh yeh* bands coincided with the decline of the musically-oriented Malay film industry (Lockard 1998:226). It is difficult to ascertain whether *pop yeh yeh* directly impacted the 'decline' of Malay cinema but there is an interesting example of the two 'worlds' or cultures interacting in the Shaw Brothers Malay-language film, *A Go Go '67* (1967), directed by Omar Rojik. The film contains a loose plot about a young woman and man who are members of a *kugiran* and more

<sup>30</sup> For a thorough discussion on the cosmopolitanism and Malay nationalist activism in print media see Barnard and Van der Putten (2008). Barnard and Van der Putten believe that it was the cosmopolitan intellectual environment of Singapore in the 1950s that led to significant creative and political advances in the Malay arts and literature. A cosmopolitan conception of Malayness was being formed and the imperative for the creation of a modern 'Malaysian' state was being articulated with utmost agency, 'in the Malay language' (Barnard and Van der Putten 2008:148).

importantly, features *pop yeh yeh* performances of twelve groups and four dance groups. While the musical performances are the main highlights of the film, the narrative that ties the numerous musical performances together contains discourses about *kugiran* youth culture clashing with conservative Malay values. As a case study of the clash between youth culture and state ideology in 1960s Malaysia and Singapore, I will discuss such contestatory discourses about youth culture present in the film *A Go Go '67*. Interestingly, the film provides a moral compromise that favours the youth, while portraying stereotypical conservative views that abhor youth culture.

The film's storyline evolves around a young woman named Fauziah (portrayed by Nor Azizah) who, against her conservative and well-heeled father's wishes, sings in a *pop yeh yeh* band. Her boyfriend, Johari (played by Aziz Jaafar), is the leader of the band who sings and plays the keyboard. Fauziah's father (Ahmad Nisfu), is extremely antagonistic towards Malay youth culture to the point that he abruptly intervenes one of Fauziah's band rehearsals by kicking a drum kit and proceeds to scold her and her bandmates: 'If you want to be Satan, go and be Satan. Don't bring my daughter to be Satan with you! What is all this *yeh yeh yeh*?'<sup>31</sup>

Despite his disapproval, Fauziah makes long 'speeches' about how youth aren't as bad as her father believes. She admonishes her father about his misconceptions about youth:

Not all youth are immoral and delinquent, father. Also, not all people who are religious are good, father. I am an adult. I know right from wrong. You know father, a lot of them (youths) do not have permanent jobs. So, by directing their interest towards music, they are able to fill the emptiness of their lives and avoid criminal activities... Father, do you like hearing of our youths stealing, thieving, extorting because of the emptiness in their lives?<sup>32</sup>

Her father doesn't agree as he views such youths as lost beyond 'repair'. He then laments how the West with their civilised ways and innovations have failed to control their 'wild youth movements (*angkatan liar*)'.

<sup>31</sup> 'Ingin! Kalau kau nak jadi syaitan, pergi jadi syaitan. Jangan bawa anak aku jadi syaitan bersama! Apa ni, 'yeh yeh yeh' ini apa?'

<sup>32</sup> Bukan semua pemudi begini tak bermoral dan jahat, ayah. Juga tak semua orang yang alim baik, ayah. Saya dah besar. Saya tahu buruk-baiknya. Ayah tahu, kebanyakan dari mereka itu tak mempunyai pekerjaan yang tetap, ayah. Jadi, dengan menumpuhkan minat mereka terhadap muzik, mereka dapat mengisi kekosongan hidup dan terelak dari perkara-perkara jenayah... Ayah suka mendegar pemuda-pemuda kita mencuri, merompak, menyamun kerana kekosongan hidup mereka?

In order to control her from her social and musical activities, Fauziah's father arranges her to be married to her cousin.

Later in the film, Fauziah's father makes a comment about the misfortunes of the world, and mentions a need to do charity work. His wife chides him by saying that his plans for charity never materialise. He then schemingly says that if he collects considerable donations he will receive a medal for his contributions to society and the government. He then denounces the youth for their aimless ways, noting that they are never concerned about the welfare of the poor.

Upon overhearing these remarks, Fauziah decides to organise a charity concert for orphans. She gives Johari five hundred dollars to organise the event and recruit bands to participate. Johari asks why she is suddenly planning this event. Fauziah then makes another speech-like proclamation:

My father always accuses that youth like us are the thrash of society that are absolutely useless. I want you (Johari) to prove to society, especially my father, that we can be used for a good cause as long as people know how to make use of us.<sup>33</sup>

In the next scene, Fauziah's house is prepared for the marriage but Fauziah is nowhere to be found as she is attending the charity concert. More performances from *kugiran* bands ensue. She returns from the concert and says to her father that she has accomplished her duties and is ready to be married according to her father's wishes. Unfortunately, her engagement was called off as her potential in-laws were fed-up of waiting for her return. Fauziah didn't even intentionally avoid the wedding as she just wasn't informed when the wedding was going to be held! Her father is too ashamed about the whole escapade and angrily tells Fauziah to leave his sight.

Shortly after, a group of reporters come into the now gloomy house looking for Fauziah. They glowingly inform her parents that Fauziah and Johari just organised a very successful charity event and are to be commended for their contributions to society. As the reporters congratulate her on her success, she mentions that the *true* organiser of the event was her father. In the end Fauziah's parents are seen apologising to Johari and all is well.

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<sup>33</sup> 'Ayah selalu menuduh bahawa pemuda-pemuda dan pemudi-pemudi seperti kita ini adalah sampah masyarakat yang sudah tak berguna langsung. Yah (Fauziah) mahu Joe (Johari) buktikan pada masyarakat terutama pada ayah Yah sendiri bahawa kita dapat digunakan untuk sesuatu tujuan yang baik asalkan seseorang itu tahu menggunakananya.'

*A Go Go '67* provides an informative perspective on the discourses about youth in contention with national culturalism in late 1960s Singapore and Malaysia. The film was shot in Singapore during the last years of the Shaw Brothers Malay Film Productions division; marking the end of an era of Malay film production in Singapore. Fittingly, the film is an attempt by the fledgling industry to appeal to the very youth culture that was a major factor in the Malay film industry's 'demise'. As such, the narrative tries to portray a conciliatory stance by portraying the youth-protagonists as decent human beings, contrary to much of the statements made by cultural icons such as P. Ramlee and Zubir Said. The film paints a stereotypical archetype of reactionary conservatism in Fauziah's father, replete with statements about the immorality of youth, their uselessness to society and their devious, delinquent and devilish tendencies. Interestingly, the film's altruistic protagonist, Fauziah, becomes a staunch advocate for youth culture, proving to her father that youth are morally grounded people with the capacity to care of others and use their art for good causes. Fauziah's character is thus a noble and self-sacrificing archetype that is a participant of youth culture as well as an upholder of 'traditional' moral values. In fact, she ends up displaying greater moral initiative than her conservative and opportunistic father.

Ironically, the film's altruistic narrative also asserts moral expectations on youth and in effect, patronises their moral inclinations. Despite this attempt at discursive reconciliation, youth music remained predominantly commercial and government initiatives continued to repress youth culture as indicated in the consequent banning of youth-music activities and venues (Pereira 2011). The film, while being a commercial production that targeted a youth demographic provides an important document of the discourses and disjunctures that circulated around the vibrant musical culture of Malay youth in the late 1960s. Past the one-dimensional characters, moralistic condescension and far-from-subversive narrative, *A Go Go '67* presents viewers with an idea of the music and lifestyles of the Malay youth of the *pop yeh yeh* era albeit through the mediating gaze of a declining local commercial film industry desperately seeking a youth audience.

### *Conclusion*

Youth music cultures in Malaysia and Singapore have always been at the locus of contention for nation-making policy and its conservative advocates. While studies on Malay youth and music have provided pertinent

examples of this contention with the government (Stivens 2012; Yusof 2010; S. Tan 2006; Ibrahim 1995; S. Tan 1989, 1993, 1992), it was the music cultures of the 1960s in the Malay Peninsula that ignited the history of contestation between the emerging Singaporean and Malaysian state with youth cultural practices. The 1960s was a transitional period of independence, post-coloniality and independence for Malaysia and Singapore. As such, state-makers from both countries were desperate to create a local-traditional cultural imaginary for their emerging nation-states. *Pop yeh yeh* was immediately antithetical to the state vision, and was a hindrance to the nation-making project. The music of *pop yeh yeh* was unmistakably Western in influence and Malaysian and Singaporean youth were aligning themselves to more radical and subversive cultures of the West. These youth in their cultural practices incited 'moral panic' (Young 1971; Cohen 1972 cited in Stivens) among the conservative ruling elite, which resulted in the formation and implementation of policies and interventions to limit their activities and spaces of expression. Much like the Malaysian 'black metal crackdowns' in the early 2000s, 'the construction of Malay cultural identities as embodied in the body politics of urbanized Malay youths' led to state actions to control and repress what was deemed as deviant cultural practices' (Yusof 2010:180). Of course, in the case of commercially-based music cultures there are ever present ironies with regards to ethnocratic-state hegemony and capitalist logics of global cultural consumption. Stivens in her recent study of Malaysian youth culture points out the following:

There are... contradictory links between, on the one hand, the social disciplining imposed by the state and religious moral projects, to produce the hoped-for new, responsible, self-fashioning young citizen-subjects required by the new order discourses – male and female – and on the other, the relentless fashioning of selves by young people through their massive engagement in the new consumption ordained by the enthusiastic embrace of capitalist development. (Stivens 2012:190)

While not as 'transgressive' or subversive as the more recent heavy metal youths (Tan 2002 cited in Stivens:182), *pop yeh yeh* culture can at least be seen as counter-cultural in its convivial embrace of 'the new' through processes of 'self-fashioning' that while initially emulative of external trends, became uniquely local in its expression of Malaysian and Singaporean youth aspirations. These youth had music that was enjoyed in Europe (Kassim Selamat and the Swallows), they adapted foreign songs to Malay and infused new meanings into them (Ismail Haron), they sparked new but shortly-lived interest to a declining film industry, and more

importantly, they danced the Go-Go in stylish abandon and let their hair down freely; much to the misunderstood disgruntlement of the Malaysian and Singaporean state authorities.

All these cultural practices intersected in complex ways: cosmopolitan expressions of agency were articulated, yet the looming presence of larger market forces such as the print, recording and the film industries were instrumental in the dissemination of such cultural practices and lifestyles. The state enforced national cultural policies on Malay youth that imposed a racial-traditional conception of morality with attendant behavioural expectations. It was thus the disquieting loudness of 'degenerate' Malayan youth practices in the mid-1960s to early-1970s that unsettled the Singaporean and Malaysian nation-making project of cultivating a culturally refined and obedient citizenry. Ironically, the looming presence of the global post-colonial music and culture industries of the West still exists to challenge the presumed self-fashioning agency of musical cultures around the world (Stokes 2004). Such post-colonial transnational market and ideological forces complicate the tensions between youth practices and state policies in Malaysia and Singapore in the present albeit with different cultural manifestations. Beyond the scope of this chapter, further reflections are required on the complex relationship between the state, youth, gender, post-coloniality and global capitalism in the Malaysian-Singaporean cultural sphere.

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PART TWO  
THE SOUND OF MELAYU



## CHAPTER FIVE

### POP GOES MELAYU: MELAYU POPULAR MUSIC IN INDONESIA, 1968–1975

Andrew N. Weintraub

This chapter addresses the musical development and socio-cultural meanings of *pop Melayu* (or *Melayu pop*) a popular music genre created in Jakarta during the late-1960s that achieved commercial success in Indonesia during the 1970s. *Pop Melayu* blended Western-oriented pop and localized Melayu (also called Malay) music into a hybrid commercial form. *Pop* and *Melayu* had different symbolic associations with music, generation, social class, and ethnicity in Indonesia. *Pop* was marketed mainly to younger listeners who viewed it as ‘cool’ (*gengsi*) and progressive (*maju*). For this younger audience, ‘pop’ looked to the future. Conversely *Melayu* music had the connotation of ethnicity, tradition, and authenticity. *Melayu* music, as performed by Malay orchestras called *orkes Melayu* had a large audience base, but was not trendy. Under these conditions, what was the impetus for recording companies, producers, and musicians to create *pop Melayu*? What did the music mean to musicians, producers, and listeners within the context of culture and politics in the late 1960s and early 1970s? What were the implications of blending *pop* and *Melayu* for the future of Indonesian popular music?

During the politically and economically transformative period of the 1960s, *pop Melayu* grounded the present in the past. As Indonesia moved toward a system of Western-style capitalism, sustained industrialization and intensified commodification of culture, *pop Melayu* sonically transcoded images and memories of the past, albeit an imagined past, for Indonesian listeners.<sup>1</sup> I will suggest that *pop Melayu* in the 1960s and 1970s mediated the contradictions and ambivalence of everyday life during a

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<sup>1</sup> I borrow this concept of ‘transcoding’ from Ryan and Kellner’s analysis of film and social life: ‘Films transcode the discourses (the forms, figures, and representations) of social life into cinematic narratives. Rather than reflect a reality external to the film medium, films execute a transfer from one discursive field to another’ (Ryan and Kellner 1988:12).

period of rapid social and cultural change. Musicians, recording companies, and producers were cultural mediators in this process.

In this chapter, I will describe the social and cultural conditions that made it possible to articulate 'pop' and 'Melayu' as a new genre. As a cross-over genre, *pop Melayu* was a commercial effort to expand the market for popular music by bringing together or unifying diverse audiences. By 1975, a large number of prominent bands and singers had recorded *pop Melayu* albums.<sup>2</sup>

I situate *pop Melayu* within the social and cultural conditions of modernity in Indonesia in four thematic ways. First, its creative flowering coincided with the first decade of the New Order capitalist state in Indonesia. New private recording companies and private radio stations stimulated the development of new forms of music, new ways of advertising music, and an increase in sales of recordings. Second, as a 'text' about modernity, *pop Melayu* marked a transition between something old and something new. Change was articulated through sound, visual representation, and the discourse about *pop Melayu* in popular print media. Third, it was a form of modernity marked by ethnicity and specific to Indonesia. This "ethno-modernity" presented more than two alternatives: either the American-infused pop music of the future or the Malay-inspired music of the past. Fourth, it was music produced for a young generation and it helped set the course for the future of popular music.<sup>3</sup>

*Pop Melayu* refers to a commercial genre of popular music and not simply any kind of popular music in the Malay (or Indonesian) language. My focus will be on the commercial genre of *pop Melayu*, and not other forms of Melayu popular music or popular music in the Indonesian language (*bahasa Indonesia*).<sup>4</sup> Data are based on interviews with musicians, analysis of music and lyrics, depictions on record covers, and critical readings of popular print media from the period.<sup>5</sup> Particular emphasis is given to

<sup>2</sup> Bands that recorded *pop Melayu* albums included (along with record company, catalogue number, and year of release): Koes Plus (Remaco RLL-314; 1974), The Mercy's (Remaco RLL-339; 1974), D'Lloyd (Remaco RL-343; 1974), and The Steps (Remaco RLL-433; 1975). Celebrated singers Tetty Kadi, Emilia Contessa, Mus Mulyadi, and Eddy Silitonga also recorded *pop Melayu* albums during the 1970s.

<sup>3</sup> One article referred to *pop Melayu* musicians as the 'generation of 1966' ('angkatan '66'); 'Regrouping musikus Angkatan '66' (1968:5).

<sup>4</sup> Nor will this chapter address songs composed previous to the era of *pop Melayu* which might be considered precursors or progenitors of *pop Melayu*.

<sup>5</sup> I am grateful to Hank den Toom, Jr. for providing me with recordings from the period, and Ross Laird for recording data. I would also like to thank Shalini Ayyagari, Bart Barendregt, Henk Maier, Tony Day, and Philip Yampolsky for helpful comments during the writing of this essay.

the work of Zakaria, an influential musician, composer, and arranger. The scope covered in this chapter encompasses the formation of pop Melayu around 1968 and it ends in 1975 when two things happened: (1) *pop Melayu* was established as a mainstream genre in the music industry; and (2) Rhoma Irama began taking contemporary Melayu music in a different direction, namely dangdut, which blended rock with Melayu. My interest here lies in the development and meaning of *pop Melayu* in its formative period.

### *Melayu*

Central to my discussion of music in mid-1960s Jakarta is the notion of 'Melayu' or Malay-ness. Melayu is a word of great slippage, and therein lies its productive force: it allows people to authorize all sorts of meanings (Andaya 2001). Defined in the colonial period as 'stock,' race, and ethnicity on the basis of biological appearances, Melayu implies a core set of ideas, values, beliefs, tastes, behaviours, and experiences that people share across geographical areas and history (Barnard and Maier 2004).<sup>6</sup> However, Melayu never represented one uniform discourse, practice, or experience exclusive to all members of that group (Barnard and Maier 2004:ix). As a discursive category, Melayu has always been constructed, imagined, fluid, and hybrid. Melayu was an arena of constant reinvention. Notions of Melayu culture, language, and identity have always operated situationally and contextually (Andaya 2001).

What frames Malayness as a discursive category in popular music of the 1960s and 1970s in Indonesia? In contrast to the mistaken colonial idea of Malayness as cultural homogeneity and origins, I invoke Homi Bhabha's notion of 'ambivalence' to understand the simultaneous attraction and aversion to Western colonial cultural forms in post-colonial Indonesia of the 1960s (Bhabha 1994). I aim to show how Malayness in popular music

<sup>6</sup> The concept and naming of Melayu as culture and identity existed before colonialism but not as a way of organizing people according to physical markers of race and ethnicity. Some differentiation is necessary, and perhaps the terms ethnicity and race can be usefully applied. For example, Malays as an ethnic group (*suku Melayu*) resided around the Melaka Straits and Riau whereas Malays as a racialized group (*rumpun Melayu*) populate the modern nation-states of Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, Brunei Darussalam, and (southern) Thailand in Southeast Asia. Yampolsky (1996:1) refers to the ethnic group as the 'primary' area of Melayu culture, and to, what I would call, the racialized group as the 'secondary' area of Melayu culture. For further on the construction of Melayu as a social category see Andaya 2001; Shamsul 2001; Reid 2004; Kahn 2006 and Milner 2008.

discourse of 1960s Indonesia represented: (1) the blending of Malay indigeneity and tradition (discursively constructed as 'Melayu asli,' or the 'original' or 'authentic Melayu') with Western forms, ideas, and practices; and (2) a 'third space,' where signs of the past could be appropriated, translated, rehistoricized, and read anew (Bhabha 1994:36; Rutherford 1990). In the politically transformative period of 1960s Indonesia, *pop Melayu* music formed links with discourses of indigeneity and tradition while simultaneously articulating with commercialization and modernity.

Melayu as a category of musical composition and performance did not represent a return to tradition in the face of modernity. Stylistic experimentation and compositional variety had long characterized Melayu popular music. The musical genres *bangsawan*, *orkes harmonium*, and *orkes gambus* of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries played mixed repertoires of Indian, Chinese, Middle Eastern, and Malay music. *Orkes Melayu* (Malay orchestras), which I will discuss further, continued this trend.<sup>7</sup> Even the term '*orkes Melayu*' suggests mixing and contradiction: 'orkes' (from the Dutch 'orkest' or the English 'orchestra,' which denoted modernity) and 'Melayu' (signifying a cultural past). Melayu popular music was a 'hybrid language' (*bahasa kacukan*), the kind that always breaks the rules rather than follows 'correct' and standardized usage (Barnard and Maier 2004). Further, Melayu was a term of perspective: for example, '*orkes Melayu*' had different musical properties and symbolic associations in Medan, Surabaya, and Jakarta during 1950 to 1965 (Weintraub 2010).

In the following section, I will trace the historical development of pop Melayu based on my interpretation of musical recordings, popular print media, and interviews with musicians and producers who were active during the period. I begin with the period of Sukarno's Old Order (1949–1965) because it informs an understanding of 'pop' for the purposes of this essay. I will focus on the formative period of *pop Melayu* recording, which occurred during 1968 to 1975 in Indonesia's capital of Jakarta, the center for the production and consumption of *pop Melayu*.

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<sup>7</sup> *Bangsawan* (also called *opera* and *stambul*) troupes travelled from Malaya (Malaysia) to Java in the 1890s (Tan 1993:73; see also Cohen 2006; Takonai 1997 and 1998). Named after the harmonium, a small reed organ from Europe via India, *orkes harmonium* (or O.H.) included harmonium, violin, trumpet, *gendang* (small two-headed drum), *rebana* (frame drum), and sometimes tambourine. Radio logs indicate that *orkes harmonium* played a mixed repertoire of Malay, Arabic, Indian, and European music (Weintraub 2010:39–40). *Gambus* orchestras featured the *gambus* (long-necked plucked fretless lute) or *'ud* (pear-shaped lute) and were accompanied by small double-headed drums (Ar. *marwas*, pl. *marawis*). Immigrants from the Hadhramaut region (Yemen) presumably brought the *gambus* and *marwas* with them to Indonesia (Capwell 1995:82–3).

*The (Late) Old Order*

The politically transformative decade of 1960s Indonesia is often characterized in terms of the fiercely anti-colonial and socialist-leaning Sukarno regime and the capitalistic and neoliberal economic policies of the Suharto regime. The transition from Sukarno's Old Order (*Orde Lama*) to Suharto's New Order (*Orde Baru*) took place mid-decade, after the military coup and subsequent killing of 500,000 to a million people beginning on October 1, 1965. Knowledge about cultural history of the period has been buried, particularly in Indonesia, due to the Suharto government's effort to erase the PKI and the Left from the historical record. Recent scholarship has begun to investigate the cultural history of Indonesia 1950–65, particularly in terms of literature (Foulcher 1986; Day and Liem 2010; Lindsay and Liem 2012). However, studies of popular culture, especially popular music, remain unexplored (Lindsay 2012:18).

During the late 1950s, the anti-imperialist regime of Indonesia's first president Sukarno denounced the allegedly harmful influence of American and European commercial culture (Frederick 1982; Hatch 1985; Sen and Hill 2000).<sup>8</sup> Sukarno viewed American and British music as symbolic and material markers of colonialism, imperialism, and capitalism. During a speech in 1959, Sukarno criticized the grating sound of American popular music, using the non-literal sounds *ngak-ngik-ngok* to characterize its noisy clatter (Setiyono 2001). As a result, popular music bands with English-sounding names were compelled to switch to Indonesian ones to disarticulate the influence of American music. In a speech in 1965, Sukarno declared that 'Beatle-ism' was a mental disease and that he had ordered the police to cut the hair off anyone found listening to the Beatles (Farram 2007). Sukarno even imprisoned members of the American and British-influenced pop music band Koes Bersaudara (Koes Brothers) for 100 days in 1965 (Piper and Jabo 1987:11).<sup>9</sup> Largely due to the banning and jailing of Koes Bersaudara, historians of the period have focused on Sukarno's hostility to Western popular music (Lockard 1998; Sen and Hill 2000; Farram 2007).

Emphasizing the Old Order's hostility to Western pop tends to obscure the diverse activities of musicians, producers, recording companies, and fans of popular music. Indeed, Sukarno attempted to ban Western

<sup>8</sup> The Committee for Action to Boycott Imperialist Films from the USA (PAPFIAS) boycotted American films in 1964 (Biran 2001:226).

<sup>9</sup> As interesting and important as this case may be, I will not discuss Koes Bersaudara in this essay because I feel that their case has been covered amply in the literature on Indonesian popular music of the 1960s.

popular music recordings from entering Indonesia in the late 1950s and early 1960s. However, despite Sukarno's aversion to the sound of Western popular music, it still managed to cross geo-political borders. Although Western popular music was limited by government regulation on the national radio network RRI (Lindsay 1997:111), hundreds of illegal student-run radio stations in Jakarta broadcast prohibited recordings of American popular music (Sen 2003:578). Recording companies continued to produce American- and British-sounding popular music, following trends established in the early 1950s. In addition, songs inspired by popular music of India, the Middle East, and Latin America energized the repertoire of the many *orkes Melayu* groups in urban Indonesia (Frederick 1982; Takonai 1997 and 1998; Weintraub 2010). Sukarno himself encouraged producers, composers, and musicians to mix regional songs with Western musical elements (Piper and Jabo 1987:10). Despite claims that the early 1960s was one of the most repressive periods in Indonesian music history, complete with national government censure of recording, radio, and public performances, the music of this period was productive in shaping ideas about modernity along the axes of social class, gender and ethnicity.

*Orkes Melayu* and *pop Indonesia* constituted distinct genre categories in terms of song lyrics/themes, language(s) used, instrumentation, performance practices and occasions, and audience. In the following section, I will elaborate on these genre categories and describe how pop Melayu combined elements of *orkes Melayu* and *pop Indonesia*.

### *Orkes Melayu*

In 1960s Jakarta, *orkes Melayu* (O.M.) was an important genre term, but it actually describes several different kinds of ensembles, performance practices, and publics. At a very basic level, *orkes Melayu* was an ensemble of musical instruments (an 'orkes' or 'orchestra') used to accompany Malay-language songs. Songs were sung in a vocal style characterized by distinct kinds of ornaments (called *gamak* or *cengkok*) conventionally associated by musicians with the music of the Melayu ethnic group. Song forms included *pantun* verse structures as well as modern sectional forms (e.g., AABA).<sup>10</sup> The songs may have come from the geographic region considered the homeland of Melayu culture (in the southern Malay peninsula, Malacca, eastern Sumatra, and Riau), but they could also have been

<sup>10</sup> *Pantun* are made up of two couplets, generally structured into four lines with the rhyme scheme ABAB.



5.1. Pop Melayu album covers, c. 1975 (clockwise from top left): Favourite's Group, Pop Melayu, volume 1 (Remaco); Fantastique Group, Pop Melayu, volume 3 (Purnama); Favourite's Group, Pop Melayu, volume 2 (Remaco); Koes Plus, Pop Melayu, volume 2 (Remaco); Murry's Group, Pop Melayu (Remaco); The Ge & Ge, Pop Melayu, volume 1 (Remaco).

newly composed in a Melayu style in other parts of Indonesia including Jakarta. Either way, the repertoire, vocal style, and certain instruments in the ensemble signified a connection to Melayu ethnic identity or Malayness.

The instrumentation was not set. Recordings of *orkes Melayu* and photographs from the early 1960s reveal ensembles of Western instruments and two indigenous instruments, namely a small double-headed drum shaped like a 'capsule' (*gendang kapsul*) and bamboo flute (*suling* or *seruling*). The Western instruments could include accordion, violin, piano, vibraphone, acoustic guitar, string bass, woodwinds (flute, clarinet), brass (saxophone, trumpet), and percussion (maracas, in addition to the *gendang kapsul*). The historical and symbolic associations of the violin and accordion with Melayu music had been established earlier (Yampolsky 1996). *Orkes Melayu* bands could be heard on national radio programs, recordings, and in films. Although *orkes Melayu* has often been referred to as *kampungan* (regressive, backward, rural), it is hard to imagine these ensembles as such due to their centrality in mass media.<sup>11</sup>

Another kind of *orkes Melayu* was a pick-up group that performed in a variety of settings. *Orkes Melayu* was discursively coded as music of 'ordinary people' or 'masses' (*rakyat*). They were denigrated by elite youths as 'kampungan', country bumpkins, because they played an older kind of music. *Orkes Melayu* musicians and audiences themselves never thought of themselves as 'kampungan,' a term that expressed disdain. *Orkes Melayu* musicians in Jakarta viewed Melayu music with a certain amount of nostalgia, as expressed in the following quote by Zakaria in 1975:

Looking back for a moment, the birth of Melayu songs is like a step-child without a father. They were born on the side of the road, in ramshackle huts, next to railroad tracks, in food stalls, or in places where villagers hold celebrations, and even in lower class prostitution quarters. They danced to their heart's content as they joked around to their dying day. They enjoyed these kinds of songs because they are easy to remember, the language is simple, and they are nice to listen to. Besides these psychological factors, the song texts give voice to suffering, love, sex, etc. Those songs, which are indeed sentimental at heart, are very appropriate to the emotional states of their listeners.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>11</sup> See 'Elvi Sukaesih' (1972:18); 'Peta Bumi Musik' (1973:17); 'Panen Dangdut' 1975:48. A *kampung* refers to a neighbourhood that can be located in a village, town, or city. *Kampungan* connotes inferiority, lack of formal education, and a low position in a hierarchical ordering of social classes (Weintraub 2010; see also the next chapter by Emma Baulch).

<sup>12</sup> See Zakaria (1975), 'Sensasi Pop Melayu Ditahun 1975: "Begadang" yang jadi bintang', *Sonata* 53, as found in the private collection of Zakaria.

A comparison with pop music is instructive. *Orkes Melayu* bands had fewer resources than pop music bands. For example, they performed with only one microphone for the singer and one or two speakers for amplification. They were seen by elites as lagging behind pop music because they did not play electric instruments (guitar, bass, organ).

Their music was a hodgepodge and was viewed in a negative light by elites as impure or hybrid. Since the early 1950s, Indonesian composers had been copying Indian melodies from film songs and composing new lyrics in Indonesian. They played dance music with a wide range of accompanying rhythms derived from Western music (which included Cuban-derived rhythms), Indian, Middle Eastern (*padang pasir*), and Melayu (Indonesian/Malay) music (Zakaria, pers. com., 2005). On the one hand, the repertoire for *Orkes Melayu* was old and conservative. On the other hand, the repertoire was vast and cosmopolitan and included Indian, Middle Eastern, Latin, and European songs. It did not look to the past or the present; it looked in many directions at once.

### *Pop Indonesia*

The nascent genre of *pop Indonesia* referred to music whose repertoire, song forms, arrangements, and instrumentation were rooted in American and British popular music. Also called *band* or *band remaja* (youth band), *pop Indonesia* was geared primarily to an emerging middle- and upper-class youth culture ('the middle classes and up'). Pop Indonesia bands often played indoors in buildings (*gedung*), and earned the epithet *gedongan* (from *gedungan*) which implied class distinction and 'progressive' attitudes. Composer and musician Guruh Soekarnoputra, the son of Indonesia's first president Sukarno, stated that the term *gedongan* and *kampungan* stemmed from identification with class distinction:

Pop Music in the past came to our country via 'privileged youngsters' whose parents had bought records from outside the country. They played these records at home and their friends heard them. Then they bought 'band' instruments and played them at their parties. Eventually the music got on the radio stations run by those youngsters. At that point youngsters outside [privileged residential districts] of Menteng and Kebayoran heard them. They began to think that this music was cool, and if someone was not familiar with that music, they would be considered a 'country bumpkin' (Soekarnoputra 1977:48).<sup>13</sup>

<sup>13</sup> 'Musik pop dahulunya masuk ke negeri kita lewat 'anak-anak gedongan' yang orangtuanya bisa membeli piringan hitam di luar negeri. Lalu diputar di rumah, dan

*Pop Indonesia* was modeled on Euro-American mainstream popular music including pop, rock, and jazz. *Pop Indonesia* songs were accompanied almost exclusively by Western instruments (primarily guitar, bass, drums, and keyboard). Bands had a microphone for each person and multiple speakers. The language of *pop Indonesia* songs was Indonesian and English. It often incorporated vocal harmonies, in contrast to *orkes Melayu*, which generally consisted of a solo vocal part accompanied by instruments. Themes centred on romantic love. Musicians were often trained to read scores. They had financial backing that allowed them to purchase fine-quality instruments (*Dunia Ellya Khadam* 1972:36).

Private radio played a large role in disseminating new forms of popular music during the New Order. During the Old Order, the national radio network RRI, as part of the Ministry of Information, had sole authority for broadcasting (Lindsay 1997:11).<sup>14</sup> Private radio stations (*radio amatir*), suppressed during the Old Order, came back as part of the student movement of 1966 (Lindsay 1997:11). During the late 1960s, especially in Jakarta and Bandung, competing radio stations battled for airwave frequencies (Lindsay 1997:11). Private commercial radio stations flourished in the early New Order period (early 1970s), and they set themselves apart, respectively, by playing different kinds of music from each other.

In the late 1960s, production of popular music recordings increased. The Soeharto regime encouraged capital expansion in all sectors of the economy. Recording companies looked for ways to expand the market for products. Distinct markets existed for pop and Melayu in terms of recordings, concerts, and audiences, and both were successful. New fusion genres formed out of old ones. In the following section I will describe the efforts of the musician, composer, and bandleader Zakaria (1936–2010) who in the early 1960s began composing songs that blended pop with Melayu music.

### *Becoming Melayu: The Work of Zakaria*

Zakaria was born in 1936 in the area of Paseban in East Jakarta. He sang Melayu songs as a child growing up and cited the songs of the Malaysian singer and film star P. Ramlee as an important influence (pers. comm,

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kawan-kawannya mendengarkan. Kemudian mereka beli alat-alat band, bikin pesta dan main di sana. Akhirnya masuk ke pemancar-pemancar radio yang dibikin anak-anak muda. Mulailah anak-anak luar Menteng dan Kebayoran mengenalnya. Lantas timbul anggapan bahwa inilah musik keren, dan kalau tidak kenal sama musik demikian, bakal tetap jadi ‘orang kampung’.

<sup>14</sup> Amateur HAM radio operators existed and even had their own association; this type of operation was called *amatir radio* (which was different from *radio amatir*).

2005). Zakaria was self-taught as a musician (guitar) and was a talented singer. In 1956, he began singing with several *orkes Melayu* bands including Orkes Sri Murni (led by M. Masyhur) and Orkes Cobra (led by Achmad B.). He joined Said Effendi's Orkes Irama Agung as a percussionist in 1957, and began composing shortly thereafter.

In 1962, he formed a group called Pancaran Muda ('The Image of Youth,' also called *Orkes Melayu Pancaran Muda* and *Orkes Pancaran Muda*). The band had a modern sound. With support from Jakarta's popular entertainer Bing Slamet, Zakaria learned how to arrange music for an orchestra. He also worked on songs and new arrangements with pop and jazz pianist Syafii Glimboh, as well as violinist Idris Sardi. Zakaria's songs combined elements of both genres. For example, in the song *Luciana*, the refrain ('Luciana') was composed in a pop style whereas the verse was Melayu (Zakaria, pers. comm., 2005).<sup>15</sup>

In 1964, Zakaria produced the first commercially released songs by Elvy Sukaesih, a young 13-year-old singer who would later earn the moniker 'the queen of dangdut' (*ratu dangdut*). Elvy Sukaesih could sing both Melayu music and pop music and the songs on her first album were accompanied by a group made up of *orkes Melayu* musicians and pop (band) musicians. The session took place at the Remaco recording studio on December 19, 1964 and the record was released in January, 1965. The session included the following songs:

*Rahasia sukma* (Secrets of the soul, composer Ilin Sumantri, singer Elvy Sukaesih)

*Tjurahan hati* (From the heart, composer M. Harris, singer Elvy Sukaesih)

*Mustika* (Beautiful jewel, composer Ilin Sumantri, singer Kartini Rosadi)

*Pelita hati* (Light of my heart, composer Ilin Sumantri, singer Achmad Basahil)

*Suswati* (referring to a name of a person, composer Sjafie Glimboh, singer Hartono)

*Djoget gaja asli* (Joget [a dance] in the old style, composer Zakaraia, singer Kartini Rosadi)

*Hari raya* (Holiday, composer Zakaria, singers Achmad Basahil and friends)

*Heryansjah* (name of a person, composer Zakaria, singer Zakaria)

Zakaria's Pancaran Muda did not emphasize the Indian-derived sound of *orkes Melayu*, which was discouraged in 1964 as the central government was trying to divert attention from Indian culture and refocus it on Indonesia. The Sukarno government, which had vigorously encouraged Indian film imports during the late 1950s and early 1960s, changed course

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<sup>15</sup> From the album *Antosan* featuring Lilis Surjani accompanied by Orkes Idris Sardi, Bali Record RLL-002, released in 1965–66.

by ceasing to allow imports during 1964–1966. As Indonesia became more isolated politically, songs with an Indian flavor (*berbau India*) were discouraged from being played on the radio (*Barakuan* 1964: 21; ‘O.M. Chandralela’ 1964:21; ‘Dangdut, sebuah flashback’ 1983:15). The Indian-derived songs of *orkes Melayu*, some of them direct copies from popular Indian films, were the targets of these efforts.

Zakaria mixed what he describes as ‘Melayu-India’ songs with Indonesian ones. In a description of his music taken from the album cover of *Rohana* released in 1967–68, Zakaria is quoted as follows:<sup>16</sup>

The song style that I present on my recordings is a mixture between music of Melayu-India and [pop] Indonesia itself. Since I do not copy a particular foreign song and then give it an Indonesian text, the songs will not sound like songs whose melodies and rhythms simply copy Indian songs.<sup>17</sup>

There was a vacuum in popular music recording after the military coup and subsequent regime change from Sukarno’s ‘Old Order’ to Suharto’s ‘New Order’ in 1966–1967.<sup>18</sup> Deregulation of film imports, which began on 3 October 1966 (Said 1991:78), enabled greater access to foreign film music. Zakaria promoted singer Lilis Suryani as a competitor to singer Ellya Khadam, the top *orkes Melayu* singer of the era known for her Indian-inspired songs *Termenung* (Daydreaming, c. 1960), *Boneka dari India* (A doll from India, 1962–63), and *Kau pergi tanpa pesan* (You left without a word, 1967); the latter was considered a ‘comeback’ for Melayu music à la India.<sup>19</sup> Previously criticized by Sukarno as a symbol of imperialism and capitalism, American popular music was encouraged under the new president Suharto. Recordings of American-influenced pop Indonesia boomed in the late 1960s.

Zakaria was a savvy promoter of his band Pancaran Muda. Descriptions of Zakaria in popular print media depict him as a musical soldier for the nation. For example, ‘he had a face that looked like a soldier’;<sup>20</sup> another

<sup>16</sup> Liner notes written by Jul Chadir on the back cover of the album *Rohana* featuring Elvy Sukaesih accompanied by Orkes Melaju Pantjara Muda, directed by Zakaria (Remaco RL-050), c. 1967–68.

<sup>17</sup> Tjorak lagu2 jang saja hidangkan dalam rekaman2 saja, ialah tjampuran antara lagu Melaju-India dan Indonesia sendiri. Djadi saja tidak menjelplak sesuatu lagu luar untuk kemudian diberikan teks Indonesia, oleh karena itu dalam lagu2 ini tidak akan terdengar lagu2 jang nada dan iramanja menjelplak lagu2 India thok.

<sup>18</sup> From 1961 to 1963, Irama produced as many as 30,000 discs per month, but by the end of 1966 only pressed about 1000–2000 per month (and only sold about 500 per month) (MYK 1967). A similar gap is evident in Lokananta’s production of *hiburan* music (Yampolsky 1987:119–20).

<sup>19</sup> From the album *Pengertian* featuring singer Ellya M. Harris accompanied by Orkes Melaju Chandralela, directed by Husein Bawafie (Remaco RLL-011), c. 1967.

<sup>20</sup> *Tokoh Wadjar*, 19 December 1965, as found in the private collection of Zakaria.

journalist referred to him as a ‘general’ of the band Pancaran Muda (*ber-tindak sebagai panglima perangnya*). His work was characterized as ‘revolutionary art’ (*seni untuk revolusi*) because it supported ‘the motherland that must be defended to the death’ (*ibu pertiwi yang harus dipertahankan mati-matian*).<sup>21</sup>

In the late 1960s, Melayu-inflected songs accompanied by pop bands ascended in popularity. Successful songs in this vein included *Boleh-boleh* (It's allowed) sung by Titik Sandhora and accompanied by Zaenal Combo (1968); *Wajah menggoda* (Seductive face) sung by Lili Suryani (Remaco RLL-018, 1968), and *Tiada tjerita gembira* (Not a happy tale) sung by Muchsin Alatas (Remaco RL-050, 1968).

After seeing positive sales figures from these and other songs, the Remaco recording company hired Zakaria as a producer, composer, arranger, and talent scout. Zakaria was instructed to create Melayu songs for a stable of pop singers:

Mr. Yanwar, the director of my section, told me that every singer who recorded at Remaco had to have a Melayu-type song on each record. It was a good opportunity for me [a composer of Melayu songs] that fans and pop singers liked Melayu songs. Subsequently, pop Indonesia bands like Bimbo, Koes Plus, Eka Jaya Combo, and Empat Nada recorded pop Melayu songs. (Zakaria, pers. comm., 2005)

Zakaria taught pop singers Mus Mulyadi, Lili Suryani, Wiwiek Abidin, and Titiek Puspa, among others, how to sing vocal ornaments typical of Melayu music (Zakaria, pers. comm., 2005). They were trained to sing in a more strident timbre than used in pop. Zakaria taught them to sing without too much vibrato, a hallmark of pop music.<sup>22</sup> According to the composer, singer, and journalist Yessy Wenas, singers of Melayu songs had to be able to produce rich tonal variations, triplets, portamenti, punchy (staccato) tones, partial wailing, and shrill sounds. (Yessy Wenas, pers. comm., 2012).<sup>23</sup> He noted:

The singer Wiwiek Abidin felt stiff and encountered many problems when she began learning the ornaments of Melayu songs. But after a while she

<sup>21</sup> *Mingguan Wadjar*, 19 December 1965, as found in the private collection of Zakaria.

<sup>22</sup> (Rh)Oma Irama, who had achieved success as a pop singer before becoming a star of contemporary Melayu music (dangdut), honed the Melayu vocal style by working with Orkes Melayu Chandalela bandleader Awab Haris who remarked: ‘He was often told not to sing with too much vibrato. Because dangdut is different from pop.’ (Ia sering diberitahu agar tidak terlalu banyak menggunakan vibra (getaran). Pasalnya, bernyanyi lagu dangdut berbeda dengan pop’ (Tamala 2000, no page numbers available).

<sup>23</sup> Penyanyi lagu Melayu harus punya teknik intonasi yang kaya variasi, not triol satu ketuk tiga nada, nada mengayun, menyentak, setengah merata, melengking.

figured out how to sing in the style of Melayu songs *in her own distinct way*. Wiwiek commented that singing Melayu songs is easy to hear but difficult to follow because there are so many ornaments and there are almost no breaks [in vocal phrases]. She said that there are no definite rules, and only the composer of the song knows [the parameters of the composition]. (*Lagu2 ‘dang dut’ mulai di senangi banyak orang*, c. 1974).<sup>24</sup>

Yessy Wenas's commentary noted that Suryani had figured out how to sing in a Melayu style (albeit in her own way). Despite not knowing the parameters of the style, she was able to recreate a style of singing that was convincingly Melayu-sounding. The composer Zakaria had his own definition that stressed the compromise or in-betweenness of *pop Melayu*. It was not 'either/or' but 'both/and.' Zakaria defined pop Melayu simply as 'When a pop singer sings a Melayu song in a pop vocal style accompanied by a pop music band' (Zakaria, pers. comm., 2005). They may have inserted an ornament here and there, but the vocal style emphasized pop rather than Melayu.

### *Musical Style of Pop Melayu*

In the following section I will examine two songs that merged pop and Melayu, focusing on texts and musical characteristics.

*Djangan duduk di depan pintu* (Don't sit in front of the door), c. 1970, exemplifies the Melayu modernity of pop Melayu. The song is from the album entitled *Kepantai Florida* ([Let's go] to the beach in Florida, Mutiara Records MLL 025). The cover of the album shows a photograph of Zakaria and female singer Ida Rojani dressed in casual beach attire sitting on a rock (Fig. 5.2). The photograph is pasted against a background that looks more like the coast of Java than the southern gulf of the United States. 'Florida' was not a place that ordinary people would actually go for a vacation, but it was a sign of escape and play. In *Djangan duduk di depan pintu* sonic markers of Melayu music include the percussion parts played on a *gendang kapsul* (a small double-headed drum shaped like a 'capsule') and tambourine.<sup>25</sup> Markers of modern music include piano, vibraphone, and electric instruments (bass).

<sup>24</sup> Penyanyi Wiwiek Abidin ... merasa canggung dan menemui banyak kesulitan ketika baru mulai mengenal lekukan2 (intonasi) lagu2 melayu. Tapi lama kelamaan dia temukan juga gayaz lagu melayu yang tersendiri ciri kasnya itu...Wiwiek memberikan komentar bahwa menyanyi lagu melayu adalah gampang di dengar tapi susah di ikuti, karena lekukan2 lagu melayu banyak sekali belok2nya dimana batas lekukan2 itu hampir tidak ada, katakanlah tidak ada patokan yang pasti, hanya pengarang lagunya saja yang tau'. See Wenas, J. (date unavailable, c. 1974), 'Lagu2 “dang dut” mulai di senangi banyak orang', as found in the private collection of Zakaria.

<sup>25</sup> Other key markers of *Melayu* music are accordion and violin, which appear in other examples (see below).

In her pop music recordings, the singer Lilis Suryani often used a smooth and syrupy vocal quality that was similar to her American counterparts. In this example, however, Lilis Suryani sings with a strident tone. Unlike Melayu singers, who inserted characteristic ornaments toward the ends of phrases, this vocal style is largely unornamented.

Despite the American influences in instrumentation and vocal timbre, the two singers engage in a dialogue common in *pantun*-structured Melayu music. They express themselves in the style of the Indonesian language spoken in Jakarta.

Example 1: *Djangan duduk di depan pintu*

Album *Kepantai Florida*; Mutiara Records MLL 025 (side 1: ML 12247), c. 1970

Composed by Zakaria

Sung by Zakaria and Ida Rojani

F=father

D=daughter

F: *Jangan suka duduk di depan pintu*  
*Coba ayu dengar babeh bilangin*  
*Nanti jadi lama dipungut mantu*  
*Sampe kapan bisa babeh ngawinin.*

D: *Emang babeh paling sih bisa aje*  
*Aye dengernya ih jadi malu*  
*Kapan aye masih mau sekolah*  
*Soal gituan tuh sih entar dulu.*

F: *Bagus, biar denger kateye.*

F: *Anak perempuan gak usah merih (?)*  
*Pokok asal bisa nulis dan bace*  
*Biar sekolahnya di kelas tinggi*  
*Ahirnye kerjenye di dapur juga.*

D: *Babej jangan bilang sembarang bilang*  
*Perempuan sekarang haruslah maju*  
*Kalau aye dapat ke kedokteran*  
*Bisalah ngurusin anak dan cucu.*

F: *Bagus bagus babeh demen dech.*

[repeat previous verse]

F: *Bagus tuh baru namanye anak*  
*babej huh-uh.*

F: Don't sit in front of the door  
 Listen to your father's words  
 It'll be a long time before marriage  
 When will I be able to marry you off?

D: You're good at talking  
 Hearing you makes me embarrassed  
 Because I want to go to school  
 And other things [i.e. marriage] have  
 to wait.

F: Good, but listen to me.

F: A young girl does not need to be smart  
 As long as she can write and read  
 Even if she achieves a good education  
 In the end she still works in the  
 kitchen.

D: Father don't say that  
 Girls nowadays have to move forward  
 If I can become a doctor  
 I can take care of children and  
 grandkids.

F: Good, good, Father likes that.

[repeat previous verse]

F: Good, now that's my girl.



5.2. Album cover *Kepantai Florida* ([‘Let’s go) to the beach in Florida’), Mutiara Records MLL 025, c. 1970, featuring Orkes Melayu Pancaran Muda, directed by Zakaria.

*Djangan duduk di depan pintu* is a saying that literally means ‘don’t sit in front of the door’ (because you will block the path of those going in and out). Symbolically, ‘sitting in front of the door’ stands for being too aggressive. ‘Don’t sit in front of the door’ is a warning for young girls: ‘you’ll never get married if you’re too aggressive.’

Yet, the young daughter in this example resists her father’s advice, and insists on ‘sitting in front of the door.’ She asserts her will to finish school so that she can become a doctor and take care of everyone in the village. This exchange between a father and daughter translates intergenerational conflict and the changing role of women into song. This kind of conflict, and the striving of women for equality, goes back to the colonial period, but had a different intensity in the context of the late 1960s and early 1970s. On the one hand, women were cast as wives and mothers as part of the gendered ideology of the Old Order. On the other hand,

with increasing industrialization during the late 1960s, women became increasingly important actors in the workforce (Robinson 2009:90). In this song, the public transformation of gendered identities has become a private family matter, discursively transcoded for a public audience in popular song. The daughter rejects male patriarchy, which circumscribes a woman's role as housewife and mother. Eventually the father comes around to the daughter's point of view, signifying acceptance of the woman's desire. From an old patriarchal saying about sitting in doorways, to a new articulation of women, education, and work, this short upbeat song transcodes the social transformation of gendered and generational identities.

The vocal style of the music contributes to the narrative meaning of this song. The first voice one hears in the song is the father, who sings 'don't sit in front of the door.' His daughter respectfully challenges him in a somewhat *malu* manner (shy, reticent, reserved). She articulates her refusal in a relaxed manner, somewhat behind the beat, stretching her words over the main beat. The woman's voice seems to get louder and more strident with each successive verse, as the male voice recedes into the background. By the second verse her words fall clearly on the beat and she is emphasizing her words with more vibrato. By the end of the song, the father sounds like an acquiescent old man, shuffling away in the background. He has shifted his point of view completely, expressing pride in his daughter's progressive attitude.

In *Bila suami kerja* (While husband is at work), c. 1975, the accompaniment of *gendang*, mandolin, and accordion indexes Melayu music of the period. Electric guitar and bass and piano, and especially the unornamented vocal line, articulate a modern sound.

In this fascinating example, a man visits a woman's home and asks if her husband is there. After learning that her husband has gone to work, he prepares to leave. However, she opens the door and invites him in for a drink. After establishing that she is interested in having an affair, he invites her to a beautiful place to spend a long afternoon together (and maybe an evening).

Example 2: *Bila suami kerja*

Album *Sallama*; Indra Records AKL 102 (side 1: TMS 102A), c. 1975

Composed by Zakaria

Sung by Mus Mulyadi and Rifa Hadidjah

m=male

f=female

- m: *Maaf ganggu nyonya.*  
f: [?]
- m: *Apa boleh abang numpang bertanya?*  
f: *Tentu boleh saja.*
- m: *Suami nonya ada?*  
f: *Kebetulan barulah pergi kerja.*
- f: *Memang ada urusan bang?*  
m: *Huh-uh ada. biase.*
- m: *Kalaulah begitu ku permisi nyonya.*
- m: *Biar lain waktu ku kembali nyonya.*
- f: *Tunggu dulu 'ah'-bang mau ke mana?*
- f: *Minum dulu tehnya.*  
m: *Ah, terima kasih nyonya.*  
f: *Jangan takut. Abang bebas bicara.*
- m: *Tapi bagaimana?*  
f: *Apakah maksudnya?*  
m: *Kalau suaminya datang tiba-tiba?*
- f: *Gampang itu soal kecil.*  
m: *Bukanrry gitu, Abang kan baru sekali ini.*
- m: *Nyonya ini hari tak ada acara.*
- m: *Baik kita pergi ke mana kau suka.*  
f: *terserahlah ku setuju saja.*
- m: *Kita bertamasya.*  
f: *Ke puncak yang indah.*  
m&f: *Di sanalah kita berkasih mesra.*
- la-la-la-la-la-la*
- f: *Mus Mus, kita pulang yo! ayo udah sore nih!*
- m: *Ah tanggung. Abang kan masih kangen. Kita pulang pagi aja ya?!*
- m: Excuse me, Ma'am  
f: [?]  
m: May I ask you something?  
f: Of course you may.  
m: Is your husband home?  
f: Actually, he just left for work.
- f: Is there something you need brother?  
m: Yeah, the usual.
- m: Well, I'd better be on my way,  
Ma'am.
- m: I'll come back some other time,  
Ma'am.
- f: Wait a second, where are you going?
- f: Have some tea first.  
m: Oh, thank you miss.  
f: Don't be afraid. say what's on your mind.
- m: But how can I?  
f: What do you mean?  
m: What if your husband comes home?
- f: Don't worry about that.
- m: But this is my first time here.
- m: Ma'am, I don't have any plans today.
- m: Let's go to a place you like.  
f: It's up to you, let's go.
- m: Let's go somewhere.  
f: To a beautiful place.  
m &f: where we can make love.
- [later...]
- f: Mus Mus, let's go home! It's late afternoon already.  
m: Ah, hold on. I'm still longing for you. Let's go home tomorrow morning, ok?

The freedom and directness of the lyrics are striking. Extramarital affairs were part of everyday life, but were rarely discussed in public. This

example translates female agency and desire into song (specifically on the word *abang* (lit. 'older brother' or form of address by wife to husband) which the singer turns into the sexual *ah-bang*). It is noteworthy that the married woman initiates the affair, while the man is hesitant and coy. In a reversal of conventional male-female roles, in which men speak in public and women are silent, it is the woman who states 'don't be afraid to speak your mind!'

The song invites multiple and conflicted readings. In one reading, the song turns male-female relations upside down, and places the modern woman in the position of actor rather than passive receiver. This reading celebrates female sexuality and power. However, we must consider these characters within the moral framework of this tale. In another reading, she is assumed to be the one responsible for the potential breakup of the family. This woman is not only 'acting,' but 'overacting,' a code word for vulgarity and backwardness. Not only is the woman having an extramarital affair, she is doing it when her husband is at work! In this way, the song articulates with both modern and progressive roles of woman as agential, while also serving as a morality tale about what can happen when women are let loose and 'not afraid to speak their mind!' The song thus becomes a sign for struggles over the meaning of changing male-female relations, morality, and sexuality in modern New Order Indonesia. These struggles would continue to be played out in dangdut, a contemporary form of Melayu music that also grew out of *orkes Melayu*.

The bridging of pop with Melayu as a commercial genre had important implications for the future of pop music in Indonesia. By 1975, most of the top national singers and groups had recorded pop Melayu songs. Pop Melayu invigorated the careers of Jakarta-based pop Indonesia bands Koes Plus, Panbers, Mercy's, and D'Lloyd. These groups produced their own form of upscale Melayu music characterized as *Melayu Mentengan* after the expensive residential area Menteng in central Jakarta where youth from privileged families lived ('Panen Dangdut' 1975:45).

Why, as stated in a 1975 *Tempo* magazine article, did the 'aristocrats' (*priyayi*) in the music industry begin 'lowering themselves' (*turun ke bawah*) to sing Melayu music? According to the article, market forces had compelled producers and pop singers to go along with the Melayu trend, sometimes begrudgingly (as in the case of pop singers Titiek Puspa and Mus Mualim). When asked why producers followed the trends of the industry, Ferry Iroth, a producer at the Remaco record company, stated simply, 'We sell products' [and Melayu sells] ('Panen Dangdut' 1975:3). Pop

singer Mus Mualim noted that ‘pop music has an unstable (wandering) quality that always wants to find something new’ (*Panen Dangdut* 1975:47). For the pop audience, Melayu music was perceived as something different, trendy, and therefore marketable.

During the early 1970s, pop producers and musicians were competing with dangdut, a form of contemporary Melayu music with roots in *orkes Melayu*. The popularity of dangdut was a major factor that pushed pop singers and bands to adopt Melayu songs, song forms, and vocal style. Singers who had been trained in *orkes Melayu*, including Rhoma Irama, A. Rafiq, Elvy Sukaesih, and Mansyur S., were familiar with both Western pop and Melayu music. As dangdut’s popularity soared in the mid-1970s, pop Melayu was gradually pushed aside.

### *Conclusion*

In the mid-1960s, *pop Melayu* (Melayu pop) combined some of the most progressive (pop) with some of the most conservative (Melayu) music (as well as tinges of Indian film music and Middle Eastern popular music). Melayu stood for music with a strong connection to tradition, a basis in Middle Eastern and Indian music, a link to Malaysia and other Malays, and a community of Muslims. On the other hand, pop Indonesia looked toward the future, was strongly influenced by American pop music, was not considered to have ethnic associations, and was non-religious in nature (although some singers were Christian and some were Muslim). Slipping around this binary and reductionist model of past/future, East/West, and traditional/modern, pop Melayu composers and musicians wove the past (old) into the present (new).

In contrast to static and essentialized colonial definitions of culture, ‘Melayu’ can more productively be understood using postcolonial theory as hybrid, liminal, and ambivalent. This ‘third space’ sensibility is demonstrated clearly in the genre *pop Melayu*. I used the term ‘ethno-modernity’ to describe how pop Melayu participated in new ways of seeing oneself as both modern and Malay (‘Melayu’).

In this chapter, I have examined pop Melayu from several different angles. As a form of commercial pop music, pop Melayu capitalized on the popularity of Melayu music to sell records. As a form of Melayu music, it did what Melayu had been doing for a long time: branching out, blending, appropriating, and complicating genre distinctions. Melayu songs composed, arranged, and performed in an American-influenced style were very much part of a Melayu sensibility in music.

Pop Melayu presented more than two alternatives: either the American-infused pop music of the future or the Malay-inspired music of the past. The new pop Melayu sound was 'cosmopolitan' and internationalist. By 'sounding' elsewhere, pop Melayu looked in many directions at once and presented ways of imaging a future for Indonesian audiences that built the past into the present.

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## CHAPTER SIX

### POP MELAYU VS. POP INDONESIA: NEW INTERPRETATIONS OF A GENRE INTO THE 2000S

Emma Baulch

#### *Introduction*

This chapter presents the rise to national fame of the pop Melayu band, Kangen Band, as an example of reclaiming of the derisive term *kampungan*. In it, I argue that this reclaiming represents an interesting case of genre manipulation, and consider what this can reveal about how Indonesian pop genres are constituted, what they ‘are’ and what they ‘do’. In so doing, I seek to rework existing scholarship relating to Indonesian pop genres and modernity, as well as interrogate some broader theories of genre.

In this essay, I extend the argument that Indonesian pop genres are not purely technical categories, they touch on myths of class and nation (Wallach 2008; Weintraub 2010; Yampolsky 1989). As we shall see, in the New Order period, pop music genres reached out to these myths by positioning themselves variously vis-à-vis the capital city, Jakarta. Such positioning, achieved through use of the terms *gedongan* (a term that strives to infer refinement by stressing the non-masses’ central position in the urban environment) and *kampungan* (a term that strives to enforce sub-alterns’ marginal position in relation to the metropolis, see also the previous contribution by Weintraub), continues to haunt the constitution of genre in the post-New Order period, but in novel ways. These novel ways, I argue, may be seen to result from industrial transformation and new systems of knowledge production.

#### *The Contentious Rise of Pop Melayu*

In the middle years of this decade, a group of youths from the provincial city, Lampung, in Southern Sumatera gathered together and began busking outside of their day jobs (as pushcart traders, construction workers), then staging more formal performances at music festivals in their home

town. By mid 2005, this group had named itself Kangen Band, and recorded a demo CD of original compositions by guitarist Dodhy. Over the course of the rest of the year, and due to orchestrations by band members as well as events beyond their control, Dodhy's compositions could be heard and bought in various strategic public spaces around Lampung: on the radio, on the bemo, in malls and in the form of compact discs arranged on plastic sheets spread by the roadside. By 2006, Kangen Band's popularity manifested in similar form on Java. From such airplay and roadside exchanges, Kangen Band members drew no financial reward. But, in contrast to the official condemnations of piracy, which paint this practice as undermining musicians' interests, Kangen Band members recall this time with great enthusiasm; it led to their well-documented rise to national prominence (Sujana, 2009).

In 2006, a former print journalist, Sujana, who had recently established an artist management company, Positive Art, discovered Kangen Band and invited its members to pioneer Positive Art's strategy for pop production. The band agreed to the remastering, repackaging and redistribution of its debut album that had so pervaded public spaces in Lampung and across Java the previous year; a venture shared, like subsequent Kangen Band productions, by Positive Art and the Indonesian branch of Warner Music.

Just as it had been in unofficial format,<sup>1</sup> when incorporated into publishing and distribution systems of a major recording label, Kangen Band also proved to be commercially successful. But once part of such official systems of musical reproduction, Kangen Band began to assume new form. No longer simply a sonic text (that is, one not accompanied by visual images of the performers), Kangen Band now began to appear on national television, a base requirement of official strategies for the promotion of pop music. It also became incorporated into a broader narrative, which allowed for its emplacement in certain national imaginings. On signing to Positive Art, Kangen Band became known as a pop Melayu band. The band's commercial success beneath the auspices of major label recording was, then, the event that gave rise to the re-employment of this term, Melayu, to describe an emerging pop genre.

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<sup>1</sup> I prefer the terms 'official' and 'unofficial' over 'legal' and 'pirated'. 'Pirated' implies theft, but members of Kangen Band (and Inul Daratista before them; see Heryanto 2008) did not take issue with the widespread reproduction and exchange of their performances at the level of the *emper-emperan*.

Subsequently, in Kangen Band's wake, all of the Jakarta-based major recording labels have begun to develop 'Melayu' repertoires, and a number of these 'pop Melayu' bands have also been commercially successful.

The virtue or otherwise of these pop Melayu boy bands' emergence on national stages was hotly debated in some circles. Kangen Band's appearance on television was much to the chagrin of a considerable number of critics, who found Kangen Band – specifically the chronically acned lead vocalist, Andhika – to be unsightly. Such alleged unsightliness was then heavily airbrushed out of the cover of their first album with Warner Music, a repackaged version of the album *Tentang aku, kau dan dia*, (On me, you and him) which had been so widely disseminated in unofficial format. However, although remastered, little musical manipulation took place. Warner's repackaged version of *Tentang aku, kau dan dia* sounds, in parts, blatantly under produced. Andhika's wavering, thin, wispy, and off key vocals were left as they were. According to Sujana, who discovered the band and manages it to date, producers were anxious not to miss the 'Kangen Band' moment by spending much time in studio engineering the sound. This again had critics in an uproar.

Furthermore, rather than distancing themselves from the image of provincial vulgarity associated with the term kampungan, in response to criticism, the band's publicity machine began to make much of its humble, marginal beginnings. In cinematic and literary form, narratives of the bands rags to riches story appear in chain bookstores and on television. Here is an inspirational story of the *wong cilik* (little people) battling against the odds. In 2007, for example, after Kangen Band signed to Warner Music, RCTI aired a film which recounted their rise to fame, entitled *Aku memang kampungan* (Proud to be a hick). In 2009, the band's manager published a book recounting its rise to fame and entitled *Rahasia Kangen Band: Kisah inspiratif anak band* (The secret of Kangen Band: The inspirational story of a pop band). The cover of the book depicts the band's journey away from the provincial kampung, towards the metropolis. Both productions implicate a reclaiming of the term kampungan, normally employed as a term of derision.

### *Genres*

In the English language academic literature, how Indonesian popular music relates to a positioning vis-à-vis the metropolis has been a compelling question for a lot of writers (Barendregt 2002; Baulch 2007a; Browne

2000; David 2003 and this volume; Frederick 1982; Gjelstad 2003 and this volume; Heins 1975; Heryanto 2008; Luvaas 2009a; Murray 1991; Pioquinto 1995; Piper and Jabo 1987; Wallach 2008; Weintraub 2010; Yampolsky 1989). In fact, how consumption and performance of musical aesthetics is connected to peoples' proximity or distance from a metropolitan core of cultural authority, truth and knowledge has been a primary theme of this literature. In it, a *kampungan-gedongan* dichotomy is quite often invoked. Some writers suggest that *kampungan-gedongan* are styles of performance and directly relate to social categories determined by wealth.<sup>2</sup> Others gloss *kampungan* and *gedongan* as 'genre ideologies' inferring unwieldy, yet coherent, articulations of space, capital, language and styles of performance (Wallach 2008:51–2). Others still show how *kampungan* is made up in the process of its mediation (Browne 2000; Wallach 2002; Weintraub 2006).

Broadly speaking, *kampungan-gedongan* are said to relate variously to certain Indonesian genres of popular music. This paper will refer to some of those genres, namely: Melayu music, ranging from *dangdut*, a hybrid form distinguished by consistent use of a Melayu vocal style, a *suling* (bamboo flute) and *gendang* (two-headed drum) (see also the contributions by David and Wallach to the present volume), to *pop Melayu*, distinguished through use of iconic elements of the Melayu vocal style, but otherwise using Western instrumentation; *pop Barat*, meaning popular songs in English sung by American or English bands, *pop* (and *rock*) *Indonesia*,<sup>3</sup> referring to songs usually sung in the national tongue but making use of a Western pop idiom.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>2</sup> 'The division between rich and poor extends to performance, with an evident dichotomy between the *gedongan* spectacular style typified by Guruh Soekarno Putra, and the *kampungan* style, used as a term to suggest crudeness and mindlessness and more recently taken up by *kampungan* performers themselves as a source of pride' (Murray 1991:3).

<sup>3</sup> My own simplified characterization serves the purpose of the current study. Yampolsky offers a more multi-faceted depiction: 'Pop Indonesia is one genre within the complex that an English speaker might call 'Indonesian popular music.' The larger category includes several other genres – among them Rock, Country, Jazz, *Kroncong*, *Dangdut*, *Qasidah*, and Hawaiian – that an Indonesian would differentiate from Pop Indonesia. (If he were thinking in musical terms, he would; sociologically it is possible to use 'Pop' as an umbrella term for Pop Indonesia, Rock, and Country)' Yampolsky (1989:2). In this chapter, *pop Indonesia* is used as in a sociological sense, and includes rock. See footnote below for an elaboration of how categories of Indonesian rock and pop have converged over time. For discussion of rock/pop as a continuous genre field, see Johan Fornas (1995).

<sup>4</sup> A number of writers have provided rich and varied illustrations of uses of *kampungan* to describe the performance and consumption of Melayu forms, and this usage hints at the *gedongan* nuances of *pop Barat* and *pop Indonesia* (Browne 2000; Murray 1991; Wallach 2008; Weintraub 2006) Philip Yampolsky's (1989) article, though, discusses derisive

A number of those who have written about Indonesian popular music contend that *pop Indonesia* is a *gedongan* form; that it enjoys a privileged relationship to the rhetoric of modernization Pembangunan espouses.<sup>5</sup> Some have pointed to how print media help maintain *pop Indonesia's* *gedongan*-ness by drawing and redrawing impassable lines distinguishing *pop Indonesia* from *dangdut*,<sup>6</sup> a sign of the *kampungan*, that state of modernity's lack.<sup>7</sup> Others show how the very *gedongan*-ness of *pop Indonesia*, and *dangdut's* attendant *kampungan* dimensions, are partly maintained through the spatiality of its public display (Heryanto 2008:27; Wallach 2002). Some have even suggested that practices associated with *pop Indonesia* domesticate the New Order vision of modernity.<sup>8</sup>

### *The New Order and pop Indonesia*

Indeed, the fact of *pop Indonesia*'s close ties with Soeharto's New Order as a regime of governance and as a cultural environment has only been of passing interest in English-language scholarship, but of quite central importance in Indonesian writing (Mulyadi 2009; Setiyono 2001; Sopian 2001). Such close ties can only be understood in the light of the prohibitions placed on the airing of 'Western' (I use inverted commas since similar prohibitions applied to cha cha cha and mambo) popular music in the national public space during the course of Guided Democracy (1959–65).

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descriptions of *pop Indonesia* songs as *cengeng* (sob stories) printed in the daily *Kompas*, and both Mulyadi and Solihun detail similar derisions of pop in the 1970s magazine devoted to rock, *Aktuil* (Mulyadi 2009; Solihun 2004).

<sup>5</sup> '[Pop Indonesia] represents urban life, in particular that of Jakarta, the centre of the Indonesian entertainment world .... It also represents middle-class youth – the world of clean-cut teenagers, forever frolicking about and pining away; and, by representing Jakarta and youth in a largely Western musical idiom and instrumentation, it offers one answer to the question of how to be modern' (Yampolsky 1989:9–10).

<sup>6</sup> Weintraub discusses how in a feature on *dangdut* in *Tempo* magazine, pop Indonesia performers and composers are cited as characterizing the *dangdut* vocal style as difficult and specialized (Weintraub 2006:415).

<sup>7</sup> The idea of the *kampungan* as a state of modernity's lack is inspired by Mark Hobart's (2006) discussion of print media assessments of the television consuming masses, in which he states: 'In every article I have read to date, *masyarakat* were people 'out there', on whom reason had a weak grip and who were prone to influence, emotion and recidivism. They were defined by lack' (Hobart 2006:403).

<sup>8</sup> '[T]he continuing conflict between dangdut and the more middle class oriented and westernised pop Indonesia, not to mention Western imported music itself, can be viewed as a battle between competing visions of modernity: the collectivist, egalitarian, national vision of the Sukarno era versus the individualist, status-obsessed developmentalism of Soeharto's New Order' (Wallach 2008:252–3).

In 1959, just as some young Indonesian people began to respond to the availability of Elvis Presley records, and to showings in Indonesia of the film *Rock Around the Clock*, and began to form into rock and roll bands, Soekarno delivered a speech in which he espoused the need to take steps to protect national culture from foreign influences. Initially, these steps comprised bannings of particular kinds of music on the national public radio, *Radio Republik Indonesia* (RRI). Further steps to protect the national culture were taken in 1963, when a Presidential Decision forbade any public airing of rock and roll, and in 1964, when police operations were undertaken in the provincial city of Bandung, with the aim of publicly burning Elvis records and 'disciplining' young men with shaggy, Beatles-style haircuts. At the same time, the rules of these prohibitions were neither clear cut nor consistently applied. Sometimes, musicians performing the forbidden styles appeared as guest stars at state sponsored live events, or as contestants in the national public radio song contest (Mulyadi 2009).

In separate writings, Mohamad Mulyadi and Agus Sopian detail the military's use of state-prohibited western style pop and rock music to interest people in its new regime of governance, beginning with the mass killings and arrests of 1965–6. Mulyadi recounts how 'ABRI staged a series of musical events called 'soldier stages' co-ordinated by an outfit called Body for Co-operation between Artists and the Army Strategic Command. The Body's strategy was to invite those artists who had been banned by Soekarno was part of an effort towards moral transformation' (Mulyadi 2009:20).

These soldier stages apparently caused some confusion about which sounds were sanctioned and which were outlawed, creating a kind of musical parallel to the political about-turn needed to suddenly outlaw a major political party, and set about killing and arresting its members and alleged sympathisers. In December 1965, a columnist for the Protestant newspaper *Sinar Harapan* wrote: 'Are we now allowed to play songs with a beat like rhythm, or songs that contain destructive musical elements?' (Mulyadi 2009:21; Sopian 2002).

From late 1965 through the early 1970s, live and telecast (on public television TVRI) musical events were used to associate the military uniform with pop music. The military uniform was ubiquitous on TVRI's music show, Cameria Ria since after 1965, senior military personnel established and played (dressed in their uniforms), or sponsored, Western pop bands. Popularization of the idea of the novelty of military rule, then, through 'forbidden' musical performance, was one of the first tasks of the to-be leaders – a task that well preceded the flow of foreign capital for infrastructural development.

Some of the currently existing, *pop Indonesia*-devoted recording labels were established in this environment, in the late-1960s.<sup>9</sup> Taking advantage of the regime's pro-West cultural proclivities, they devoted their efforts to re-recording *pop Barat* – albums by European and US artists – then sold them on the Indonesian market (Sopian 2002:26; Sakrie 2009:60–7). Due to the advent of cassette technology, the trade in Western pop became lucrative; more lucrative in fact than that of *pop Indonesia*, which included production costs. *Pop Barat* could simply be re-recorded; the production costs were borne elsewhere. Not until the 1980s did *pop Indonesia* become a more serious contender, commercially speaking, as those recording labels that had hitherto devoted their attention to re-recording Western pop recordings began to upgrade their interest in developing *pop Indonesia* repertoires.<sup>10</sup> As a result, new higher sales figures for *pop Indonesia* recordings were reached, although sales of *pop Barat* continued to exceed those of *pop Indonesia*.

#### *Re-Emergence and Derision of Melayu-Ness*

What troubles the link between aesthetic Westernisation and newness is the development of a new Melayu sound in the early 1970s. This sound, which subsequently became known as dangdut, came to be exchanged in very large volume throughout the 1970s, 80s, 90s. There are various views on how and why dangdut came to be understood as a Melayu form. According to Philip Yampolsky, dangdut was widely seen to evolve from a musical style that featured on scores for films made in Malaya (personal

<sup>9</sup> According to Wallach (2008:31) the establishment of *pop Indonesia* as a genre marked that of new hybrid performances upon the advent of rock and roll, first seen in performances by Koes Plus, Eddy Silatonga and Emilia Contessa, presumably prior to the fall of Guided Democracy. Citing Yampolsky, Wallach draws attention to the importance of *pop Indonesia*'s bossa nova and swing based predecessor, *hiburan*, in pioneering a certain kind of hybrid performance that was then taken up by *pop Indonesia*: '*Hiburan...* demonstrated that Indonesian performances and Indonesian languages could be incorporated into clearly a Western context. When *pop* emerged, demonstrating the same thing with greater energy, and linking its audience to the dream world of Western entertainment media, *hiburan* dried up and blew away' (Yampolsky in Wallach 2007:30–1).

<sup>10</sup> This interest followed pressure on the Indonesian government to prosecute these companies after Bob Geldof, an English musician, complained that pirate copies of Live Aid, a concert involving top UK and US artists to raise funds for famine victims, originated in Indonesia and were for sale on the European market. Consequently, locally reproduced and distributed Anglo-American albums were subjected to taxes, leading Indonesian recording executives to more seriously scout out *pop Indonesia* acts could conceivably be sold in recorded format to Indonesian consumers (Sopian 2002).

correspondence, 21 August, 2009), but Weintraub attributes dangdut's Melayu associations with Rhoma Irama's forceful role in narrating the genre's history, and insisting on strong links with aesthetic forms originating in Deli, North Sumatera (Weintraub 2010:33).<sup>11</sup>

Scholarship on *dangdut* is fabulously varied in its interpretations of the genre, and this may be due to the diverse range of contexts in which *dangdut* is practised, and its endurance beyond the New Order, forcing new political readings.<sup>12</sup> Once carved out as a genre, *dangdut* may well have opened space for performing despair or rough communalities in ways that flaunted transgression of prevailing notions of the refined, perceived as proximate to the modern. However, we should be careful not to focus our inquiries only on *dangdut's* appeal, thereby assuming the existence of 'the people' as *dangdut's* source.

'[T]he name 'dangdut' is actually an insulting term used by 'the haves' toward the music of the poor neighborhoods [where it originated]', explains Rhoma Irama in Weintraub's analytical piece on *dangdut's* representation in the print media. They ridiculed the sound of the drum, the dominant element in *Orkes Melayu* [one of *dangdut's* musical precursors]. Then we threw the insult right back via a song, which we named "Dangdut" (Weintraub 2006:414). According to Weintraub, the offending term originated in an article printed in the magazine devoted to rock, *Aktuil*.<sup>13</sup> Certainly, Irama's statements illustrates that the term was very quickly

<sup>11</sup> In Weintraub's book, the view of dangdut as strongly grounded in Melayu is not consensual. Weintraub (2010:34) quotes Elvi Sukaesih as refuting any stylistic similarities between Melayu music and dangdut.

<sup>12</sup> Some argue that dangdut articulates a collectivist, egalitarian vision of Indonesian modernity (Wallach 2008). Some say it offers a window onto the possibilities of stardom and celebrity enabled by the New Order (Frederick). Some say its sartorial flashiness and aggressiveness was attractive to an emasculated urban underclass (Murray 1991). Some attribute the genre's past popularity to its adaptability – the idea that dangdut can be 'about' just about anything and is therefore broadly accessible (Weintraub 2006), some to discursive tensions and contradictions within the genre that make it pleasurable to consume (David 2003), some to the repression of political Islam (Heryanto 2008), some to the fact that dangdut songs address 'real life' (Weintraub 2006). Some, however, say that dangdut lyrics are of little consequence because people do not listen to them (Pioquinto 1995; Browne 2000). Others argue that 'sad' dangdut lyrics are of great interest: 'sad' male vocalists present an image of emasculated manhood and 'sad' female vocalists voice female concerns and problems (David 2003 and this volume).

<sup>13</sup> Weintraub (2006:429) reports that in an interview, Silado claimed to have invented the term. But when Weintraub searched for the 1972 article in which the term dangdut was reportedly termed by Silado, he could not find it. But he includes in his article a quote from Rhoma Irama, the composer and performer widely credited with inventing dangdut. Irama does not name Aktuil but confirms that the term dangdut was first coined in a derivative article in the print media (Weintraub 2006:414).

excorporated, and this complicates the Melayu–Indonesia relation somewhat, a point Weintraub does not stress enough. In my view, Irama's response betrays his astute commoditisation of the poor, for neither he nor the musical sound he developed originated in poor neighbourhoods (Frederick 1982). This reading supports the statement above: the relationship between dangdut and the people is not necessarily one of source to expression.

According to Weintraub, as well as through Rhoma Irama's celebrations and commodifications of the *rakyat* ('the people'), another way in which dangdut's special relationship to the people was invoked was through derisive designations of its perceived *kampungan* character, mainly in the medium of print. A core argument of Weintraub's piece, and a point also touched upon (but less forcefully) by several other observers of Indonesian pop. As Browne (2000), Mulyadi (2009), and Solihun (2004) also attest, rehabilitations of Melayu–*kampungan* have very often taken place in print media. Incidentally, all these writers cite those publications that have been key to the heralding of an Indonesian middle class in the New Order period, such as *Tempo* (Weintraub 2006), *Jawa Pos* (Browne 2000) and the rock devoted magazine, *Aktuil* (Mulyadi 2009; Solihun 2004). Weintraub (2006:413) considers most directly the matter of Melayu–*kampungan* as part of addressing the middle class, and devotes his article to the question of 'what kind of story has been told through *dangdut* about the people in popular print media?'<sup>14</sup> He states (2006:417):

Dangdut became a social text for assigning all sorts of meanings – *kampungan* for example – through which elites could register their own class position... Dangdut fans, synonymous with the masses, were discursively produced in popular print media according to middle class and elite notions of the *rakyat* [the people] as explosive and uncontrolled.

Pop music criticism was not a particularly promising career choice in New Order Indonesia, but representations of the people in print media articles about music are relevant, and can be located in a broader context of a mythology of middle classness that grew in key publications, part of a new chapter in print capitalism on the advent of the New Order, which I do not have space to expand on here, but have discussed at length in a separate paper (Baulch 2010).

Suffice to say, the main point to be made here is that, rather than as a reflection of existing social entities, pop genre distinctions and their

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<sup>14</sup> Weintraub's use of the word 'popular' is confusing, because he cites *Tempo* extensively.

attendant *kampungan-gedongan* dimensions may be more usefully considered in a context in which print media have played a crucial role in endowing literate Indonesians with considerable cultural authority and, by extension, in building, and continuously reinforcing, a myth of a 'middle class', reading public as a truth bearing public. The devaluing of both dangdut and the *kampungan* that Weintraub discusses, that is, may be understood as integral to this evolving myth, which notably took place just as the rural masses were deprived of their political rights by the 'floating mass' doctrine,<sup>15</sup> outlawing political party activity below the level of subdistrict.

But we should not overstate the determining role of disdainful writings that draw genre distinctions. Certainly, *pop Indonesia* and *dangdut* are not equally positioned on a hierarchy of cultural status and prestige. They represent a relation of power, but this relation does not always already subjugate dangdut. Most of those writing about dangdut do indeed note, but only obliquely or in passing, the dialogic character of Melayu/*kampungan*; it is constituted in the process of to-ing and fro-ong between efforts to Other *kampungan* and efforts to commodify it, in the name of the masses. Certain meanings remain dominant, but cannot snuff out all alternatives. At the same time, the poor enjoy relatively little power to manipulate representations of their musical consumptions. They can only speak back to *kampungan*'s Othering through commodification of the *kampungan* in their name, such as that undertaken by Rhoma Irama, cited above. In this sense, we may consider that dangdut was partly constituted through a dialogic process of Othering and commodification. Indeed, there are other ways in which dangdut was constituted, as clear from the above review of scholarly literature on the genre. Nevertheless, I stress here the dialogue of Othering and commodification as it provides an apt comparison with the process of *pop Melayu*'s constitution. On the one hand, the Kangen Band success narrative mentioned above, commodifies the *kampungan*, and the urban-rural contrasts that emerge from it are continuous with 1970s films in which Rhoma Irama starred (Frederick 1982:115). On the other, in authoritative music criticism in the medium of print, contemporary *pop Melayu* is derided as a threat to the civilized

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<sup>15</sup> Anticipating the general elections of 1971 and in order to de-politicise Indonesian society, Suharto had introduced the 'floating mass' concept that banned all organised political activities at village level. Instead the central government was to carry out the will of the people.

metropolis, recalling denigrations of dangdut as discussed by Weintraub (2006), cited above.

In March 2009, for example, as part of its regular profiles on the music industry, the Indonesian licensee of *Rolling Stone* (hereon, *RSI*) magazine ran an article entitled 'Inilah musik Indonesia hari ini'. The article was excerpted from a transcript of a focus group discussion moderated by Wendi Putranto, and involving nine industry figures. The introduction to the discussion sets a certain tone; it is derisive of pop Melayu, musical uniformity, piracy, free live concerts and the widespread consumption of ring back tones (Putranto 2009:65):

Pop Melayu bands have suddenly attacked the capital and have suddenly become superstars, with their uniform music

The people are given no choice in the matter because the mass media fully supports Melayunization. [The indie band] Efek Rumah Kaca is one of the only bands to rise up in protest, with their [ironically titled] song 'Nothing but Love', which became a minor hit.

But most people don't seem to care and can't be bothered debating the issue. Most of the people enjoy buying pirate CDs or pirate MP3s, or picking out their 30-second ring back tone, enjoy celebrating or rioting at free concerts. Many of them feel that cheating on their lover qualifies them to write a song. Recently, these phenomena have begun to clearly manifest in our society.

The idea that *pop Melayu* bands are universally lacking in musical quality is something of a house position among staff writers at *RSI*. In my interviews with them, staff writers Ricky Siahaan and Hasief Ardiesyah separately iterated similar positions. When I asked him why *pop Melayu* bands whose compositions enjoyed healthy sales records rarely emerged in *RSI*, Ardiyah replied: 'None of us consider their music good.... [It's] a quality issue,' and Siahaan said:<sup>16</sup>

You can say that we have a high degree of idealism that holds us back from including those musics we think of as lacking in quality. We are careful to ensure that we only discuss certain kinds of music if we feel we can vouch for its quality. So, for instance ST12, Kangen Band, and so many, all those bands whose compositions sell so well as ring back tones. Because now the music industry is ruled by ring back tones. I mean, nobody buys CDs or cassettes any more. Everyone is downloading ring back tones. And that's where the industry makes its money, in ring back tones. Now, all those champions of the ring back tone, [Pop Melayu bands] ST 12, Kangen Band, Hijau Daun.... In our

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<sup>16</sup> Interview with Hasief Ardiyah, October 8 2009.

opinion we are now at the lowest peak of the music industry, quality-wise. And we are not going to give over to them a portion of our magazine, *RSI*.

These characterizations of *pop Melayu* are not, in and of themselves, particularly remarkable. It would be possible to argue that this mode of genre distinction draws on the elitist claims to musical authenticity that appear in rock, as discussed by Fornas (1995:99). They also resemble the moral panics, sparked by the specter of a dominant, ubiquitous, homogeneous, unrefined and mass mediated musical genres that have so often accompanied the rehabilitation of *kampungan-gedongan* in print media. In this sense, the *Rolling Stone* writers' derisions of *pop Melayu* resemble the derogatory characterisations of dangdut in *Tempo*, as analysed by Weintraub (2006). In terms of social meaning, *pop Melayu* in some respects resembles dangdut. But aesthetically, and in terms of the historical consciousness it evokes, *pop Melayu* is distinct from dangdut. Below, I discuss these similarities and differences by analysing four albums by the three top *pop Melayu* bands nationally at the time of writing: Kangen Band (*Tentang aku, kau dan dia* and *Bintang 14 hari*), Wali (*Cari jodoh*) and ST12 (*P.U.S.P.A.*).

### *Pop Melayu-Dangdut*

According to Lono Simatupang, Melayu is a *ritme* (rhythm). This *ritme* is achieved in Melayu Deli through use of the *rebana* and in *dangdut* through use of the *gendang*. But *ritme* rarely features in popular characterisations of what distinguishes contemporary *pop Melayu* from pop Indonesia. In my conversations with critics and performers, *cengkok* is a key term that defines contemporary *pop Melayu*, and this stresses vocal quality, not *ritme*. This distinguishing feature has more in common with Wallach's characterisation of dangdut (see his chapter to this volume). Wallach's research on to the process of recording dangdut revealed that 'the vocals play a... central, structuring role.... [A]ll the melodic, rhythmic and sonic features of a dangdut song ideally derive from a vocal melody that constitutes its most essential component' (Wallach 2008:99).

Many critics complain that *pop Melayu* lyrics are obsessed with sexual infidelity, its motivations and emotional effects, and add the term *mendayu-dayu* – a kind of moaning, evocative of despair – to contemporary *pop Melayu*'s defining features (Putranto 2009). *Mendayu-dayu* certainly emerges quite strongly in some *pop Melayu* lyrics, most particularly in the songs on Kangen Band's first album. In this sense, some

contemporary *pop Melayu* performances may well be likened to the performances of a particular kind of male sentimentality in the register of dangdut. Take, for example, A Rafiq's rendering with great conviction a song composed by Ellya Khadam, entitled *Kau Pergi Tiada Pesan*, some of the lyrics of which run thus: '*Kemanakah ah...akan kucari* (Where, ah... am I going to look) / *gelap terasa ah...dunia ini* (it is a dark world) / *bagai tiada matahari* (for those upon whom the sun doesn't shine) / *Kau pergi tanpa pesan* (you left without a notice) / *kunanti tiada datang* (I have waited, but you did not come) / *Dimana kau kini, Dimana kau kini* (where are you now) / *aku tiada berkawan lagi* (I have no friend left) / *aduh du du du du...*'.

Many critics of *pop Melayu* have referred to its uniformity, but I beg to differ. To my amateur ear, there are considerable musical and lyrical differences in the ways in which Melayu is rendered in Kangen Band's first album (*Tentang aku, kau dan dia*), Wali's *Cari jodoh* and ST 12's *P.U.S.P.A.* To be sure, there are some consistent elements in the repertoire. All of the songs attend to love relationships; almost none of them, with the exception of Kangen Band's *Anugerah* (*Engkau selalu setia walau aku tak punya*; 'you are always faithful, even while I don't owe a dime') mention economic hardship. None of the songs present the woman as properly servile or domesticated. But which iconic Melayu elements are used, how they are used, the positioning of the male singer in the love relationships sung about, the treatment of sex and of Islam, vary considerably across the repertoire.

When I first listened to it, exactly what musical elements of Kangen Band's first album allow it to be categorised among other performances of *pop Melayu* were quite confounding to me, and the reason for the absence of Melayu features will become clear below. Nowhere on any of the songs on this album are any of the iconic musical elements of Melayu foregrounded. By contrast, much of ST12's *P.U.S.P.A.* is strongly rock-accented, but overlaid with cengkok-style vocals on many of the songs. In this respect, Kangen Band's second album, *Bintang 14 Hari*, sounds quite like ST12's *P.U.S.P.A.* There is a greater effort to effect a *cengkok* like vocal, and a heavier rock sound. On *Cari Jodoh*, Wali's Melayu character comes through in many of the songs' *ritme*, in which the snare-cymbal-bass, in conversation with the bass guitar, is used to a gendang-like effect.<sup>17</sup> Lyrically speaking, the albums are also quite distinct from one another. Whilst Melayu musical elements are difficult to discern in Kangen's first album, its lyrical concerns recall very much David's insights into male

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<sup>17</sup> This *ritme* may be found in the songs *Cari jodoh*, *Kekasih halal*, *JODI* and *Yank*.

impotence in sad dangdut songs (see her chapter in this volume). That said, it is worth noting that I am hesitant to describe such sadness as David does, in terms of 'impotence' and 'emasculated'. It is highly possible that this sadness, which, following Weintraub (2006:418), I prefer to describe as despair and loneliness, evincing a sense of things being beyond reach, and beyond control, is actually meant as a valid dimension of masculinity, rather than something that undermines it.

Ten out of the twelve tracks on Kangen Band's first album give voice to the male vocalists' (Andhika) loneliness.<sup>18</sup> However, in the wave of commercially-produced *pop Melayu* to be signed to major Jakarta-based recording labels since Kangen Band stepped up onto the national stage in 2006, this sadness and despair never emerges again with such intensity. It is possible that the change in the politics of relationships lyrically evoked by Kangen Band stands as an instance of domestication, but it could just be that the circumstances of the lyricist, Dodhy, had changed.<sup>19</sup> What is clear is that on Kangen Band's second album, produced under Sujana's auspices, the male singer emerges as one much more in control of his relationships. This second album is more slickly produced, and more muscular, and a *cengkok* style has been stressed more strongly. Lyrically, speaking, the position of the man has changed. He only appears as a victim of bitter jealousy in *Yolanda*.<sup>20</sup> In two of the twelve songs on the album (*Jangan pernah berubah, Saat terakhir*), he is abandoned and the tears fall, but it is not clear whether another man is involved.

The image of the philandering woman does emerge in Wali's *Cari jodoh*, but not as overwhelmingly as in Kangen's first album.<sup>21</sup> *Cari jodoh*,

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<sup>18</sup> The image of the philandering woman emerges strongly; either the singer is trapped in a three-way relationship (*Penantian yang tertunda, Selingkuh, Tentang bintang, Tentang aku, kau dan dia*) or has been abandoned for another man (*Karma, Jika, Adakah jawabnya*). In two other songs, he waits helplessly for his lover to return from afar (*Menunggu, Petualangan cinta*).

<sup>19</sup> This requires further research – I am looking forward to listening out for differences between ST12's first album, *Jalan terbaik*, which was released independently as mentioned, and its most recent and first major label album, *P.U.S.P.A*.

<sup>20</sup> In the other songs, he confidently tackles head on relationship problems (*Doy*), declares his love intending to sweep her off her feet (*Kembali pulang, Cuma kamu*) asks forgiveness for wronging his lover (*Dengar dan rasakan, Bintang 14 hari, Dinda*), or saves fallen and wronged women (*Jangan menangis lagi, Yakinlah aku menjemputmu*). In this lyrical sense, too, Kangen Band's second album is more akin to ST12's *P.U.S.P.A*. As well as the muscular rock sound, the songs on this ST12 album present an image of empowered and sexually active manhood (*Putri iklan*) who engages in casual affairs (*Tak dapat apa apa, P.U.S.P.A*), and resists being ordered around by a woman (*Cari pacar lagi*).

<sup>21</sup> In *Cari Jodoh, Puaskah, JODI, Yank* and *Adinda*, the singer is abandoned, wronged or lonely, but only *Puaskah* and *Adinda* are mournful tunes.

is so upbeat it presents as a parody of that quest, and all its contradictions (*Pengumuman, pengumuman* (Anouncement, announcement) / *Siapa yang mau bantu tolong aku, kasihani Aku* (who would like to help me, care for me) / *Tolong carikan diriku kekasih hatiku* (please help me find my beloved) / *Siapa yang mau* (who wants to)?).

To the extent that it serves as a sign of the *kampungan* – sometimes reclaimed, sometimes derided, depending on whose interests are at stake – *pop Melayu* resembles dangdut. However, musically and lyrically speaking, contemporary *pop Melayu*'s links to dangdut are tenuous indeed. Nor does contemporary *pop Melayu* evoke an historical consciousness that links it to dangdut; *pop Melayu* performers do not imagine their music-making as part of a broader Melayu narrative that includes dangdut. This means that contemporary *pop Melayu* does not rely on dangdut to constitute itself, in the way that dangdut came to rely on Melayu Deli (Weintraub 2010). Contemporary *pop Melayu* betrays, then, Weintraub's characterization of genre's stylistic qualities and historical significance. He writes (2010:12):

The stylistic qualities and characteristics that constitute specific genres are important to analyze because they contain a unified set of texts, a vocabulary, and specific ways of speaking. Music genres represent historical continuity and stability, and mark common training, aesthetics, techniques, skills and performance practices.

On the contrary, contemporary *pop Melayu* seems devoid of historical gestures. None of the *pop Melayu* musicians I interviewed in 2010 mentioned male dangdut musicians as important sources of inspiration, and when pressed, seemed unaware of famous dangdut composers' place in popular musical history. ST 12 composer, Charly van Houtten likens his music to that of Peterpan and of Ary Lasso (Solihun 2010:34). Apoy, the composer for Wali, cites influences outside of *pop Indonesia*, but Melayu Deli is not among them. He recognises *lagu Minang* as influencing his art (Solihun 2010:30), and claims that vocalist Faank's skill at singing in the cengkok vocal style derives from the fact that he is *pandai mengaji*.

Further, there is no purely musical relation between *pop Melayu* and Kangen Band's first album; the event that gave rise to the re-employment of the term, *pop Melayu*. In its initial moments surrounding the production of the first album, the band made no attempt to use widely accepted musical markers of Melayu (such as a certain vocal style or rhythm) as a way of signalling a popular alternative to *pop Indonesia* (Interview, Andhika). In fact, Kangen Band did not understand their first album as a *pop Melayu*, but a pop Indonesia album, for the band started out covering

Sheila on Seven, Padi and Peterpan (Sujana 2009:31). It was only after signing to Positif Art and Warner Music that Kangen Band became categorised as a *pop Melayu* band.

When a *pop Indonesia* sound can be sold as *pop Melayu*, this suggests some degree of convergence and cross over quite at odds with the dangdut-pop Indonesia segregation mentioned above. Many observers have noted how *dangdut* and *pop Indonesia* have historically been segregated realms. In fact, aside from both being genres of popular music, there is very little that these genres share. According to Wallach, the idea that these two genres are distinct from one another manifests in the arrangement and pricing of cassettes at the point of sale. Dangdut cassettes are placed lower down, and are cheaper. Nor do they share recording studios, or even recording labels. When *pop Indonesian* musicians attempt to perform dangdut, they are often said to fail miserably (Weintraub 2006; Panen Dangdut 1975; Wallach 2008).<sup>22</sup>

This kind of segregation draws attention to the very material, spatial and naturalising dimensions of a taste hierarchy, a most striking example of which is the idea that pop singers are incapable of effecting the dangdut *cengkok* vocal style. The current wave of *pop Melayu* bands also occupies a lowly position, but it is not maintained in the same way. In many ways, *pop Melayu* is closer to *pop Indonesia*. The two genres now share producers, live and televised stages, and recording labels – some domestically owned and some transnational. *Pop Melayu* CDs sell for the same price as *pop Indonesia* CDs, and are not spatially segregated in stores. They share pop charts, which are generated from radio requests. *Pop Indonesia* bands even cover *pop Melayu* hit songs.

*Pop Melayu* indeed has a recent history of cross-fertilization with *pop Indonesia*, and for this reason it may not be surprising that the two genres now share national stages. *Pop Indonesia* bands Koes Plus, Mercy's, and DLloyd produced *pop Melayu* albums in the mid 1970s, inspired by dangdut's growing popularity. (According to a *Tempo* review of this mid-seventies wave of *pop Melayu*, such *pop Indonesia* bands opted for the Melayu Sumatera, as opposed to the Melayu *dangdut*, style but Frederick says that Koes Plus etc played the proto-dangdut style, Melayu-Deli, see also Weintraub's chapter in this book) But these productions were experimental (and critically unsuccessful) forays into the genre by *pop Indonesia* bands, not a distinct genre unto themselves. Further, they were far from

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<sup>22</sup> Nevertheless, dangdut and pop cohabited at recording label Remaco. For a discussion of these and other examples of *pop Indonesia*-dangdut encounters and meldings see Aribowo (2002); Panen Dangdut (1975); Sakrie (2008a, 2008b, 2009a and b).

the lower class nuances of either dangdut or Kangen Band. In fact, critics assessments of this mid-seventies wave yielded the term, Melayu Mentengan, referring to an elite suburb in central Jakarta (Panen Dangdut 1975). Clearly, then, whilst contemporary *pop Melayu* technically resembles its 1970s' predecessor, in terms of its social meaning, it does not. Socially, it resembles dangdut but refrains from gesturing towards dangdut. This raises questions about the social meaning of contemporary *pop Melayu*, and how it is built.

According to Simon Frith (1996:88):

A new genre world... is first constructed and then articulated through a complex interplay of musicians, listeners and mediating ideologues, and this process is much more confused than the marketing process that follows, as the wider industry begins to make sense of the new sounds and markets and to exploit both genre worlds and genre discourses in the orderly routines of mass marketing.

Above, I have discussed how Rhoma Irama exorcised the initially derogatory term, dangdut, and in the process commodified the *rakyat*. This reading of dangdut, in which a musician/composer plays a central role in both defining the genre musically and in marketing its social meaning, blurs the neat distinction Frith draws between the 'complex interplay of musicians' etc, and the 'marketing process'. To be sure, Irama may well be considered both a 'mediating ideologue' and a musician in conversation with other dangdut musicians, but are not musicians and mediating ideologues also implicated in the imagining of markets? The case of Irama's dangdut would suggest so, while that of contemporary *pop Melayu* reveals that musicians and performers can sometimes play no determining role in genre construction. *Pop Melayu* emerged, after all, not from a complex interplay among musicians commonly acknowledging generic rules, but from an event: the well publicised discovery of the provincial Kangen Band by a Jakarta-based producer, and members' thoroughly documented relocation to the capital. In this sense, contemporary *pop Melayu* may be considered pure marketing.

There is much to be discussed about the success or otherwise of this marketing venture, but that will not be the subject of this chapter. Below, I focus my discussion on how contemporary *pop Melayu* emerges from a process of mass marketing, and pay particular heed to the new modes of knowledge production and new 'mediating ideologues' emerging from the coincidence of political change with developments in the technologies for mediating pop music. These changes open space for the re-assigning of both Melayu and *kampungan*.

*The Dispersal of Pop Indonesia*

Above, I have recounted how new sales figures for pop Indonesia albums were reached in the 1980s, and it was to this already growing *pop Indonesia* industry that major multinational recording labels arrived in the late-1990s. A 1988 deregulation package had surrendered the state monopoly over television and allowed for foreign recording labels to distribute their products through local recording companies. A 1994 Decree allowed foreign companies to distribute their own products and develop local repertoires. Sony Music, Warner, EMI, BMG and Universal all established offices in Jakarta in the second half of the 1990s, and encouraged the across-the-board adoption of a royalty system, which now governs contractual deals between recording artists and recording labels. At the time of writing, multinational firms Warner, Universal, EMI and Sony share the Indonesian recording industry with local groups, Musica and Aquarius. Over the same period, sales of *pop Indonesia* have overtaken those of *pop Barat*, and the meaning of *pop Indonesia* has changed. Structurally, pop Indonesia has globalized, but aesthetically it has undergone a certain transformation.

As widely known, in 1998, Suharto fell, marking the end of the New Order, but we should be careful not to link the structural globalization of *pop Indonesia* to Suharto's fall per se, for it was catalysed by the New Order economic deregulation policies in the 1990s and attendant rhetoric of openness. Nevertheless, the aesthetic localization that has taken place under the auspices of globalized recording manifests most clearly in the post Suharto period, and does so in the following three ways: increased sales, or the greater volume of *pop Indonesia* material now exchanged on the Indonesian market; the increased exchange value of pop Indonesia performers and performances; and the new ways in which consumers now imagine the field of *pop Indonesia* production.

In May 2004, business magazine *Swa* ran a cover story entitled 'Boom bisnis musik: Mau kaya raya dan populer? Gelegar bisnis musik menjanjikan banyak peluang, yeah...!' (Music business boom: Do you want to be filthy rich and popular? The music boom promises heaps of opportunities, yeah...!). The report consisted of separately-authored feature articles which generally lauded the music industry's capacity to generate billions of rupiah for recording labels, producers, television stations, recording studios, musicians, music schools, songwriters, music retailers, dancers, video clip production houses, and artist management firms alike. In the years since the publication of the *Swa* report, changes have taken place

that erase some of these parties, such as artist management firms, and outlets for official recordings, from the list of those who are able to profit from the so-called local music boom. Due to piracy (and not iTunes), sales of official recordings have fallen drastically, and recording companies have adopted the task of artist management and music publishing, elbowing independent outfits out of the industry. However, content providers, companies that provide segments of songs to telecommunications companies for sale as ring back tones, have emerged as new independent players in the industry. Profit from sales of ring back tones can be substantial, and accrue to songwriters, recording labels, content providers and telecommunications companies.<sup>23</sup> The ownership of mobile phones has increased tenfold to 42 million since 1998 (Heryanto 2010:192). Incidentally, advertising funded television with national reach is now the primary medium for advertising pop music products, and mobile phones provide the key to generating profit from such products. Furthermore, by the turn of the century, sales of official recordings of *pop Indonesia* began to exceed those of *pop Barat*, and this situation endures to date.

But sales figures alone do not tell the whole story of shifts in the meanings of *pop Indonesia*. With the demise of the New Order, new opportunities for performance emerged. The process of obtaining a permit for concerts, for example, was freed from lengthy bureaucratic procedures, and this greatly expanded the space available to promote *pop Indonesia* acts, in turn serving as advertising space to promote other products. Private television stations blossomed, featuring live, televised performances by *pop Indonesia* performers, or featuring *pop Indonesia* performers in advertisements. Successful acts soon came to be viewed not only as products or commodities of the recording labels, but as advertising space for promoting other products, as certain sounds and performance styles became linked to certain commodities. Once endorsed by Iwan Fals (a folk singer whose songs were widely used as anti-Suharto anthems by students activist of the 1998 generation), Inul (a *dangdut* singer whose provocative dance style gained substantial moral support after she was criticized by Muslim clerics and the pious, proselytizing founder of *dangdut*, Rhoma Irama) and Ary Lasso (who was sacked as the vocalist for the

<sup>23</sup> Putranto (2006) explains how ring back tones, sometimes referred to as *RBTs*, and sometimes as *nada sambung pribadi*, are different to ring tones. Ring tones are the sound the cell phone emits when called, and ring back tones are the sound callers hear when they ring a number. The sound callers hear will depend on whether users of that number have purchased a ring back tone, and which ring back tone they have purchased. Ring back tones require a code for activation and, unlike ring tones, cannot be pirated.

pop group, Dewa, when his heroin habit got the better of him, and then rehabilitated and made a comeback as a solo artist some years later), drinking a certain energy drink could fill one with grit and determination. Once endorsed by all male pop bands such as Gigi and Padi, both of which feature guitarists famous for their musical virtuosity and composing skills, smoking a particular cigarette could imbue one with physical vigor and a creative mind.

That technological change has brought with it changes in the media content is well exemplified by the fact of the so-called 'local music boom', and how quantitative changes in pop Indonesia exchanges (album sales, concert fees, etc) constitute this boom has been well noted (Heryanto 2010). But some related transformations that have yet to be subjected to scholarly analysis. Over the period since the transnationalisation of the Indonesian recording industry, not only have sales of *pop Indonesia* well overtaken those of Euro-American pop; the meaning of *pop Indonesia* itself has changed. The proliferation of new media formats for exchanging music, such as television and mobile phones, has accompanied the qualitative transformation of the Indonesian pop musical environment, including the new sketches of class and nation.

For example, one may observe without implying any causal link, that just as televisual and telephonic mediation has become central to the exchange of pop, since the late-1990s, *pop Indonesia* has begun to break out of its assignation as a gedongan realm; the realm of the 'other-worldly' metropolis and Western derivation. For young people all over the archipelago, *pop Indonesia* is more and more part of the mundane. *Pop Indonesia* has dispersed, and its ties to an 'originary' UK/US rendered fragile.

This point is well illustrated by a recent conversation I had with an amateur Balinese musician, seventeen year-old Komang. Komang is a talented guitarist and vocalist, and has been in a number of amateur pop bands during her teen years. She is an avid fan of *pop Indonesia* acts Cokelat and Afgan, but her broad active listening crosses genre lines: she claims a deep appreciation of both the *dangdut* vocal style and of *pop Melayu* Kangen Band's tunes. This is not someone with limited musical interests nor horizons. Komang's mother is a friend of my parents in law, I often bump into Komang there when visiting. One day, as I chatted to her, a song by the band Dewa filled the air. It reminded me of a Beatles song, and I asked her if she had made the same association. Given her deep musical involvement, I was taken aback by her reply. 'Who are The Beatles?' she asked me.

Ten years previously I conducted some research among Balinese men around the same age as Komang, also amateur musicians. I had found

that among them, questions similar to the one I had posed to Komang – comparing *pop Indonesia* sounds with those originating in Anglo-America – were prominent in their imaginings of the field of pop music production. Questions about *pop Indonesia* composers' Anglo-American influences were highly important to those amateur musicians' consumptions of *pop Indonesia*. But in Komang's reply, we see a different way of imagining the field of pop production. Her ignorance of The Beatles illustrates a profound change in the way Indonesian consumers of *pop Indonesia* perceive the world of cultural production. Although some *pop Indonesia* musicians continue to cite Anglo American acts as sources of inspiration, in the minds of many *pop Indonesia* consumers, the genre has nothing to do with the West. It is produced in Jakarta, for a national audience, and most often sung in Bahasa Indonesia. Many observers note, however, that the distinction is often difficult to discern.

Indeed, as mentioned above, the band that gave rise to the re-employment of the generic category, *pop Melayu*, Kangen Band, originally thought of itself as a *pop Indonesia* band before the label 'pop Melayu' was thrust upon it by producers, begging the question raised at the chapter's outset: what 'is' contemporary *pop Melayu*, and what does it 'do'? In what follows, I propose that *pop Melayu* may be understood in context of developments in technologies for mediating pop music, which in turn yield new fields of intellectual endeavour: the interpreting, chronicling and imaging of history through strategic uses of genre conventions.

### *The Staging of Production*

While undertaking research in Jakarta in 2004, I was struck by the frequency with which media spotlights, increasing in number, turned to those normally thought of as standing behind the scenes of pop music production: artist and repertoire (hereon, A and R) directors at recording labels. The staging of production indeed seems to be a new phenomenon of consumption globally, and deserves greater analysis than I can afford here. Suffice to say, instances of such staging include the prominence afforded to music producers, such as Quincy Jones and Timbaland, whose narrating voices (Jones) and singing, dancing bodies (Timbaland) on albums and music videos of the artists they are responsible for producing are seen to enhance the value of those commodities. Another example is the behind the scenes clips that often appear in split screen with rolling credits at the end of feature films. The fact that such split screens appear as *animations* at the end of animated films too suggests that they may not

always be meant as representations of the real. At the end of one of my daughter's Barbie videos, Barbie slips out of her role as the ice-skating, cloud-dwelling Princess Anika and reverts to Barbie, a straight-up tech savvy girl who swaps email addresses with the male lead: 'And mine is [Barbie@barbie.com](mailto:Barbie@barbie.com)'.

The staging of production evident in the media performances of Artist and Repertoire directors (who recruit and manage the recording labels' repertoire) I had noticed in Jakarta in 2004 arose in part from the new ideas about how to produce music that came with the recording industry's deregulation. To date, most of the A and R directors of Jakarta-based transnational recording labels are those who were closely involved in the establishment of local labels in the 1970s. But beneath the auspices of transnational labels, and therefore more closely drawn into global marketing trends, their task is transformed. The introduction of royalties for contracted artists upon recording's transnationalisation is most oft-cited. But equally important is the fact that, with the transnationalisation of Indonesian recording, no longer were recording labels simply a site for generating signs from individual commodities that together make up a labels' repertoire. The labels have become signs in and of themselves, branded commodities. This development, which I will attempt to illustrate below, is suggestive of post-modernity, and confuses a production-consumption dyad. The sleeve of the Barbie film assures us that Barbie plays Princess Anika, but can we be sure? Is it not that Princess Anika is playing Barbie? After all, the email address, [Barbie@barbie.com](mailto:Barbie@barbie.com) is sure to generate only silence, unless perhaps to say: 'Buy me'.

In 2004, similar interminglings of stage, performance and behind-the-scenes could be seen in the Jakarta pop musical environment, and were most striking in discussions of Sony Music in the public sphere, of which I present the following examples. When I met the composer/singer Oppie Andaresta in early 2004, Universal had recently informed her that they were doing away with their entire local repertoire and that, therefore, her recording contract with them was no longer valid. She was seeking a new deal with a different label, and told me that Sony would be her first choice. In her view, Sony are renowned for the kind of professional management modes she favours. Of particular note, she insisted is Sony's transparent reports of album sales and, therefore, their estimations of royalties due to their artists. At a live-to-air concert to celebrate his band's tenth anniversary at the studio of Trans TV, Gigi's vocalist Armand Maulana thanked Sony Music's Senior Director of A and R, Yan Djuhana, whom he referred to as '*Golden Ears*' (*si telinga emas*) and whose support was apparently

responsible for the group's longevity. Upon establishing itself as a site for the development of local repertoire, as deregulation policies allowed, Sony was intent on imposing itself as the very sign of musical quality and patriotism, of national modernity indeed.

Above, I have argued that in the New Order period, pop genres were maintained through a ritual distinguishing; a labour to which writers (music critics) were key. Print journalists were valorized in ways that accorded truth value to their writings. In the post-Suharto, transnationalised pop musical environment, the task of enunciating the modern is extended to other media workers, such as A and R directors, who are held to bring their own kind of specialist knowledge to the task. The term 'Golden Ears' is often applied to such workers, mystifying them in a manner once restricted to writers, and suggestive of their role in forging a modernity that is not only spatial (as in *gedongan* and *kampungan*), but also sonic. When I first heard the term Golden Ears, it was being applied to Yan Djuhana, but since then I have heard it applied to a range of producers, including Sujana, the manager and producer of Kangen Band who 'discovered' *pop Melayu*. Here, the term Golden Ears suggests, are the pioneers of our sonic modernity.

The valorisation of Indonesian artist and repertoire directors in a context of transnational recording labels' attempts to brand themselves as patriotic ventures seems to support Mazzarella's (2003) argument that the globalisation of media structures opens space for new interpretations, and interpreters, which he calls 'hinge occupants' of the local. In his book on advertising and consumerism in India, Mazzarella (2003) contends that that contemporary cultural politics is riddled with global-local translation projects. Institutions of consumer capitalism, in his view, are most adept at such translations. He avers that 'these institutions – marketing and advertising agencies, commercial mass media, and all the auxiliary services that accompany them – are perhaps the most efficient contemporary practitioners of a skill that no-one can afford to ignore: the ability to move fluently between the local and the global...' (Mazzarella 2003:18). In his respective studies of advertisements for mobile phone service providers and condoms, Mazzarella shows how, in justifying their 'hinge' positions in this translation process, local elite cultural producers (specifically advertising executives) reproduce imagined dualisms between globalizing capital and local cultural difference.

I prefer Mazzarella's terms, 'hinge occupants' and 'interpreters', over Frith's 'mediating ideologues', for it opens the way to consider pop genres as ongoing processes of interpretation, rather than as ideologies. 'Hinge

'occupant' accurately describes those writers who denigrated dangdut as *kampungan* in the medium of print, discussed by Weintraub (2006). It also aptly describes Rhoma Irama, who melded rock and Melayu aesthetics, then attributed to this hybrid a social meaning through his deft excorporation of the term dangdut. Whilst any act of consumption and reading entails a process of interpretation, some interpretations are more determining than others, and reveal the importance of habitus. Mazzarella's point is that the political power with which certain habitus of interpretation are endowed works to circumscribe the local, and assert its defining features vis a vis the global. Similar power, I propose, may be attributed to habitus of interpreting Indonesian pop genres, and changes in these habitus can be seen to underlie changes in pop genre distinctions.

For example, new valorisations of A and R executives do appear to draw on old patterns of producing intellectuals, historically proximate to the medium of print. But they are also eased by global patterns of staging production, patterns to which transnational recording companies, such as Sony and Warner, part of broader multimedia conglomerates, are closely linked. Sujana's mediation of *pop Melayu* provides a case study of how such hinge occupants, or intellectuals, engage developments in the media environment to propose novel formations of a national modernity. As in Sujana's case, these engagements may not take place directly beneath the auspices of multinational media corporations. Nevertheless, they are heavily influenced by the new, transnationally manifest ways of imagining national populations as hierarchies of media consumers. Contemporary *pop Melayu* is to large extent testimony to Sujana's astute observations of the extent to which a changed media environment would allow for manipulation of key, longstanding signs: Jakarta and Melayu/*kampungan*.

In a separate paper (Baulch 2007b), I have argued that, in the post-Suharto era, marketing parlance, which categorises Indonesian people according to their perceived capacity to consume media, was transposed onto pre-existing notions of the *kampungan*. This development should be read as a result of post-Suharto flourishing of media in various formats, and the related rise in prominence of the US firm, Nielson Audience Measurement. In their attempts to sell their imagined audiences to potential sponsors, radio stations, recording labels, and music magazines and television stations all employ the same Nielson Audience Measurement categories of media consumption. In 2004, my research in Jakarta revealed that the lower reaches of this hierarchy barely registered on the radar of

Jakarta-based pop institutions, all of which rushed to sell the various pop-related products to the more privileged, metropolitan, educated youth, denoted by the categories ABC.<sup>24</sup> Consequently, media producers spoke of the masses as if they were a minority whose media consumption habits could only emulate those of the well-to-do.

Since 2004, however, the way Jakarta-based media producers imagine the lower reaches of this hierarchy has changed. This change coincides not only with the advent of contemporary *pop Melayu* and related contestations over the meaning of kampungan, but also with the emergence of these lower reaches, the masses, as a pop music target market of undeniable importance. At a time when the business of recording in crisis globally due to falling sales as a result of digital downloads, those Indonesian masses residing in the nation's peripheries, well beyond the metropolis, have emerged as astoundingly enthusiastic consumers of pop music in the format that now accounts for the greatest profits accruing to various parties in recording. This format, called ring back tones or *nada sambung pribadi*, delivers music in the form of song segments to mobile phones for a weekly or monthly fee. The work of producing music for a profit therefore to large extent requires heralding those masses who, according to the regimes of audience measurement that exist, buy most of it (Solihun 2010). By reinventing *pop Melayu*, Sujana honed significantly the art of heralding these masses.

Indeed, a central feature of Kangen Band's publicity, or at least its visual presence on the public sphere, has been the tale of member's progressive civilizing on their move to Jakarta. This is certainly the tale Sujana tells in his book on his discovery of Kangen Band, which has served as an important source in the writing of this chapter. Notably, the cover of this book renders the band members as cartoon figures with broad smiles plastered on, making their way past a road sign that reads 'kampung'. In other words, the cover depicts their movement away from the kampung. Tukul Arwana, a successful comedian and talk show host whose character is an ugly man of humble village origins with a wicked sense of humour, is quoted on the cover thus: 'Keep going forward, Kangen Band... just

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<sup>24</sup> These categories span from 'A' – the highest income earners, to 'F' the lowest. Notably, such categorizations necessarily link capacity to consume with musical and television viewing habits, for the only media audience research company, Nielson Media Research, employs the same categories in their descriptions of viewing patterns, as do radio stations, recording labels, and music magazines in their attempts to sell their audiences to potential sponsors.

believe in yourself, like me.' As I discovered while conducting research among Kangen band fans, the story Sujana's book narrates is certainly well known, although the spectacular and well-rehearsed character of this civilizing narrative is likely more due to its frequent retelling on television, not to readings of Sujana's book. In mid-2010, the majority of fans gave as the reason for their enthusiasm for Kangen Band: 'They came from below.'

### *Conclusion*

To suggest that this interpretation of contemporary *pop Melayu* as a movement from below, from kampung to metropolis, emerges in context of the masses re-attaining their political rights in post-New Order Indonesia may well seem plausible. Narratives and practices that valorize upward mobility certainly depart from the image of the *rakyat* that the floating masses doctrine inferred. But the coincidence of technological advancements and political change make interpretation of these phenomena tricky. On the one hand, the local music boom, which is the context in which I have set Sujana's *pop Melayu*, may be seen as resulting from more intensive investment in Indonesian acts by a newly transnationalised recording industry at the end of the Suharto era. Further, indeed the floating masses doctrine died with the New Order, but so do other developments not directly related to post-authoritarianism ease new representations of the masses. Pop music's reliance on advertising funded television and mobile phones is a feature of post-Suharto Indonesia, but not directly related to a post-authoritarian polity. Some aspects of the post-Suharto pop musical development are only tenuously connected to regime change and reflect more strongly Indonesia's increasing global interconnectedness prompted by Suharto-era 'deregulation' policies. Some new ways of defining pop genres, that is, emerge not from the political empowerment of the masses, but from key hinge occupants' interest in rendering into the vernacular global developments, such as the global proliferation of audience measurement regimes.

Sujana's *pop Melayu* is a case in point. As already mentioned, *Melayu* by no means describes the performative impetus that prompted Dodhy to pen the very sentimental songs on the debut album. As mentioned in the above analysis, most of these songs evoke a masculine sentimentality, an emotional state presumably provoked by the marginalisation and disenfranchisement of men whose laments the songs retell. Similar

sentimentality is a feature of some dangdut compositions, but Dodhy wrote the debut album in the register of *pop Indonesia*. Since signing to Positive Art, on subsequent albums Kangen Band has been encouraged to adopt a more empowered and muscular speaking position and sound. Consequently, very little of the original Kangen Band sentimentality is present in Positif Art's pop Melayu repertoire.

In his book on popular music in Indonesia, 1997–2001, Jeremy Wallach views

...national music and the nation as *mutually constitutive*: each is simultaneously a reification and palpable presence that relies on the other to provide a legitimating framework. Thus 'Indonesian' popular music appears to validate a particular sense of Indonesian-ness, just as the sense of Indonesian-ness generates a need for recognizably Indonesian popular music Wallach (2008:6, emphasis in original).

Following Wallach, I propose that political change – which could entail the establishment of a new state or simply that of new policies for regulating media flows – give rise to changes in senses of nation and the meanings of national genres, including their inter-relations. In this chapter, I have attempted to qualify transformations of Melayu's significance and in its relationship to *pop Indonesia* by comparing contemporary pop Melayu to Weintraub's characterisation of generic style in his book on dangdut. As the story of the production of Kangen Band as a pop Melayu band suggests, stylistically speaking, contemporary *pop Melayu* bears few of the stylistic traits Weintraub attributes to genres, nor does it necessarily represent historical continuity. As discussed, among contemporary *pop Melayu* musicians, there is little sense of the place of their music making within a history of popular music, and this could suggest that the genre exemplifies a post-modern historical rupture and pastiche (Jameson 1991).

Rather than of a post-authoritarian context, this development speaks more forcefully to me of how the contestations and shifts that we have been discussing – the dispersal of *pop Indonesia*, the marking of pop with provincial difference, and the backlashes this marking has provoked – are all couched as patriotic moves. This, in turn, seems to suggest an intense compulsion among those hinge occupants empowered to chronicle and organise culture, to attaining authenticity at the site of the nation, or some other variant of 'the local'. Genre, then, serves as a site at which pop is rendered into the vernacular, as a sign of context.

Some brief reference to Arjun Appadurai's theory of context (1996) is apt at this point. For him, locality is by no means a given but exceedingly

fragile; its dangerous border zones must be ritually maintained, usually by those with restricted knowledge. We may see such ritual maintenance being undertaken by hinge occupants (Rhoma Irama, Sujana, and the music critics) at crucial habitus for interpreting (valuing, devaluing, excorporating, distinguishing, categorising) pop. The question that emerges then, following Appadurai's theory of context, is how these hinge occupants' interpretations reproduce locality.

In conclusion, I would like to draw attention to one of the most persistent features of the vernacular to emerge from the current study: that of the metropolis, Jakarta. As we have seen, it was images of the metropolis that emerged in the early New Order period as devices for naturalizing socio-cultural distinctions and a differential proximity to modernity. More than a decade after the fall of the New Order, the metropolis persists as a device for heralding the masses in new ways, using new media structures and technologies. It persists, that is, even as these new heraldings bathe in a viscous pool of global interconnectedness. New, transnationalised structures open new spaces in which the local is produced, but certain national myths endure.

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### PART THREE

#### NEW SUBJECTIVITIES AND UNOFFICIAL IDEOLOGIES



## CHAPTER SEVEN

# WORLDS OF SPARKLING LIGHTS: POPULAR MUSIC AND YOUTH CULTURES IN SOLO, CENTRAL JAVA

Lars Gjelstad

### *Introduction*

In his *The Religion of Java*, Clifford Geertz described the emergent 'youth culture' of the 1950s as 'the most vital element in contemporary Indonesian society' (C. Geertz 1960:307–8). It is associated with 'a group of restless, educated, urban young men and women possessed of a sharp dissatisfaction with traditional custom and a deeply ambivalent attitude toward the West' (C. Geertz 1960:307). According to Geertz there is a close connection between their strong national identity and their appreciation of popular songs, orchestras, movies, novels and other popular forms belonging to what Geertz calls 'the national-art complex' (C. Geertz 1960:302–3). These popular forms are regarded as national because they are not confined to the island of Java; they are expressed in the Indonesian language and they are mainly spread across the archipelago through the radio, movies and magazines (C. Geertz 1960:302–3).

Neither Geertz nor others have, to my knowledge, provided any substantial ethnographic accounts of the first waves of youth cultures in Java. From his fieldwork in Surabaya in the early 1960's, James Peacock (1968:102) briefly notes that 'rock 'n' roll or mambo-samba-like music played on electric guitars and bongo drums is a pervasive and audible part of youth culture in Surabaya'. Peacock then mentions that he at a circumcision ceremony was astonished by the contrast between the refined ethos of elderly Javanese men and the rather expressive aesthetics of a rock 'n' roll band performing there. 'Such music', Peacock comments, 'does seem to break down the formality of traditional etiquette' (Peacock 1968:102). The decisive significance of the rise of pop music for the restructuring of self and the flattening of Javanese hierarchies has been most thoroughly argued by James Siegel:

With the rise of popular music the connection between speaking well, acting well, and a totalized hierarchy is broken. In its place there is one's "own"

language, the language of “expression” [...]. [P]opular music depends entirely on taste (*selera*), a notion new to Java (Siegel 1986:230).

The new phenomenon of taste corresponds with the emergence of a new ‘social type’ in Java – the teenager (Siegel 1986:203). Teens, in Indonesian called *remaja*, are allegedly defined by having certain tastes and aspirations (Siegel 1986:204). The expressiveness of youth is further associated with Low Javanese (*ngoko*), the ‘natural’ language of children and the language that surfaces, for example, when losing one’s self-control<sup>1</sup> (Siegel 1986:22).

Siegel’s considerations of youth’ changing conceptions of agency is important and stimulating. However, his analysis relies on a highly essentialised category of *remaja*. While these representations offer valuable insights into the discursive formation of youth, it ignores the complex and shifting ways in which youths actively co-create their own cultural worlds. These worlds should in my view also be studied ‘in their own right’ (Wulff 1995).<sup>2</sup> The aim of this chapter is to demonstrate that this paradigm shift in youth studies may offer a fresh approach to the study of popular music and its relationships to both new and old social formations of the Malay world. Given the increased demand for cultural autonomy among Javanese youth, which of course also links them up with new structures of power, my argument is that popular music and youth cultural forms in general play a vital role in an ongoing restructuring of authority and agency in Java. This is for example noticeable in a rapidly spreading discourse exalting the value of self-confidence (*percaya diri*), not least articulated in contemporary popular music. Below I discuss the importance of this notion for the formation of youth subjectivities by focusing, among others, on how popular music encourages young people to playfully explore new textures and colours of their personality by offering a language for articulating the uniqueness of their selves.

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<sup>1</sup> The way personal and expressive styles of teenagers relate to the formality of Javanese etiquette and state rhetoric shares patterns with Bettina David’s account in this volume on how the seducing corporeal rhythm of dangdut is considered by cultural elites as childish and symptomatic of the instinctual desires of the uncontrolled masses.

<sup>2</sup> The attempt here to grasp ‘the present’ (Caputo 1995) of particular youth counters representations of youth merely as ‘incomplete adults’ found in conventional socialisation theories (Wulff 1995). Such theories are prevalent in the ethnography of Southeast Asia, and Bali (Bateson and Mead 1942) and Java (H. Geertz 1961) in particular. Even Siegel’s comparison of the sociality and agency of urban teens of the 1980s with those of traditional Javanese builds uncritically on Hildred Geertz’s ethnography of socialisation practices in a small East-Javanese town in the 1950s (Bråten 1995:228–9).

This chapter is an ethnographic account of the cultural worlds in which some young urban Javanese consumers of pop music live. It focuses primarily on how popular music is received and appropriated in everyday life by particular networks of youths localised in the city of Solo, Central Java. In order to explore how the uses and experiences of popular music are embedded in broader cultural styles and to identify how these styles are contingent upon situated cultural practice, I will contrast an upper-class and rather opulent 'clubbing community' with a gang of high school students playing guitar at their roadside hangout. I further describe how some members of this latter gang of high school students, which initially started as a fan club of the popular Indonesian artist Iwan Fals, began to experiment with house-music and Ecstasy (locally known as 'tripping'), which became popular at Solo discothèques in the mid-90s.<sup>3</sup> These boys found in Iwan Fals a voice that was critical to cosmopolitan lifestyles, and below I show how this perspective influenced the boys' moral framing of their increasing involvement with global youth trends.

In the second part of this chapter I describe some features of a cultural field that evolved in Solo as elsewhere in urban Indonesia in the late 1990s. It is associated with a worldwide form of dance music, called clubbing, and takes place at various cafés, often at the major hotels. This new cultural form is termed *dugem*, short for *dunia gemerlap*, which can be translated as 'a world of sparkling lights'. It refers to the use of spotlights and other visual effects that go with the music. From the cafés my young informants bring the music and its cosmopolitan atmosphere back into their private bedrooms, where they also prepare themselves for performances at the dance floor. The taste and competence acquired in these private spaces feed back into the cafés by way of dance performances and by requests for their favourite songs played by local and national Top 40 bands.<sup>4</sup>

The development of local youth scenes is increasingly influenced by global electronic media such as MTV programs in dialogue with local managers, event organizers, sponsors and various entertainment venues. I further pinpoint the significance of local tastemakers to the circulation of popular music across local arenas as well as to the local unfolding of

<sup>3</sup> The gang of high school students was a main focus during 10 months of fieldwork in 1996, and it was also frequently revisited in the course of three periods of field studies between 2001 and 2005. It was also in these latter periods I came into contact with the network of clubbers.

<sup>4</sup> Although charts have been lacking for a long time in Indonesia, the term 'Top 40' emerged at the youth scene in Solo with the rise of the above mentioned live performances at cafés.

broader youth cultural practice. Since the uses of pop music always are embedded in what Holland et al. (1998) depict as historical contingent and socially enacted cultural worlds, musical activities cannot be sharply isolated and delimited. The task is rather to elucidate ways in which experiences of music are linked up with specific networks of social relationships (S. Cohen 1993:135), and to describe how the uses and meanings of pop music are embedded in broader circuits of youth cultural spaces and practices (Saldanha 2002:340).

### *Sugaly: A Gang of 'Savage Children'*

After a few days of fieldwork in Solo in 1996 I passed a group of high school students sitting at a traditional Javanese snack bar (*wedangan*) by the city's main road. A boy, named Roni,<sup>5</sup> shouted *hello mister* after me, and all of a sudden I find myself seated among them. The location near the bustling centre made the *wedangan* their favourite gathering spot. Some of the boys took turns playing the guitar while the rest sang along with much eagerness. Their favourite artist was Iwan Fals, whom they praised for his simplicity, honesty, solidarity as well as for his critique of the New Order government. An earlier generation of youth had actually established this gang<sup>6</sup> in the early 1980's as a fan club of Iwan Fals. These tattooed male youths had allegedly played the guitar most of the day, and despite their evocations of a delinquent (*gali*) style, they were not, unlike some other gangs at the time, looking for trouble. The name they had invented for their gang was *Sugali*, taken from a title of a song written by their hero.<sup>7</sup> Sugali is an acronym for 'suatu gabungan anak liar', meaning 'a bunch of savage children'. The present generation that I sat with had changed the name *Sugali* inherited from their predecessors to *Sugaly* in order to set their personal mark on it and to make it hip.

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<sup>5</sup> Roni soon became my main informant when I thankfully accepted his and his parents' invitation to live with them in their home during my stay in Solo. This family has also been my hosts in subsequent periods of fieldwork.

<sup>6</sup> The term 'gang' is a translation of the Indonesian 'genk', which commonly refers to peer groups with a certain delinquent image (drinking, fighting and racing). The term is used by the boys themselves.

<sup>7</sup> 'Gali' has connotations to 'a gang of street toughs' (Echols and Shadily 1989) and is synonymous with *préman* (gangster). The word 'liar' connotes to be wild in the sense of uncivilized and primitive. Although portraying street toughs, the song 'Sugali' implicitly asks Indonesian youth not to join such gangs. The Sugaly boys I met in 1996 did, with lots of irony however, identify themselves with a *gali* ethos, including elements such as tattoo, drugs, street fighting, prostitution, and being an enemy of the police.

A brief look at the lyrics of the song *Sugali* (1978) may help us to better grasp some of the atmosphere they are playing with:

Voi ... voices from the news, Written in the newspaper, About a male person, Who goes in and out of jail, Becoming someone wanted by the police, dar ...der ... dor, The sound of a gun, (belonging to) a 'gali' considered a firecracker, With no feeling of fear, Possessing magic making him invulnerable to gunfire, With his head more and more in the clouds, Watch the street thugs [Sugali] dancing at a, Low-class prostitution complex, Passionately working overtime until the morning, Having finished banditry wasting the money of Satan, Dig....did.....dug.

In contrast to the lifestyles of the youths hanging out at hotel bars and cafés, which will be described in later sections, this song deals with a gang- and banditry ethos related to rather low-class entertainment centres.

The foremost manner in which the Sugaly boys appropriated a *gali* behaviour was by motorbike racing (*trek-trekan*), which became a trend among affluent local youth around 1990. Most of these trendy 'gangsters' had their own motorbike, and the vehicles were objects of much attention. Their engagements in illegal motorbike racing did also represent an opposition to the police, who obviously represented the arbitrary and corrupt nature of New Order rule. 'When the police has gone to sleep, we use the street for racing', one of the boys explained.

Another important part of their collective identity was their construction of a particular secret language (*prokem*)<sup>8</sup> based on what they claim to be the Arabic language. They are thus making use of an already existing idiom for social differentiation in Indonesia. Most members of Sugaly were students at a Muhammadiyah high school where Arabic is taught as part of their religious instruction. Since their invented vocabulary mostly refer to activities forbidden by religion, such as sex and drinking, the function of Arabic as a social diacritica is here somewhat reversed. Their rather ironic use of Arabic to create a distinct collective youthful identity may therefore also be read as a local articulation of tensions between Islam and popular youth cultures – as well as an opposition to the world of schooling.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> See Chambert-Loir 1984; Murray 1991:104; Sahertian 2002.

<sup>9</sup> An example of how musical elements became emblematic for their gang is the way they creatively incorporated the name of one of their favourite bands, Humania, into their exclusive slang (*prokem Sugaly*). Once we were gathered at their regular meeting point, one of them took the initiative to a drinking session by shouting 'sroop' (allegedly an Arabic word), another immediately answered 'Humania'. I was confused by this answer and since this occurred after several months in the field, they were rather surprised that

From their basecamp the Sugaly members made several excursions into the urban landscape. In one of the first evenings I spent with them, a couple of girls dropped in and asked if anyone would like to accompany them to Discotheque Freedom. Two of the boys jumped on their motor-bikes and the girls followed. The remaining boys eagerly told me that these girls were delinquent (*gadis nakal*). According to the boys, there were many *bad girls* in Solo nowadays because of the stress and frustrations that came with the 'global era'.<sup>10</sup> They also believed that most of such girls came from *broken homes*.

With his song *Frustrasi* (Frustration) Iwan Fals<sup>11</sup> has helped to circulate the term *broken home* and the message that children become delinquent because their parents are too busy with themselves to take care of their offspring. In fact, some of the Sugaly boys explicitly said they were hanging out because their parents were busy. According to Iwan Fals, 'a frustrated generation is 'disgusted watching dad, mum always going out'. The lyrics then continue:

There are things that, Don't make sense, Mum is busy searching for bachelors, Daddy is busy looking for young girls, Consequently I'm dejected, I better, Fantasize about, Becoming a big person like Hitler, The famous ...

The Sugaly boys themselves often framed their own engagements with emerging youth cultural styles in terms of cultural models of human development (with their hidden assumptions about the authority and agency of youth). The song describes how children who are neglected at home begin fantasizing about becoming really big persons (*orang besar*), persons that nobody can ignore.<sup>12</sup> The Indonesian 'besar' means 'big' and is synonymous with the Javanese *gedé*, which is found in the expression

I had failed to notice the Sugaly way of saying 'up to you'. The Indonesian band Humania became popular with the song *Terserah* (Up to you), and the boys would now substitute the name of the band with the name of this song whenever they would like to say 'up to you'.

<sup>10</sup> These girls were also referred to as 'experimenting girls' (*perek*, an acronym for *perempuan eksperimental*). Such girls, I was told, liked to smoke cigarettes, wear mini skirts and practise free sex.

<sup>11</sup> When writing this chapter Iwan Fals is still catching up with the national music scene; he won the 'Indonesia MTV Award 2003' for 'Best male vocalist'. And *Solo Pos* (27.01.2005) reports that the arrival of a joint concert tour by Iwan Fals and Slank to Solo February 15th 2005 is one of the big attractions to Solo youth that year.

<sup>12</sup> Mulder (1992) claims that according to a traditional Javanese worldview, a strained relationship between parents and children is always regarded as the child's failure: 'The thought of 'bad parents' or 'faulty education' being modern inventions that have not (yet?) penetrated into the Javanese mind' (Mulder 1992:35). Whereas other ethnographers have reported that juvenile delinquency in Java is commonly seen as resulting from parents'

*Anak Baru Gede* (ABG). This expression may be translated as 'child just become big' (Gjelstad 1998) or a 'child just grown up' (Sen and Hill 2000:49). Given the social dexterity of the Sugaly boys and their passion to explore the cityscape, they often referred to themselves as ABG. It is a highly ironic concept, and since it mostly refers to youth belonging to the middle- and upper classes, the concept plays upon a significant Javanese distinction between commoners, *wong cilik*, and the elite, the *wong gedé* (Sen and Hill 2000; Gjelstad 1998). The Sugaly boys themselves were of a mixed social background, most of them somewhere between the lower and middle classes. The fact that they had their own motorbike and were high school students, tells us as much of their aspirations as of their actual class position. The boys themselves played with middle class values and symbols, and they often identified themselves as ABG. The term exemplifies here how constructions of youth entail negotiations of class. It does also intersect with other dimensions of youths' uncertain relations to modern lifestyles, not least ethnic Javanese conceptions of maturation and upbringing. Tellingly, the name of the gang Sugali codifies the conventional metaphorical tying of children and lack of civility, linking the term wild (*liar*) with the term for child (*anak*).

### *Negotiating Lifestyles through Popular Music*

Iwan Fals' ironical notes about young people's drive to become big and famous influence the Sugaly boys' articulations of the frustration and confusion that arise from their engagements with contemporary youth cultures.<sup>13</sup> In 1996, one of the Sugaly boys said he used Iwan Fals' music as 'medicine' when he felt sad, confused or crazy. He further told that he tried to be a 'shadow theatre kid' (*anak wayang*), a phrase taken from the title of a song by Iwan Fals, meaning that he wanted to be like the *wayang* heroes who can differentiate the virtuous and upright from the immoral and foolish. With these references as a backdrop, he said he did not like popular youth trends such as tripping and motorbike racing, as he considered them too opulent and glamorous. He then referred to the song *Ini si*

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neglect of their children and lack of harmony in the family (Guinness 1986:136–7), the popularity of the expression *broken home* signals that the authority of parents is increasingly questioned.

<sup>13</sup> Such a bewilderment I think applies to Indonesian youths in general, which may also explain the popularity of the rather ironical phrase *Anak Baru Gedé* (ABG) as a general category for modern youth. A common critique of ABG is that they always want to create sensation and uproar (*onar, héboh*) with their assertive styles.

*Trendy* (This is trendy) by Iwan Fals in which a modern-day obsession with trends is equated with the worshiping of one's 'self', with empty talk, with becoming the slave of desire, and with being afraid of the old-fashioned. In the next moment, however, the teenager disclosed his fantasies about having a VW Beetle and taking part in motor crossing, which were at that time popular symbols of a cosmopolitan lifestyle. With a dry smile, he admitted that he probably disliked the cosmopolitan lifestyle because he had no money, thus revealing an underlying uncertainty about his commitment to the frugal ideals he had articulated a minute earlier.

Although the subjectivities of youth have changed dramatically, the stories above suggest that youth may still experience the kind of ambiguity toward Western lifestyles that Clifford Geertz commented on four decades ago. Iwan Fals is a deft interpreter of such tensions, and my view is that the Sugaly boys, at a certain level, interpreted their complex experiences in terms of the narratives that Iwan Fals provides them.<sup>14</sup>

Iwan Fals was of course not the only kind of music the Sugaly boys listened to; Western rock bands such as Red Hot Cili Peppers and Guns n' Roses were for example very popular. In 1996 house music, in Indonesia commonly referred to as 'tripping', had also became popular. My main informant then, Roni, soon learned this style. He bought several tapes with house dance music, and he went to discotheques and danced to the latest hits, opening up his mind and body to songs like 'Digital stimulation', 'Phuck me, phuck me (sic)', 'You are so sexy', 'Work that pussy' and 'Ecstasy, Ecstasy'. He explicitly described this sort of music as 'crazy music'. House and techno are generally associated with the use of Ecstasy, which in turn seems to stand metonymically for a decadent generation. In the days before the national Independence Day in 1996, journalists and politicians warned that Ecstasy could be a serious threat to the nation's future. The police also reacted sharply to the new trend of house music and drug use, and almost every week the police closed down a discotheque after inspections. These media reports on the societal threat of youth tripping at discotheques evoke Stanley Cohen's notion of British youth as 'folk devils' (Wulff 1995:3).

Local meanings of *tripping* do also articulate with undercurrents of Javanese traditions. In 1996, youth in Solo frequently employed the metaphor of the buffalo (*kerbau*) when speaking of the unruliness of their generation, associating the stupid and whirring buffalo that has to be

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<sup>14</sup> In an article in *The Eastern Economic Review*, Margot Cohen (1991) refers to a thesis by Elena Zachnas on Iwan Fals arguing that the enormous popularity of Fals among youth is due to the exclusion of youth from national politics, suggesting that by articulating 'what they are afraid to say themselves', Iwan Fals's messages fill a vacuum.

constantly herded with youth *tripping* at the discotheques. Teenagers' articulations of stress and frustration are, as already suggested, comprehensible in light of the emphasis placed on self-control and refined behaviour within Javanese cultural traditions. To have stress signifies that one has not yet 'become human' (*dadi wong*), which is connected with the concept of having 'not yet become a Javanese' (*durung Jawa*) (H. Geertz 1961).

As James Siegel (1986) has remarked, teenagers' tastes, aspirations, and excitements are experienced as rough and strange by many Javanese. The Sugaly boys would frame their 'delinquent' practices by identifying them as part of a 'cultural stream of things crazy' (*aliran gila-gilaan*). The fact that they select normative categories of craziness (together with derogative categories such as stress and unruliness) from dominant discourses in Java to comment upon their cultural practices, demonstrates that they experience themselves as transgressing some cultural and normative boundaries.

I have pointed out that the Sugaly boys identify themselves as trendy and that expressing one's distinct personal style is highly celebrated. It is their unique personal and collective styles that define them as ABG and which marks them off from both poor *kampung* boys and the dry and clever students at school. However, while they highly rate individual idiosyncrasies, they also express a strong collective solidarity, for instance in the phrase 'one for all, all for one'. These values of friendship are perhaps most deeply expressed through collective drinking practices, which almost seem to take on ritualistic qualities. These drinking patterns include collecting money and sharing the shot glass and are usually organized by an improvised *Bandar*.<sup>15</sup> The collectivistic quality of drinking together is also strengthened by the marked property of alcohol to open up minds and bodies to the joy of the moment. If one does not join these sessions, he should have a very good excuse.

My argument is that Iwan Fals' popularity to a large degree arises from his ability to articulate such social values which at least implicitly represent a critique of governments and schools. Iwan Fals' music then articulates an undercurrent morality which is already a constituent part of their multi-layered subjectivities. This is then turned, consciously or not, against state authorities, including a rigid and achievement-oriented educational system. Even if they as part of their identity as modern teens desire all kinds of new trends, these culturally defined desires stand in a

<sup>15</sup> The *bandar* is a sort of croupier (Echols and Shadily 1989), and the person in charge of the cards in gambling is often referred to as a 'bandar', but it also refers to persons engaged with illegal retailing of alcohol or drugs. For example the Sugaly members would refer to a seller of *ciu*, inexpensive traditional liquor, as a *bandar ciu*.

formative relationship to their moral dispositions and reflections. These tensions constitute a driving force in the dynamic evolution of youth cultural forms, finding its path for example into various 'indie movements'. I return to this issue in the last section.

The next step in my reflections on the variety of ways in which popular music take part in the dynamic unfolding of youth cultural practice, is a revisit to the Sugaly gang some 5 years after my first encounter, and describe some changes in their experiences of music and life.

### *Revisiting Sugaly: Biography and Diversification of Musical Taste*

In 1996 my main informant, Roni, was playing in three different bands, and given his knowledge of popular music he became a kind of local hero among neighbours and classmates. When the cafés started to mushroom in Solo a few years later, he performed at several of these venues, which made him even more 'famous' among Solo youth. After graduating from high school and freed from the control of school authorities he could finally let his hair grow, which brought him closer to a rock 'n' roll imagery. When I met Roni again in 2001 he had moved to Jakarta for studies in classical guitar at the Jakarta Academy of Art (IKJ). In the suburb where he lived he played with several bands at a studio where he also took turns at the mix board. While he was a rather well known figure in Solo, he found it hard to 'get a name' in the capital. Nevertheless Roni now felt lucky and a bit proud for having been able to leave Solo and Sugaly, which he now characterised as rather destructive, as people there have no ambitions. While his friends at the academy certainly also had their excesses in life, they differed from his former Sugaly friends as they wanted to achieve a professional career. In a way Roni has been able to transform his hobby into a career, unlike most of his former Sugaly friends, who are either unemployed, low paid or studying at low-quality institutions.

Some of the Sugaly boys, especially the leader figures, have made the transition to adulthood less well and have become involved in drugs and gangster activities (*gali, preman*). It seems that some of the boys had difficulties in breaking with a lifestyle and a sense of self they had strived so hard to obtain in their teenage years; they may have been somewhat ensnared by their play with gangster images in their high school years. For some Bob Marley's music and his smoking habits became markers of that style. These boys, which now have become seniors vis-à-vis a new

generation of Sugaly kids, took pleasure in saying that Iwan Fals had written many of his popular songs while smoking marijuana and they especially refer to the song *Frustrasi*, mentioned above, where he describes the eyes of a marijuana smoking persona, a certain 'Mr. Gelek'. *Gelek* is slang expression for marijuana. This reframing of Iwan Fals' music is another example of youths' active and shifting engagements with popular music.

The most remarkable change of musical orientation is that of Fahrid, the tough and sharp-witted boy who used to be the leader figure in 1996. In 2001, he told that he was tired of *tripping* and motorbike racing and rather preferred to relax. His explanation for this change of personality is that in the years of one's youth one usually has a taste for things coarse (*keras*), whereas one becomes more refined (*halus*) when one grows older. He now frequently visited a small village just outside Solo, where his father grew up, to drink *ciu* with some friends there. Some of them played *kroncong* (a small ukelele-like string instrument) with a repertoire ranging from characteristic *kroncong* music to Iwan Fals and Slank. Fahrid admitted that most of his Sugaly friends do not like *kroncong*, primarily because they are prestige-oriented and consider it as old-fashioned. Despite his friends' supposed dislike for *kroncong*,<sup>16</sup> I think Fahrid recognises in these musical practices some of the simplicity he and his friends formerly experienced when playing Iwan Fals and drinking tea or *ciu* at *wedangan*, their roadside basecamp.

In 2001, the Sugaly boys had to some extent been drawn into a café-oriented sociality that is known as *dugem*, partly because they realised that guitar playing, motorbike racing and gang fighting were not that trendy any longer. Due to lack of money they usually had to seek out cheaper places with no cover charge. Rather than ordering expensive individual drinks at the bar, which is common in the up-market places, young female hostesses will serve a mix of beer, vodka and Kratingdaeng (a popular energy drink) served in a jug poured into shot glasses. At some of these cheaper places, the boys will sing karaoke to their favourite music, including *Terserah* (Up to you) by Humania, *Makan nggak makan asal kumpul* (Even if there is not much to eat, it is important that we are together)<sup>17</sup> by

<sup>16</sup> *Kroncong* music has criss-crossed class and ethnic boundaries in Indonesia (Becker 1975). Whereas its social and historical life is fascinating for all its complexity, the literature commonly describe its current reception among modern youth as rather lowbrow and olden (Lockard 1998:67).

<sup>17</sup> This is an Indonesian translation of a Javanese proverb (*Mangan ora mangan, nek kumpul*), giving emphasis to interpersonal solidarity, often within kindred groups (Koentjaraningrat 1985:457).

Slank, and of course their true favourite *Sugali* by Iwan Fals. This makes up a sociality quite distinctive to that of youth hanging out at luxury hotels and bars. This gap was occasionally marked on Saturday evenings when the boys suddenly might change their initial wish to seek out cafés and decide to drink *ciu* at their regular base camp, as this was less wasteful. Similarly, they sometimes repudiated the use of ecstasy because it was too expensive and bourgeois (*borju*). Occasionally, we went to a rather upper-class venue with an entrance fee, and where they served Western food such as fried potatoes and beer with individual glasses. On these visits, we had to negotiate carefully who should go with us, as we could only manage to collect the money needed to get five or six people in. This certainly represented a break with the inclusive and egalitarian ethos of Sugaly as it was manifest in collective rituals of drinking and guitar playing.

In the next sections I turn to a network of youth that managed to position themselves more at the centre of the new café culture associated with the phenomenon of *dugem*.

### *Dugem: The Music of Cosmopolitan Youth*

As mentioned in the introduction *dugem* is a popular expression for a youth scene that evolved in urban Indonesia in the late 1990s. *Dugem* is a short for *dunia gemerlap*, which I have translated as 'a world of sparkling lights'. While the term may refer to night life in general, it is largely associated with the musical practices taking place at the new cafés and bars in Solo. The music bar Musro at Quality Hotel is definitively the local centre.

At Musro DJs and live bands play hip-hop, techno- and house music, Indonesian and international pop music, and occasionally indigenous traditional and popular genres like *dangdut*. *Dugem* is commonly associated with DJ'ing and clubbing. In addition, my observations in Solo suggest that the performances of female vocalists in Top 40 bands are inspired by the aesthetics of MTV-mediated video clips, and that *dugem* therefore partly refers to the visual effects that go with these musical events. The rise in the popularity of *dugem* reflects a major aesthetic shift within transnational fields of popular music. In the early 1990s, Tony Langlois argued that '[t]o a larger proportion of the generation now in their teens, it is the DJ rather than the rock and roll guitarist who provided social and music role models' (in Bennett 2001:122). The electric guitar and the long hair have been replaced by Internet and MTV video clips and mp3. As

Keith Howard notes, the influx of music videos has led to 'a vision of pop based on visuals, based on action and dance' (in: De Ceuster 2001).<sup>18</sup>

Local appropriations of these aesthetic forms relate to the reformation of youth subjectivity and sociality, which in turn articulate with co-existing cultural traditions in Solo. *Dugem* is an example of how young people construct new idioms. It is part of a new youth slang that also helps to articulate novel youth identities. These distinct identities are vital to the development of lifestyle-oriented national cultures, not the least of which is expressed in a high number of television soaps, where pop music also plays a vital role. I will argue that these novel cultural forms also inspire the construction of new categories of youth. When I conducted fieldwork in Solo in 1996, ABG was a popular term. Teenagers in Solo said it remained so until about 1999, when it was replaced by the term *anak gaul*. In the Indonesian language, *anak* means child while *gaul* means to be sociable. An *anak gaul* is a child skilful in social interaction, but the concept of *gaul* has also connotations to sexual intercourse (Echols and Shadily 1989:174). An *anak gaul* refers first of all to teenagers who are familiar with the most recent trends in, e.g. music, film, Internet, cellular phones, and who easily socialize with others, including the opposite sex, and who know the language of the youth, called *bahasa gaul*. In short, being *gaul* is to be a modern youth with money, taste and self-confidence.<sup>19</sup> As I attempt to show throughout this chapter, what it means to be 'gaul' is always locally elaborated by particular youth in specific sites and in interaction with a diversifying mediascape, as well as in dialogue with local event organizers and other professionals in the field. The rest of the chapter considers how pop music is involved in such cultural dynamics.

### *Entering the Worlds of Sparkling Lights*

In 1996 Roni's 12 year old brother, named Agus, had already began to fantasise about his future teenage life. He used to stay in his elder brother's

<sup>18</sup> Emma Baulch (2002:223) has persuasively argued that the rather deregulated recording industry in Indonesia has been eclipsed by more regulated media, such as MTV and teen magazines. This situation may explain why Solo youth somewhat confusingly associate *dugem* with both underground club cultures and 'mainstream' pop images.

<sup>19</sup> In my analysis, the term *gaul* has become indexical for a newly evolved taste that culturally defines, or discursively forms, a category of youth that has replaced *remaja*. *Remaja* appears today as a generic term for 'youth', including the mainstream or ordinary teenager. As with 'dugem', the meaning of 'gaul' is a dynamic one since it always has to be realized by particular youth in particular settings in a dialogue with a steadily diversifying mediascape.

bedroom leafing through teen magazines. Once he was eagerly reading 'Hai', I asked him why he read such stuff, and he answered, without even taking his eyes away from the page, that he was 'searching for trends', adding that he was afraid of 'being left behind'. He was frequently seen dancing in his bedroom, which he transformed into a 'disco' by switching off the lights, playing his brother's *House Dance Mix* tapes, and imitating the distinct style of *tripping* by shaking his head and waving with a flashlight in his hand. I assume he was acting out some fantasies generated by his brother's stories about *tripping* and discotheques. Such events were one of many ways Agus was enacting his future position as a 'teen', and he was seemingly longing for the excitements he imagined a life as a teenager would bring with it.

Back then he was somehow taking his first steps into the worlds of sparkling lights. Later, as a high school student Agus began to write a diary about 'my lifestyle', 'my favourite movie', 'watching concert', 'ekspress my soul', 'my first kiss' and so on. The diary was very much about what he perceived to be his own decisive steps towards a great teenage life. It includes a preface where he states that he will never forget the great times of his life as a teenager. It is also a time where he will 'continuously search for his true and genuine self'. It is interesting that he understands the years of one's youth as a special time, as a period where one searches for one's true personality (Gjelstad 2005a). These diary notes reproduce a popular discourse of youthful self-exploration, and what is ethnographically significant about these articulations of youth is the way they contest those representations of youth implicit in Javanese notions of maturity and upbringing. The marginalization of youth implied in traditional Javanese socialization practices seems to accord with a general pattern of denying youth "full social personhood," which only adulthood will bring (James 1995:47). Despite an enduring exclusion of Indonesian youth from adult worlds, pop music helps to reassign the value of youth by conveying images of the ideal youthful life as passionate, amusing and unique. The cultural significance of youth' engagements with popular music in Java as elsewhere in the Malay world is further related to the growing importance of bedrooms as arenas for articulating personal identities.

#### *Popular Music and 'Bedroom Culture'*

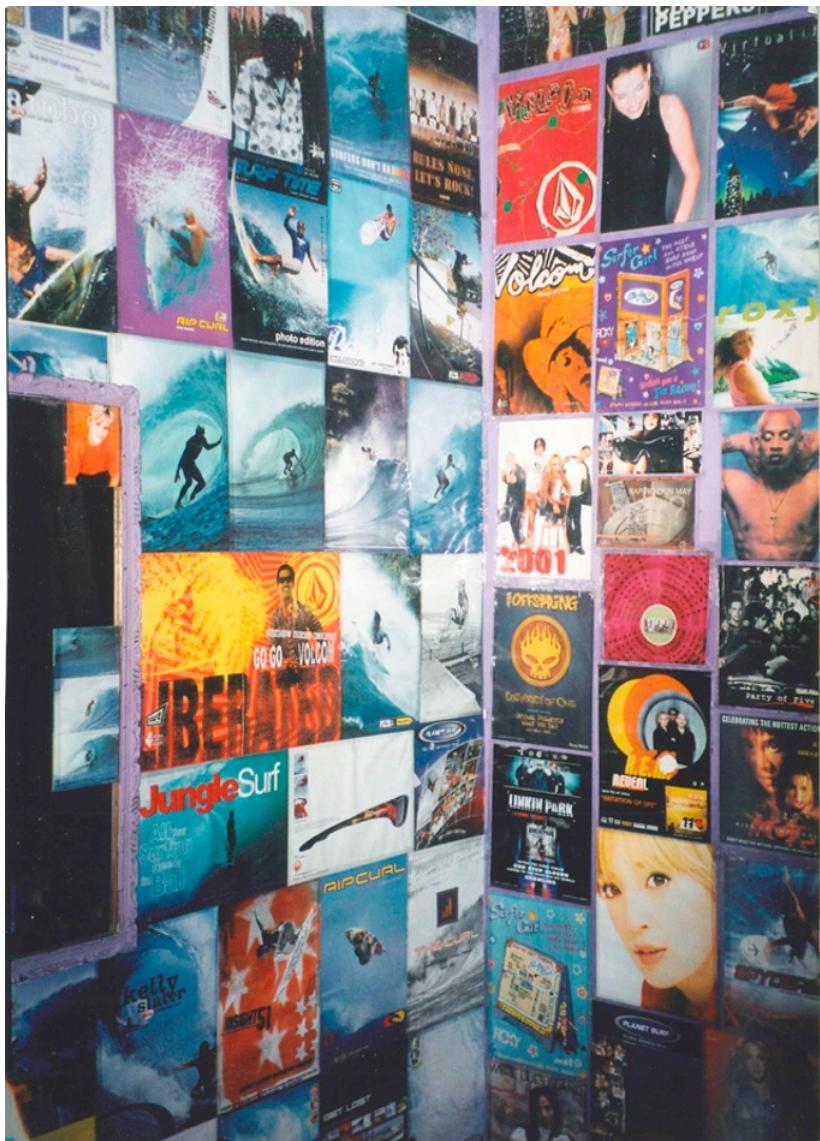
When I met Agus again in 2001 he immediately showed me the bedroom where he was found *tripping* some 5 years ago. Now it had become, in his words, a '*dugem* site' (*tempat dugem*). Full of pride he pointed at his new installation, a wire with blinking light bulbs fastened along the roof lists

and a compact disc hanging from a string in the ceiling, which while rotating, reflects the lamplight in a way resembling the mirror ball and the flashing lights at discothèques and music bars. One of his bedroom walls were covered with surfing- and skating pictures. The rest of the rooms were completely filled with pictures of movie- and pop stars, among them two huge posters of US pop singer Jennifer Lopez. These sparkling images as well as his stereo rack are totally overshadowing his little shelf of textbooks. The iconicity of popular sonic landscapes exhibits exactly the musicality, interactivity, and multiplicity of meanings that are lacking in the authoritarian ethos of Indonesian schooling. By decorating his room as a place for *dugem*, Agus personalises a place that is also distinct and autonomous from the rest of the house.

When Agus and his friends gather in his room, they often play music filled with digital techno-sounds, including strange samplings and remixes,<sup>20</sup> which they truly associated with *dugem*. It is amazing to see their active and corporal engagements with the music, and a salient feature of this cultural production is their visualization of these soundscapes through face mimicry and movements of arms, fingers and legs. I consider their modes of engagement, their selections and manipulations of musical elements, as a further development of the basic principle of cut 'n' paste that dominates contemporary electronic music. The boys will take out some sequences from the music, then simulate and modify it by exaggerating, simplifying or elaborating these sonic images.

The kind of events described above clearly function as exercises for their performances at cafés, where the ability to make funny movements on the dance floor is one of the defining characteristics of the 'funky' teenager. There is thus a constant circulation of elements across sites of cultural production. Sometimes, when the boys have their *dugem* performances in his bedroom, Agus will place himself close to the stereo rack and distribute a typed list of his music collection (which he usually uses to take up orders for his small recording company), and he asks his friends for *requests*, as is common in the cafés when Top 40 bands are playing. He also circulates the drinks menu that he has taken from the Music Room (Musro) at Quality Hotel. They then circulate glasses, pretending they are drinking 'Illusion', the most expensive drinks (200.000 Rp., i.e., about 30 USD), which is made of Vodka, Bacardi, Tequila, Dry Gin, Blue Curacao, Sambuca, Cointreau, and Orange Juice. Through playful cultural practice

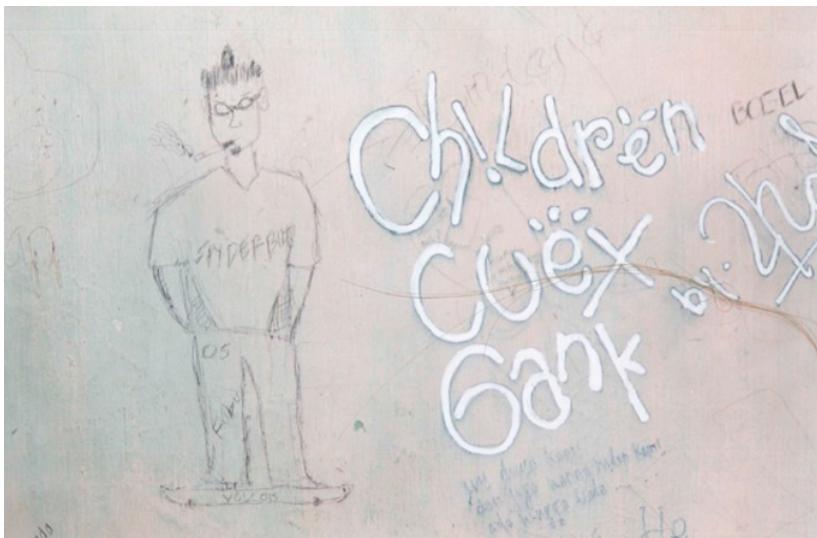
<sup>20</sup> Some of it was illicitly downloaded from the Internet for circulation among networks of acquaintances.



### 7.1. Bedroom of Agus (photo by author).

in the bedroom, the boys are creating cultural identities based on cultural models of cosmopolitan nightlife offered by the local music bar.

The bedroom was also the centre for his small 'recording company'. His personal stereo was plugged into a computer so he could download his favorite music on mp3 files from the Internet, copy them onto CDs or



7.2. Bedroom wall of Agus' younger brother, with a drawing where he and his friends style themselves in skater imagery next to their gang name, an intersection of alternative masculinities (photo by author).

cassettes, and sell them to friends and classmates. The customers could also pick their own favourites from a list he had carefully designed on his personal computer. In addition to emphasising how youth identities and practices develop over time, the point here is that these bedroom practices have to be understood as moments in a wider 'circuit of the production, circulation and consumption of cultural products' (Johnson 1986–1987:46).

As Arun Saldanha (2002:340) has argued, it is exactly by following the informal circuits of youth cultural spaces and practices that one can discover particular ways in which local and global elements are plaited together in the ongoing musical practices of young people. This is what may be the first step in the exploration of what Chun and Rossiter refer to as the 'heterogeneous third space [...] that mediates the competing interests between the local and the global' – the juncture where 'an aesthetic refashioning of traditional and pop music genres emerge' (Chun and Rossiter 2004:5).

The self-decorated and self-expressing bedroom with a lockable door symbolises an increasing cultural autonomy of affluent youth and a parallel generational divide. The bedroom appears as a distinct cultural zone for instance in that Agus himself has written 'Gaul only' on his door. Words

such as ‘cuex’,<sup>21</sup> and ‘top secret’ are also scribbled there. In yet another indication of the importance of the bedroom as a site for the formation of personal identities, he had attached his name card to the door. The cultural space of the bedroom is also sonically marked: The first thing Agus will do when entering the room is to switch on his stereo, and in this sense he also makes his presence audible to family and neighbors.

### *Soundtracks in My Life*

Consumption of popular music is indeed an essential part of the way Agus was colouring his teenage life. In the diary mentioned above, under a heading called ‘soundtracks in my life,’ Agus made a list of 16 songs that had a special meaning to him (April 2000). For every song, he wrote a sentence explaining what made it special. Among his favourites was *Kiss me* with Sixpence None the Richer (and taken from *Dawson’s Creek*, one of Agus’ favourite soap operas), which is associated with a particular romantic happening; ‘my Valentine song from the moment I gave chocolate to Ella, and at the end, she kissed me’. Backstreet Boys’, *As long as you love me* has become his ‘sweet memory’ from the time he got his first love letter. About the song *Kita* by Seila on 7, he writes that this is ‘the favourite song of his school gang’, and adds that it ‘might be said to be our obligatory song’.<sup>22</sup> This last example shows how popular music may become emblems of collective identities (similar to the role of Iwan Fals’ music to the gang Sugaly).

The significance of these accounts lies in how the songs help to create a kind of ‘memory world’ (Halbwachs, in Munn 1995) by providing generalised narrative models of how to become and act like a teenager in relation to particular persons and places. As general templates, the love songs to which Agus refers in his diary structure not only his memories of and relations to particular local girls, but they also familiarize him with a broader figured world of girls and dating. Songs might thus prescribe models for how to, for instance, date a girl and what kind of feelings they should evoke. The pleasures and pains of locally situated dramas influence in turn the meanings of these songs. Such mediations of popular

<sup>21</sup> Cuex is a modification of the word *cuek*, which means being indifferent or ignorant.

<sup>22</sup> Agus successively became part of two other gangs in Solo. The first one was *Durex* (short for *Dunia Remaja Cuex*, translated as ‘the world of indifferent teenagers’). After leaving *Durex* he managed to join a more renowned gang called *CCG* (short for *Children Cuex Gang*). *Cuex* is the *gaul* version of *cuek*, meaning indifference or lack of concern.

music further impinge upon the way youths inhabit, navigate and make sense of their local environments by binding local scenes up with wider cosmopolitan centres through offering novel 'characters, plots, and textual forms' (Appadurai 1996:35).

Elsewhere (Gjelstad 2005a), I have described how Agus, when the diary was filled up with interesting stories from his own sparkling teenage life began to circulate the diary among his schoolmates. When some of them suggested that he should make a film of it he went through the stories in his diary and gave them headlines resembling typical titles of episodes in TV-serials such as *Dawson's Creek*. The film, he says, will become exciting because there will be lots of beautiful girls, luxurious cars, hotels, and of course *dugem*. As part of that project he begins to attach a soundtrack to some of the episodes. This is an example of mutual encompassment of popular songs and memorable moments framed by the conventions of televised drama. In the diary he also makes a list of the four rich, pretty and famous girls in Solo whom he frequently is hanging out with, and who, he says, 'are colouring my life and made my life rich with pretty women'. To each of these he has dedicated what he explicitly terms a 'memory song', and one of these is *Lady Marmalade* by the MTV diva Christina Aguilera. A further indication of his tying up of local personalities with global pop icons is that he downloaded pictures of Britney Spears and Christina Aguilera in navel-bearing tops and placed them side by side with his diary presentation of two of his famed acquaintances. There are significant relations here between Agus' media practices and his socializing with local girls.

Another example of the importance of popular music for the production of new forms of subjectivity is found at the end of Agus' diary, where he – in a mix of formal and informal Indonesian language<sup>23</sup> – thanks not only God, his family and his *dugem* friends for what they have meant to him, but he also wants to thank MTV for having made him 'feel self-confident and funky' (*merasa pd dan funky*). He also feels a need to thank *Dawson's Creek*, the American TV-drama, because the programs often have made his life more 'energetic', and for having introduced him to the 'beauty in the world'. These mass-mediated worlds offer what may be

<sup>23</sup> The Indonesian language used in this diary contrasts sharply with formal language of education and politics. The former version is influenced by youth slang (e.g. *bahasa gaul*) as well as interspersed with an English vocabulary. The choice of Indonesian – rather than Low Javanese (*ngoko*) – as the language of intimacy, is significant in light of Siegel's thesis about the relation of youth and language mentioned in the introduction to this chapter.

called 'scripts for possible lives' as well as new 'resources for experiments with self-making' (Appadurai 1996:3).

Agus' assertion that mass-mediated popular forms have enriched his life and made him more self-confident (*pd* or *pede* from *percaya diri*, 'self confidence') is indicative of the importance of the cultural phenomenon of *pede* for the formation of youth subjectivities in Solo. In a highly hierarchical society it is significant that the younger generations embrace images of the autonomous person in control of the situation, images deriving from a range of mass-mediated popular forms, including pop music. The cases above thus epitomise the intervention of music industries in young people's experiences and understandings of their lives as teens. Yet, what it means to be a modern youth is always locally explored and negotiated in relations with significant others. In his diary, under the heading *dunia gemerlap*, Agus recollects his first encounter with the night life. In a sharp contrast to his elder brother Roni, Agus has from early childhood had a close relationship to his mother, who often hangs out at hotel bars. The following extract reveals how she influenced his entry into the worlds of sparkling lights:

This night I was about to fall asleep when I heard the sweet voice of my mother's calling. I saw she had already prepared herself for an evening with friends at a pub, as she often does after having worked all day... But this day was different, my mother asked me to go with her. At that time I was in the third grade at junior high school (SMP). I was invited to Hotel Novotel for a Top 40 music program targeted for young people and this was the first time I encountered what is called 'dunia gemerlap'.

The following paragraph shows how he immediately felt attracted to an aesthetics associated with *dugem*:

After I went there I started to feel a different atmosphere, and I just became aware that I had entered what is called night-life (*dunia malam*). To be honest, I felt comfortable there, and after that moment, every Saturday night, I have been searching for this kind of world. A few days later two friends of mine visited my house. They invited me to Dugem at Music Room at Quality Hotel, which is more often known as MUSRO. I agreed with their new way of spending the Saturday night. Later, night after night, and not only Saturday night, I spend my nights going 'cafe to café' and I have explored almost all the cafés in Solo. Finally, I got more and more friends with the same hobby and then we made a *dugem* community (*komunitas anak anak dugem*).

As these diary notes reveal, musical practices are embedded in broader dynamics of lifestyle-, identity-, and network formation. In the next paragraph Agus emphasises he and his friends' role in pioneering *dugem* at the local youth scene:

At that time the cafés in Solo was not so lively as today, it might be said that it was we who pioneered the young people in Solo to spend the Saturday nights at cafés, afterwards, at every hang-out I often heard the words 'Musro, dugem'. This caused a new spirit to again search for a nightlife that was crazier than the clubs in Solo. Many in our community received information that the nightlife outside Solo was more hot, wild, and courageous than the clubs in Solo. Consequently, we went outside town to explore all the clubs all over the island of Java, beginning with Safir Club at Ambarukmo Hotel in Yogyakarta and as far as Astro Cafe in Semarang. At that time I never felt satisfied; to the contrary, 24 hours really felt too short, and the effects of nightlife such as glamorous lifestyles, social freedom and casual sex (*gaya glamour, pergaulan bebas dan free sex*) do not leave me even though I now is about to leave *dunia gemerlap*.

Once I discussed with Agus my experiences in 1996 with Sugaly and *tripping*, he insisted that Solo youths at that time were 'not yet funky'. In contrast to the new cafés, Agus and his friends regarded the discotheques in Solo as shabby and rather low class.<sup>24</sup> Whereas Roni and his Sugaly friends in 1996 regarded tripping and the discotheques as rather trendy and different from the sort of places described in the song 'Sugaly', Agus and his friends tend to equate the discotheques with these low-class centres. Referring to the last sentence of the diary notes quoted above, these places seems to lack the glamour of what local youth now refer to as a *borju* lifestyle.<sup>25</sup> That Musro and the lifestyle of the people there were at the apex of a local hierarchy of youth cultural practices he got confirmed when the words Musro and *dugem* were to be heard in every hangout.

#### *Glimpses from the Local Dugem Scene*

In addition to Musro, Agus and his friends frequented a few other cafés in Solo featuring live bands playing Top 40 music. The bands are constantly interacting with the taste of their audiences. Female singers in sensual black shorts and tops are teasing their predominantly male audience, for instance, by singing out *I'm so horny, horny, horny*, the refrain of the song *Horny* by DJ Mousse T. (with Hot 'n' Juicy). Another popular song is Crazytown's

<sup>24</sup> Agus himself distinguishes between *dugem* and *tripping*, referring to the latter when describing his visits to discothèques, which usually took place after the cafés closed.

<sup>25</sup> This cosmopolitanisation of the music-oriented youth cultures in Solo certainly helps to legitimate, in cultural terms, the increasing wealth of indigenous Indonesians (see Heryanto 1999 and Baulch 2002). In my PhD dissertation (2009) I describe how Agus's classmates and neighbours openly contest the value of being *borju*, which in turn influences his own behaviour and reflection.

*Butterfly*, a title that plays on a renowned brand of Ecstasy pills with a butterfly imprint on it. *Dugem* and *butterfly* are concepts that often go together in youth talk. Some of Agus' *dugem* friends explained that the use of the drug butterfly makes one 'comes closer to the music', join in easier socially, and become more emotional.

Agus' new friends, what he calls his '*dugem* community', are all from rather upper-class families. They carry mobile phones, dress in cloths from a popular skateboard brand, and many of them have expensive cars as well. Their lifestyle practices are influenced by street and surf cultures, which in Solo are most significantly promoted by Planet Surf. This is the largest outlet of surf-, skate-, and streetwear in the city, promoting itself as 'The Next Generation Shop'. This fancy, highly decorated shop is fully stuffed with international brands, and here youth can hear the latest music hits as well as see videos showing pictures from popular surfing paradises all day long. Agus and his friends made frequent visits to this place, which obviously influenced their visual and sonic definitions of what it means to be *gaul*. This aesthetic also shares a pattern with that found in the cafés and music bars they regularly visit in Solo and in the neighbouring cities of Yogyakarta and Semarang.

When these boys go *dugem* at cafés, they request their favourite songs from the live band by filling out a form. The request sheets distributed at the tables do not only serve to modify the Top 40 repertoires and thus bring young people's taste more effectively into the orbit of popular music, but the presence of requests also gives these youth a feeling of being co-producers of the soundscape. Although less agentive than in their bedrooms, their practices at cafés and music bars inspire their musical practices at home.

The following observations from a visit I made with Agus and his friends to Musro at Quality Hotel during my last fieldwork (January 2005) reveal some characteristic aspects of *dugem* (and also some later changes in the scene). The first part of the program was much like what it used to be some years back, with a popular band, Delapan Band, from Bandung playing Top 40 music. One male and two female vocalists lead the show. The male vocalist wore black leather trousers and two female vocalists wore small black short pants (revealing a flap of their buttock), black boots, black top, with silver belts and silver chains. Their movements were quite sensual, occasionally simulating a striptease. The vocalists regularly came down across the dance floor inviting the guests, mostly young men, to dance with them or to sing along. The band played a mix of Western and Indonesian pop and rap – occasionally a dangdut song that always

helped to energize the audience. As is common at such events, they also received requests from the audience.

After the first set, the MC (Master of Ceremony) introduced some games with prizes donated by the main sponsors of the event. Then he screamed to the audience, announcing a 'hot hot hot sexy dance' and asked the crowd to welcome the 'Go-Go-Girls'.<sup>26</sup> Six girls entered the dance floor wearing only bikinis with their waists partly enveloped by a small towel, which they soon began to remove in a most seductive manner. Destiny Child's 'I loose my breath' blasted through the sound system, and the girls performed a dance that was actually inspired by the choreography found on the video clip to that popular song. All the guests had now gathered close to the stage. The Go-Go Girls were dancing daringly while touching vital body parts, bending their bodies down to the floor, jumping upon the speakers, and then sliding down with spread legs. Close to the stage, there was a swing pole and they took turns twisting and spinning around the pole.

After the session, Agus talked to one of the go-go girls, who was an acquaintance of a friend of his, and the following days he received numerous SMSs from her. He informed me that she was studying at a university in Yogyakarta, whereas most of the other dancers were high school students. Agus', explanation for their willingness to perform in this rather controversial manner was that they just enjoyed dancing and the glamour, and that they really admire Britney Spears and similar pop celebrities.<sup>27</sup> This not merely suggests the influence of the MTV-mediated female pop stars, but also how groups of urban Javanese teens strive to localise global trends and thus become themselves producers of popular youth culture. This certainly occurred in close dialogue with the corporate strategies of managers and event organizers.

After the 'go-go performance', the MC introduced DJ Arya Positiva. This Saturday night was one of the rare events in Solo where the DJ actually scratched vinyl records rather than playing and remixing CDs on a mixer board. When the DJ was about to fade out his last piece, the drummer of

<sup>26</sup> While Britney Spears, Christina Aguilera, Avril Lavigne, Jennifer Lopez and other MTV celebs, in the footsteps of Madonna, certainly inspire female youth in Solo, most Solo girls are critical of these local go-go girls. More research should be done on how various groups of teenagers respond to such images of female agency.

<sup>27</sup> Another likely source of inspiration is the video clips accompanying Christina Aguilera's song *Dirrry* from her album *Stripped*. Although the Indonesian censorship committee banned this music video, many teens in Solo downloaded it from the Internet. Dressed in a miniskirt and a bikini top, the pop diva performs an erotic dance whose movements incessantly reveal her little red pants. As the title of her album suggests, the show clearly contains elements of stripping.

Delapan Band began to jam along the deep bass lines of the techno beat. After a lengthy solo session, the Go-Go Girls came back on stage and tried to fall into the groove with their rhythmic movements – this time with an even more seductive repertoire. The most daring ones wrapped their legs around the pole and then leaned backward. Some of the girls also started teasing each other, followed by some bumping and grinding movements. When the band entered the stage for the last set, the female vocalists also incorporated some easy pole-dance work into their performance.

The relationship between audience and performers is an important dimension of the dynamic unfolding of music-oriented youth cultures in Solo. To that aspect of musical production we must add the work of managers (of bands, models and dancers), event organizers, local production companies, sponsors, and persons in charge of local bars and hotels to create new nightlife concepts, such as the one described above. This evening at Musro had several features that have become part of a steady transforming youth scene. Firstly, sexy dancing and fashion shows have become a common part of many events in Solo. Secondly, the DJ has become a central figure. The managers and event organisers in Solo look in turn to larger neighbouring cities such as Yogyakarta and Bandung for inspiration. These organisational structures are significant aspects of the development of the local youth scene as well as of the discursive formation of 'youth' (Gjelstad 2013).

#### *Contesting Dugem: Rave Parties and DIY-Cultures in Solo*

In 2003, Agus and his friends informed me that *dugem* and hanging out at cafés now was a bit outdated, and that the current trend in Jakarta was huge outdoor rave parties as well as private parties in villas. While Musro and some of the cafés in fact remained popular in 2005, I could observe several changes in the youth and music scene when I returned to Solo for a short follow-up fieldwork that year. Many of these innovations are created by an *event organizer*, which has become an increasingly important profession in urban Indonesia. In cooperation with sponsors and managers they are constantly developing new concepts in dialogue with the local markets which they themselves strive to enlarge (Gjelstad 2013).

Rave Parties are among the most spectacular of such events. The first one in Solo was arranged at Stadion Manahan in September 2004, and a second one was held at Hotel Lor In. The former staged five national DJs, as well as 'sexy dance'. Not surprisingly Agus and his friends joined the

party, and Agus also made a documentary film of the event, which became part of his small recording business. For a long time Agus has dreamt about becoming a film director like his TV-soap hero Dawson Leery (Gjelstad 2005a). Agus also made documentaries of rave parties at Kaliurang, a hill resort some twenty kilometres north of Yogyakarta, as well as at Queen of the South Hotel & Resort at Parangtritis. The Go-Go Girls described in the section above performed at the rave party in Kaliurang too. This performance occupied a central place in several of Agus documentary films. By re-producing the cultural productions of these sexy dancers, they became part of the glitzy life that he proudly presents as his own in the videos. The local celebrities that personify the cultural worlds of MTV-stars are no longer confined to his diary and bedrooms walls, but have now become available in a more up-dated medium and to a larger audience.

Agus has now also gained a position as a free-lance graphic designer and an *event organizer* in a local production house despite lacking formal training in the field. At daytime he studies Public relations at the local state university, but most evenings he is now busy designing posters, billboards, stickers and advertisement strips for new arrangements targeting youth. These arrangements were produced in cooperation with the local marketing office of the cigarette brand Sampoerna Mild Live. Through these practices, Agus managed to take a step further in the direction of creating a more professional role out of his hobby, including advancing from that of being an ordinary guest at cafés and music bars to becoming a co-organizer of the events taking place there. At one point during my last fieldwork trip he had started to fit up a multi-media studio in a vacant room adjacent to his bedroom. Its furnishing was inspired by the DIY-design culture of the new *distro*.

The sudden rise in the popularity of *distro*, a shorting of distribution store, is related to another significant shift in Indonesian youth culture. This is a reorientation from hyper-commercialised brands such as those sold at Planet Surf in Solo to that of independent designers making t-shirts in small numbers (thus regarded as unique pieces) and distributing them at small shops. The designer, like the DJ, has become a new prominent kind of artist on the Indonesian youth scene. A distro is typically a modestly equipped locale and the initial capital requirement is accordingly low. Besides, the retailers usually need not invest in a large stock of goods since most designers are happy about having their pieces stored there for free. The solidarity among designers and distributors is also said to be high. They explicitly distance themselves from factory outlets and mass

products and their business relies largely on extensive networks of acquaintances and friendship.<sup>28</sup>

As with the promotion of rave parties at rather isolated places outside town, the marketing of indie merchandises is usually based on word of mouth and by the circulation of stickers. The *distro* are run by people who are regarded as idealistic and who are reacting against the big international brands such as Billabong and Volcom. And teenagers in Solo tell me that 'Planet Surf' is not trendy anymore. The *distro* are centres of alternative cultures such as break-dance, skating, trash- and punk musicians. The designers and *distro* assistants are seen as creative and idealistic people who resist the cafés and *dugem* as well as Top 40 music. They rather prefer to hang out at the traditional snack bar or at the *distro* itself. These shops also sell 'indie' label records, magazines as well as a wide range of accessories, including those specifically targeted for punks, skaters, and other local youth scenes. The *distro* provides these practitioners with objects symbolising their particular lifestyles.

The spread of new *indie* cultures of which the *distro* functions as an important node entails contradictory processes. On the one hand, it represents an ideology countering the highly commercialised field of music, media, and clothing products. On the other hand, it quickly becomes co-opted by larger companies. Local bands on the rise sign up with larger recording companies, and local skating heroes may eventually become sponsored by international skate-wear brands. In addition, high school students are prone to appropriate the 'indie' movements as just another trend, as a fad, and not for any idealistic reasons. This actualizes the position taken in this chapter that popular cultures represent important sites for negotiating social realities. Correspondingly, the multi-layered subjectivities of youth are formed within 'multiple imaginary terrains that contest, support or ignore one another' (Chun and Rossiter 2004:3). One pertinent question now is how teenagers' appropriations of various *indie*-movements will influence the creation of new identities and categories of Indonesian youth.

### *Conclusion*

This chapter has showed that the uses of popular music are significant for the formation of young people's agency, and the ways in which youth

<sup>28</sup> Two newspaper articles confirm and expand the picture provided by my informants in Solo: '*Dari indie jadi sakti*' (*Kompas*, 22.08.2003) and '*Pilih baju lebaran di FO atau distro?*' (*Kompas*, 07.11.2004).

conceptualize personhood and sociality. The importance of the study lies in the fact that we still lack research dealing with the diverse interpretations and uses of popular music among localized networks of ordinary youth living in rapidly transforming Malay worlds. A study of popular music and youth cultures in a former Javanese court city, now highly integrated in a national and transnational political economy, is interesting since contemporary youths' ideals of explicitly expressing their emotions, needs and personalities in many ways break with deeply grounded Javanese conceptions of respect, etiquette, seniority and hierarchy (C. Geertz 1960; Siegel 1986).

The style of the gang I discuss in the first part of the chapter clearly represents such a break. This is already apparent in the name they had invented for the gang, Sugaly, which means a 'bunch of savage children'. Geertz's notes on the ambiguity of youths' orientations to the 'West' seems still to be prevalent, which for instance was expressed in the category of youth dominant at the time of my fieldwork in 1996. This term, *Anak Baru Gede* (ABG), literally means a 'child just grown up' (Sen and Hill 2000:49), and is of a rather ironical character. It is my argument here that popular music plays an essential role in the varying ways and means whereby localized youth internalise and recontextualize the elements and imagery structures of youth culture. The Sugaly boys had appropriated the title of one of Iwan Fals' songs as the name of their gang. Their engagements with his music did also influence their moral framing of their rising involvements in a range of youth cultural practice, such as dancing to the electronic sound of 'house' (locally known as 'tripping'), which became popular at Solo discothèques in the mid-90s. I also contend that the local semantics of *tripping* articulated with undercurrents of Javanese traditions emphasising the value of etiquette and self-control.

The second part of this chapter is an ethnographic portrayal of a music-oriented cultural field that evolved in urban places on Java in the late 1990s. This new cultural form is termed *dugem*, short for *dunia gemerlap*, which can be translated as 'a world of sparkling lights'. It refers to the use of spot lights and other visual effects that goes with the music. 'Dugem' is a multivocal and shifting term. While it was primarily associated with electronic music presented by DJs at major music bars, it now commonly refers to the live music performed by Indonesian bands at the many cafés that mushroomed in Solo in the late 1990s. These performances are inspired by the aesthetics of MTV-mediated video clips, but the evolution of the local youth scene is as well influenced by local networks of event organizers and entertainment centres. I further show the significance of

local tastemakers in the circulation of popular music across local arenas. The local *dugem* community that I describe in this chapter is an example of a music-oriented youth cultural practice that is closely associated with the cosmopolitanisation of Solo and the emergence of a consumer-oriented national culture. From the cafés my young informants bring the music and its cosmopolitan atmosphere back into their private bedrooms. The taste and competence acquired in these informal spaces are then fed back into the cafés by way of dance performances and by requesting their favourite songs from local and national Top 40 bands.

This development of an aesthetic shaped in a discourse of personal preferences represents a radical break from the aesthetic regimes of Javanese high cultures. James Siegel (1986:229) makes the point that *karawitan* (traditional Javanese court music) is seen as embodying cosmological images to which the individual could tune itself into, but where it is irrelevant whether the listener likes the sounds or not. Although Siegel's (1986) reifications of 'Java' is problematic, I find it fruitful to contrast high Javanese aesthetic regimes with how popular music encourages Solo teenagers to playfully explore new textures and colours of their personality by offering a language for articulating the uniqueness of their selves.

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## CHAPTER EIGHT

### SEDUCTIVE PLEASURES, ELUDING SUBJECTIVITIES: SOME THOUGHTS ON *DANGDUT*'S AMBIGUOUS IDENTITY

Bettina David

#### *Introduction*

The Indonesian popular music genre called *dangdut*, a unique hybrid mixture of mainly Western, Indian and Malay musical elements, has long been associated with the lower classes and cheap escapist, often highly sexualised, entertainment (Frederick 1982; Pioquinto 1995; Browne 2000; Wallach 2008; Weintraub 2010).<sup>1</sup> In the 1990s, *dangdut* was increasingly appropriated by the elite, leading to media discourses of it as a 'very very Indonesian'<sup>2</sup> music. There was even speculation about its potential for 'going international'.<sup>3</sup> Yet, in addition to this optimistic discourse, both in late New Order Indonesia and – even fiercer – in the post-Suharto era, there have been continuous debates about *dangdut*'s 'appropriate' form, particularly with regard to the erotic dancing styles typical of the performance of the female singers. While Rhoma Irama, with his populist Islamic *dangdut* style, often called *dangdut dakwah* (Islamic proselyting *dangdut*), may during the New Order have been the established *raja dangdut* or 'king of *dangdut*', it is in fact the vulgar eroticism of many lower class *kampung*<sup>4</sup>-style *dangdut* shows that gives rise to most Indonesians' associations and fantasies about the genre. There seems to be no neutral position with regard to *dangdut*: Indonesians tend to either love it (usually the lower classes) or despise it (the middle classes and the elite) as something embarrassingly *kampungan* – that is, 'cheap' and 'low-class'.

<sup>1</sup> This chapter is based on a paper that was written for the 2003 KITLV international workshop 'Southeast Asian Pop Music in a Comparative Perspective'; it was slightly updated and partly revised in early 2013. I am grateful to Bart Barendregt and Jan van der Putten for their helpful comments on earlier versions of this chapter. Its remaining shortcomings are of course wholly mine.

<sup>2</sup> In the words of former State Ministry Moerdiono, cited in Simatupang (1996:58).

<sup>3</sup> See, for example, the interview with senior female singer Camelia Malik (2000).

<sup>4</sup> *Kampung* means village or a poor, semi-rural village-like area in a town or city.

From a more Islamic perspective, particularly the low-class, erotic performances by female singers may even be considered to be *haram* (forbidden by Islam), and be campaigned against, as happened with the East Javanese singer-dancer Inul whose (in)famous 'drilling' (*ngebor*) buttocks gained international notoriety – one of the rare instances when contemporary Indonesian popular culture attracted brief global attention as some kind of exotic sensation.<sup>5</sup>

In this chapter, I offer some general thoughts about the socially mediated cultural aesthetics that may be at work in making *dangdut* such a pleasure to its fans, and at the same time such a contested subject in the official public sphere of both late New Order Indonesia and the first decade after its demise in 1998. I suggest that some of the most distinctive pleasures *dangdut* offers might be related to multiple contradictions inherent in its social constitution. *Dangdut's* prominent inclusive character, not only as a hybrid musical genre, but also socially as a strong status-levelling force, as well as the ambiguity and multiple meanings of its lyrics, performances and consumption practices have been explored before (Wallach 2008; Weintraub 2010; see also Wallach in this volume). Here I take a closer look at the euphoria-inducing psychodynamics of *dangdut* that, as I suggest, constitute a subjectivity 'tainted' by a strong 'tolerance of ambiguity' (Bauer 2011). In so doing I hope to offer some additional ideas about *dangdut's* social positioning as an ideologically contested object of middle class and elite anxieties.

In the first part, the main focus is on the song lyrics and their relationship to common consumption practices. I suggest that it might be precisely the interplay of often contradictory significations at the levels of discursive symbolism (the lyrics) on the one hand, and presentational symbolism<sup>6</sup> (the music, rhythm and dance, that is, the non-verbal dimensions of the performance) on the other hand, that is crucial to our understanding of some aspects of its socio-cultural meaning. The emphasis here is especially on the sad lyrics, as I try to understand why they can be danced to with the dream-like pleasure typical of *dangdut* dancing (*joget* or *goyang*). I believe that the pleasures (or 'dangers') of *dangdut* performances derive precisely from these contrasting levels of signification enacted in performance by the typically female singer and the predominantly male

<sup>5</sup> For detailed accounts and analyses of the 'Inul controversy', see Heryanto (2008) and Weintraub (2008).

<sup>6</sup> I borrow the terms 'discursive symbolism' and 'presentational symbolism' from Langer's (1957) philosophy of symbolic forms.

dancing audience: the interplay of the rational, verbal dimension of the song lyrics and the corporeal-rhythmic dimension of non-verbal sensuality.

In the concluding part, I propose that *dangdut's* dangerously seductive powers vis-à-vis both New Order developmental discourses as well as current Islamic discourses might be related to highly ambiguous feelings about a surrender to the power of an inclusive femininity. This may account for *dangdut's* characteristic, highly populist and status-leveling force, constituting a *communitas* of shared Indonesian-ness that nevertheless fails to integrate the middle and upper classes (Wallach 2008). In contrast to Islam, which also offers a shared *communitas*, *dangdut's* contested idiom of subjectivity has so far not been able to constitute an idealized vision of a modern Indonesian subject that is able to actively shape the postcolonial nation-state and whose identity is recognized globally.

But first, in order to highlight some distinctive features that characterize *dangdut* and that will be elaborated on in the analysis that follows, I will briefly compare *dangdut* with two similar musical genres, Turkish *arabesk* and Algeria's *raï*.

### Dangdut in Cross-Cultural Perspective

*Dangdut* is a local part of the global mass-mediated pop music industry. Musically influenced by popular Malay tunes and Hindi film songs, and later by Western pop and rock music, its development has been closely related to the emerging entertainment and electronic mass media industry in post-colonial Indonesia.<sup>7</sup> In many ways *dangdut's* social and musical background is comparable to two similar non-Western hybrid popular music styles: Algeria's *raï* and Turkey's *arabesk*. Both of these are hybrid in musical terms, that is, they incorporate influences of Western pop music as well as various indigenous musical traditions and recently, like *dangdut*, increasingly influences from other Non-Western popular musical styles such as Latin American music. They are associated mostly with the lower classes and the urban poor, exist alongside local pop music genres which are 'Western' in musical idiom (like *pop Indonesia*), and are part of the urban lifestyle of the educated middle and upper classes. Like *dangdut*, both *raï* and *arabesk* are pop music genres of Muslim societies.

<sup>7</sup> For an account of the historical development of *dangdut* and the various musical influences incorporated into this genre, see Frederick (1982) and Weintraub (2010). David (2008) refers to the influence of Bollywood film songs on *dangdut*.

My comparison will focus on two aspects in *raï* and *arabesk*: the content of the song lyrics and consumption practices.

### *Song Lyrics*

In terms of lyrics, both *raï* and *arabesk* convey a strongly 'male' point of view. They can be characterized as 'male' pop music styles, as most of the singers and stars are male, and the lyrics they sing speak from a distinctly 'male' perspective. *Rai* lyrics are mostly about 'the male spheres of pleasure, alcohol and women' (Schade-Poulsen 1995:91), and often also about 'available' women in bars and relationships with them in the 'asocial' woods, i.e. a terrain symbolically opposed to the ordered world of the village. Schade-Poulsen (1995:95) observes that

[I]listening to *raï* with the family poses major problems. The simple evocation of the woods, drinking, women that drink, and even of *raï* itself, creates embarrassment in many families.

In contrast to this, the possible embarrassment caused by speaking about or listening to *dangdut* is strongly related to class issues. In the urban lower classes, it may be enjoyed in domestic contexts by the whole family without any embarrassment at all, grannies spontaneously dancing along to the music with their grandchildren (see Wallach in this volume). At the height of the Inul craze, it was not uncommon to see veiled women cheering enthusiastically at toddler girls trying to 'drill' their buttocks like Inul.

*Arabesk* is also associated with these 'male spheres of pleasure' with alcohol being one of the central topoi of the lyrics. Stokes (1992:148) writes:

In *arabesk* lyrics, the emphasis is upon alcohol as a refuge and consolation, its consumption an act of simultaneous self-gratification and self-destruction.

The themes of sexuality and alcohol are part of the wider discourse of love in these lyrics. Yet, it is interesting to note that it is the dark side of love that is explored most deeply in *raï* and *arabesk* lyrics. In *raï*, the predominant notion of love is 'a relationship which basically gives great pain to the man involved [...]' (Schade-Poulsen 1995:98). *Arabesk* explores themes of grief, separation, loneliness, and alienation (Stokes 1992:128). Stokes (1992:13) speaks of an '*impotent pathos*' in *arabesk* lyrics:

[the] dominant images associated with the genre, in films, lyrics, and the remarkable personalities of the singers, are [...] images of a peculiarly emasculated manhood [...].

A similar ‘impotent pathos’ can indeed be found in many *dangdut* songs sung by male singers, and many songs are about lost or betrayed love, leaving the male lyrical persona alone and helpless in his sadness and fatalist agony.<sup>8</sup> Songs like these are often accompanied by rather pathetic gestures and tragic facial expressions in video clips. Yet surprisingly, there seem to be no songs in which the male singer explicitly links his grief and alienation with the pleasures of alcohol as a refuge, for example by praising alcohol’s faithfulness in contrast to the loved one who has gone, or in a fatalist acceptance of both the pleasures and the self-destruction it brings in even further isolating the man from the social world.<sup>9</sup> Seen from an intimate male perspective, alcohol is definitely not a common subject of *dangdut* lyrics.

This is interesting, not only because alcohol is quite commonly consumed at live outdoor *dangdut* concerts, but also because alcoholism as a stereotypical male shortcoming features quite prominently in *dangdut* songs sung by female singers. One of the best-known songs here is perhaps Cucu Cahyati’s *Mabuk dan judi* (Drunkenness and gambling) from the early 1990s. In this song, the singer complains in an up-front way about her lover/husband-to-be being drunk again with his friends and gambling with them, and she tells him she will leave him if he doesn’t change and becomes a dependable man. The complaint about a man who lets himself go and avoids taking responsibility for his actions is a common *topos* in the songs of female singers. There is quite a list of stereotypical bad male characteristics like alcoholism and gambling, laziness, irresponsibility, daydreaming, endless womanising, and even physical abuse/domestic violence, and the female voice in these lyrics can be at times quite accusing and aggressive.<sup>10</sup> In the male songs, however, the complaints about women remain relatively vague and are even interchangeable with those female songs in which the singer complains about money and status being more important to her (ex-)lover than love and faithfulness, not to mention the abundant laments over betrayal and unfaithfulness that are common in both male and female songs.

<sup>8</sup> For example, in Meggy Z.’s *Merana* (Ailing): ‘I tried to make my heart forget the first love [...], my wounded heart now hurts even more, its mourning will never ease, it leaves me in this ailing state now, without any power to chase away the sadness and misery’.

<sup>9</sup> There is, to be sure, a song by Rhoma Irama about the dangers of alcohol and drugs, *Mirasantika*, but its lyrics convey nothing of the very intimate, private perspective of typical *arabesk* songs, and rather speak from a moralist meta-position.

<sup>10</sup> For example in songs during the 1990s, on womanizing husbands *Cinta tak seperti gaun* (Love is not like a gown), by Yulia Citra; on the abusive husband/lover *Kejam* (Cruel) by Elvy Sukaesih.

However, in some female songs like Itje Trisnawati's hit song of the early 1990s, *Duh engkang* (Oh my husband), the woman even reminds the man of his social duties, of God, and what it means to be an adult man and a responsible member of society. Thus, in the context of the song narrative, the female voice at times speaks to the man from the moral position of a 'civilizing' authority, representing the norms of the social world and invoking them against the threat posed by male self-indulgent irresponsibility.

Moreover, in *dangdut*'s gender discourse the male invoked by some song lyrics not only tends to be unfaithful and irresponsible, there is interestingly also the topos of the missing male, like in such 1990s songs as Iis Dahlia's *Pengantin palsu* (False bridegroom), in which the bridegroom doesn't show up at his own wedding, or disappears on the wedding night as he does in Cucu Cahyati's *Seprei pengantin* (Wedding bed sheet), or is taken away by the police at his wedding because he is, as it turns out, a wanted criminal (*Aib* [Disgrace] by Ikke Nurjanah). Thus, the male either fails to live up to social and intimate expectations, or is at times completely missing.

It is intriguing to note, therefore, that in *dangdut* lyrics far more stereotyped criticism seems to be voiced against men than against women. This rather strong emphasis on a female point of view, which is reinforced by the fact that far more songs are sung by females than by males, is interesting not just in cross-cultural comparison. In contrast to the hegemonic official discourse of New Order Indonesia that tended to downplay or silence female voices (Sen 1993, 1994; Sunindyo 1993), the discourse of many *dangdut* lyrics is thus clearly informed by popular, 'unofficial' gender constructions widely known in the Malay archipelago. These constructions have been termed 'practical' by Peletz, as they are oriented on the practical realities of everyday life and on 'getting things done' (Peletz 1996:4; see also Brenner 1998). In these 'practical' gender constructions, men are held to be 'less responsible and less trustworthy than women, both with regard to managing house-hold resources, and in terms of honouring basic social obligations associated with marriage and kinship as a whole' (Peletz 1996:4). This alleged male tendency towards familial and social irresponsibility is indeed a typical subject of female *dangdut* lamentations. In *dangdut* song narratives, the woman quite often 'speaks', and far from being silenced, she complains about her suffering, about male double standards, or even about male absence, often using grotesque, highly exaggerated images.

### *Consumption Practices*

Now what do people do with these lyrics? The obvious contradiction between often sad and fatalistic lyrics, or even lyrics that point toward the male as being responsible for the suffering of the female lyrical persona, and the blissful dancing to these songs by the usually male audience at live shows has been noted by Wallach (2008) and Weintraub (2010). However, in order to see *dangdut's* distinctive characteristics regarding consumption more clearly, let us first take another short comparative look at common consumption practices of *arabesk* and *raï*.

According to common opinion, in both *arabesk* and *raï* the lyrics are central to the pleasure one gains from listening to these styles. *Rai* fans usually emphasize: 'When I hear the singer, it is as if I hear my own story' (cited in Schade-Poulsen 1995:88). Similarly for *arabesk*: 'When people talk about *arabesk* they do so in terms of the lyrics of the songs [...]' (Stokes 1992:133). The lyrics are explicitly referred to in intimate, private discourses of love and emotions. As Stokes (1992:129) notes: 'Arabesk is used [...] as a mode of self-representation, enabling people to talk about themselves to other people.' People consciously identify with the lyrics and cite them to express their inner selves in intimate moments.

This cannot be said to the same extent of *dangdut* as there seems to be a rather ambivalent response to the lyrics: media discourses as well as *dangdut* fans from the lower classes argue that the sad, fatalistic lyrics represent the feelings and experiences of the poor, their daily hardships and powerlessness in the face of highly unjust social conditions. For example, the women's magazine *Sarinah* told its readers in 1992: 'Dangdut [...] is loved by the lower classes because it touches as well as represents the people who feel that it is their fate expressed in the sad lyrics.'<sup>11</sup> (*Sarinah* 1992:3). However, in contrast to common social usage of *arabesk* and *raï*, rather than providing an idiom of serious, intimate discourses about love and emotions – that is, something not to just laugh about, but rather to be taken seriously in all its depth –, *dangdut* seems to be used more as a collective idiom to alleviate stress by playfully teasing each other or making rather (self-)ironic or mocking references to popular *dangdut* songs. This social usage seems to be linked to the strong cultural expectation of keeping informal social intercourse generally cheerful and gay. *Dangdut* is not so much used as a language to express one's deep

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<sup>11</sup> All translations from Indonesian are by the author, unless indicated otherwise.

personal feelings, but rather as a mode that enables people to enjoy being together in a spirit of shared sociability, while still acknowledging life's darker sides through the song lyrics (cf. Wallach 2008:9). Moreover, the highly exaggerated pathos of many lyrics encourages an ironic stance that fosters collective identification and feelings of belonging in an atmosphere of shared playfulness.

*Dangdut*'s main pleasure is usually said to lie in its irresistible pulsating rhythm, making people automatically *goyang* (swing their hips) and *joget* (dance), as *Sarinah* is quick to tell its readers: 'The lulling melody, at times pulsating and swaying, entices people to join in the dancing, inviting them to forget their problems for a moment' (*Sarinah* 1992:3). This corporeal dimension of letting oneself be seduced by the alluring rhythm is far more pronounced in Indonesian discourses about *dangdut* than in comparable Muslim genres like *arabesk* and *rai*: It seems impossible to speak about *dangdut* without at the same time referring to the pleasures (or dangers) of *goyang*. Furthermore, like *Sarinah*, both media discourse and fans usually argue that dancing to *dangdut* songs helps people to briefly *forget* their problems (see, for example, Tony 1996). This is indeed interesting, since at the same time the song lyrics' often sad and fatalistic narratives are said to 'represent' the harsh daily realities of the poor. We may ask, therefore, sharpening the paradox: How are we to understand the fact that the male audience experiences deep pleasure in dancing to songs whose lyrics are quite often about stereotypical male shortcomings? Since the lyrical discourse is almost always embedded in a fictional relationship between an 'I' (the singer) and a 'you', many songs are indeed accusations – sometimes fierce and aggressive, sometimes more lamenting and fatalistic – that are addressed to the 'you' - that is, in the context of the performance, somebody/anybody in the male audience. So what is the pleasure in dancing to an erotically hip-swinging woman who sings lyrics like 'you betrayed my pure love' or 'you promised me paradise, but gave me hell'?<sup>12</sup>

When asked about this, people tend to answer rather stereotypically that the lyrics are not really listened to; it is rather the seductive rhythm that brings the pleasure of dancing to it. But what is it that is articulated first within this cultural idiom, to only then allegedly be 'not listened to'? After all, if the lyrics were in fact 'not important', they could just as well be

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<sup>12</sup> To give just two examples: 'you betrayed this pure love, [...] I can't believe that you dared to defile love, to betray love' (*Tenda biru*/'Blue tent', sung by Minawati Dewi); 'paradise you promised, hell you gave' (*Janji*/ 'Promise', sung by Rita Soegiarto).

very different. But they are not and they usually do not articulate beautiful escapist dreams. Quite the opposite, in fact. Yet, considering the immense pleasure that fans usually get from *dangdut*, both at informal roadside performances or at large outdoor concerts, it nevertheless seems to offer some very powerful and blissful dreams.

I suggest that one of *dangdut's* most seductive pleasures is related to the complex and ambiguous interplay between the level of symbolic signification, i.e., the song lyrics, and the corporeal-rhythmic level of non-verbal sensuality. In what follows I will first explore these dimensions of signification within the theoretical framework proposed by Julia Kristeva, which distinguishes between symbolic and semiotic dimensions of the signifying process and then conclude with some thoughts on the particular subjectivity that is constituted by *dangdut*.

### *Semiotic Pleasures*

In her theoretical approach, drawing, among others on Lacanian psychoanalysis, Kristeva (1984) is concerned with bringing the speaking body back into philosophy and linguistics. She distinguishes between two heterogeneous elements in signification: the semiotic and the symbolic. The semiotic elements within the signifying process are the drives as they discharge within language. They are mainly associated with rhythm, tone, sound and gesture. This non-signifying 'material' of language is part of the child's first sensual experiences in its pre-oedipal relationship with the maternal body. The symbolic, on the other hand, is the signifying part of language, that is, the rules of syntax and grammar that enable language to become a means for taking a position or making a judgment. The symbolic also, through language and the positionality of subject and object implied by it, constitutes the symbolic order regulating social life that is associated with the paternal consciousness. However, the feminine and male dimensions here are not to be conflated with the gender identities of women and men, as both the semiotic and the symbolic are part of the psychic realities of both women and men and in fact necessary conditions for any constitution of the subject and society.

While music is a nonverbal signifying system relying almost exclusively on the semiotic, poetic language is the mode of discourse that allows the semiotic to 'irrupt' within the symbolic, as its attention to sounds and rhythms in language points to the semiotic element in signification. In challenging the static symbolic positions through its negativity vis-à-vis

all subject positions, it represents an endless dynamic force of change and process.

Indonesian interpretations of *dangdut* often bear a great resemblance to Kristeva's notion of the semiotic in contrast with the static symbolic order. For example, Susanto states that:

the vulgarity of *dangdut* that is human in its utmost corporeality (spontaneous and fragile) lies opposite all those matters that have always been offered as interpretations (such as tradition, religion, moral, philosophy, art, and so on) (Susanto 1992:220).

It is precisely this corporeal 'directness' of *dangdut*, its spontaneous liveliness that works against static positioned meanings of the symbolic order that may account for the pleasure it makes possible. It challenges the symbolic order as it reveals the fragility of its structure and transcends its restrictions. Kristeva (1984:79f) emphasizes the *jouissance* that is associated with the semiotic breaking into the symbolic.

Regarding Kristeva's notions of the semiotic and the symbolic, we may understand the pleasure *dangdut* offers its audience as being related to precisely this semiotic dimension. This would indeed be congruent with what fans say about their love of *dangdut* when they tell us that, in contrast to the rhythm, the lyrics usually 'don't really matter'. Hence it is not so much the symbolic positing of an enunciation in the lyrics but rather the sensual interplay of the (usually) female voice, melody, and rhythm vis-à-vis the thetic position of the lyrics that is experienced as pleasurable, especially in identifying with it through dancing.

This is not to say that the lyrics are not important in this interplay of the semiotic and the symbolic. Quite the opposite: as the lyrics represent the symbolic level, they point toward the 'reality' of loss, alienation and separation – whose acknowledgment, from a Lacanian-influenced perspective, is a psychic precondition for entering the symbolic order that is based on the loss of pre-Oedipal maternal omnipotence. As the lyrics are about loss, they guard the symbolic order, offering people a chance to acknowledge these intimate feelings while at the same time indulging in the semiotic pleasure of identifying kinetically with the rhythm.

One of the many pleasures *dangdut* offers, especially for male fans, is of course the erotic spectacle that is so typical of *kampung* performances. Pioquinto (1995) and Browne (2000) have explored these voyeuristic pleasures. Numerous local female singers are indeed (in)famous for their daring individual styles of sexually suggestive *goyang* and attract huge crowds. Especially fans in the first rows beneath the stage, commanding

the best view, clearly voyeuristically enjoy the titillating erotic spectacle. Fans also hold up their mobile phones, recording the gyrating hips of the female singer while obviously trying to catch a glimpse of her crotch.

But *dangdut* is about more than just cheap erotic entertainment for the poor masses. In fact, as noted before, *dangdut*'s main pleasure seems to be about *goyang*, i.e., dancing. Dancing to *dangdut* is usually characterized as entering into a self-absorbed, dreamlike state of consciousness, in which the dancer's eyes are often closed – in spite of the 'hot' erotic show on the stage. This dance style is actually so characteristic that it easily lends itself to funny, exaggerated parodistical performances on TV comedy shows and for informal fun with friends. These mock the stereotypical lower class *dangdut* fan who is so easily possessed by *dangdut*'s rhythm that within seconds he forgets everything around him.

Explaining *dangdut*'s seductive appeal in mainly voyeuristic terms thus cannot explain the pleasure experienced by those dancers who seem to be wrapped in their own inner worlds, letting their bodies be moved by the rhythm. Moreover, the voyeuristic framework suggests a splitting of subject and object, the erotic woman on stage being reduced to an object for male sexual fantasies. In contrast, I suggest that what the performance offers – besides the obvious voyeuristic element – is rather a pleasurable *identification* with the female singer via the strong rhythmic-corporeal dimension of the performance.

While in many songs the female lyrical persona of the symbolic level is a passive, suffering and powerless *aku*, on the semiotic level of rhythmic-corporeal sensuality this *aku* is capable of exerting an immensely seductive power on the male audience.<sup>13</sup> This may account for the feeling of empowerment that the female singers enjoy on stage, triumphantly exerting their erotic power on the audience (cf. Pioquinto 1995; Browne 2000; Bader 2011). Heryanto (2008:22–3), for instance, notes Inul's impressive command of authority of the situation in her early performances in East Java. It is indeed remarkable how female singers performing on *kampung* stages usually address the audience in strong, powerful, even aggressive

<sup>13</sup> Dolar (2002:15) points toward the relationship between representations of female powerlessness and, simultaneously, the musical evoking of irresistible female power in Western opera. He also speaks of 'Diva, the goddess of the opera whose status depends on being in total despair, the goddess deprived of all power and hence the most powerful' (2002:15). The figure of the seductive and eroticised female singer-dancer is part of many cultures in the Malay Archipelago. See for example Sutton (1984) on the Javanese *pesinden*, Spiller (2010) on Sundanese *ronggeng*, and Van der Putten (in this volume) on Malay *ronggeng*.

voices, being anything but the demure, submissive and delicate ideal of femininity propagated by New Order ideology and similar gender ideologies advanced by conservative Islam. It is this corporeal, highly seductive power that dancers are identified with, a blissful reunion of the dancing bodies with the semiotic and erotically charged maternal body the female singer offers the audience.

### *Dangdut's 'Noise', New Order's 'Voice': Who is Speaking?*

In order to contextualise *dangdut*'s seductive yet at the same time dangerous appeal within the Indonesian socio-political landscape of the last three decades, let us take another look at the song lyrics and their language. *Dangdut*'s Indonesian was the very antipode of the elaborated Indonesian of Suharto's New Order official culture. The similarity between formal New Order Indonesian and *krama*, the formal, refined, and highly ritualised speech register of the Javanese language, has been noted before (Anderson 1990; Matheson-Hooker 1995; see also Keane 2003). Regarding Suharto's speeches, Matheson-Hooker (1995) notes: 'The language and the style of the speeches is unemotional' (1995:280). There are 'no expressions of intimacy' (1995:278). It is all about stability and harmony (1995:287), change can only be conceived of as progress (1995:285). Suharto 'rarely uses the first person singular pronoun'. He spoke 'as one with full authority, who has the key to the nation's well-being and who holds a legitimate and institutionalised position', the implied audience was never addressed directly (1995:278). This contrasts sharply with the Indonesian as articulated in *dangdut* lyrics: in *dangdut*, the language is highly emotional, a single *aku* (intimate 'I') speaks about his/her most intimate feelings and emotions, addressing a 'you' in a strongly phatic way. In many *dangdut* songs nothing remains of stability and harmony but broken, shattered illusions of the past. The focus is mostly on the past, and instead of progress or development, the lyrics are quite often about loss and powerlessness. The lyrical persona speaks from a position of marginality and helplessness, not authority. *Dangdut*'s female *aku* speaker is definitely not part of the male-centered developmentalist ideology that characterized New Order hegemonic subjectivities.

*Dangdut*'s marginality within the dominant discourse of official New Order Indonesian has allowed its lyrics to speak about otherwise tabooed topics like domestic violence. Like *ngoko*, because it has no 'official' authority, it can say things that may not be articulated as directly in *krama*.

or official Indonesian. The debate about the *pop Indonesia* song *Hati yang luka* (Wounded heart) in 1988 exemplified this splitting of different domains that determine what may be spoken of in which ways.<sup>14</sup> *Hati Yang Luka* is a ‘weeping’ (*cengeng*) song about domestic violence, and as such it was condemned for its weeping, fatalist character. Yet, many *dangdut* songs are even more fatalistic and weepy, and domestic violence may be articulated without necessarily giving rise to a ban. It seemed not to be the lyrical content of the song *per se*, but rather the cultural form/dimension in which it was articulated that created such a scandal. Put bluntly, something usually said and spoken of in *ngoko* was suddenly articulated in the clean, upper-class and *krama*-like *pop Indonesia*, whose lyrics are usually quite elusive and vague. And while *dangdut* is a strongly rhythmic music that is famous for its seductive power, *pop Indonesia* is mostly a music that can barely be danced to. It presents no ‘anarchic’ corporeal-erotic excesses to be feared, in this regard it is ‘clean’ and ‘safe’, like *krama*.

Shiraishi (1997) points towards similar patterns of Indonesian language use that evolved during the New Order that seem to be relevant for *dangdut* as well. For example, she describes the ‘two voices’ in Indonesian classrooms: ‘the authorized voice and the noise’ (1997:135). The ‘noise’ is similar to *dangdut* and *ngoko*, as those noise-voices that are disregarded by the official, ‘legitimate’ sphere tend not to be totally suppressed, and so there is no strict internalisation of only one ‘authorized voice’. Rather, Shiraishi points toward segregation as a central structuring principle that appears to be similar to the distinction between *ngoko* and *krama* in Javanese. One may note that this psychosocial structuring is significantly more characterized by segregation into different domains than by strict suppression/repression demanding the internalisation of only the ‘authorized voice’ into a single identity. Different, even contradictory aspects and ways of being may be tolerated side by side. There are spheres for *krama* as for *ngoko* ways of being, feeling and speaking.

This differs greatly from historic developments in Western mentality that has emphasized suppression/repression of disturbing ‘noises’, and instead enhances the internalisation of social norms into a single ‘identity’ for all occasions. Other, differing voices have, over centuries of Western ‘cultural crusades’ (Baumann 1993), long been eliminated or assimilated to the one Truth, both on the individual psychic level as well

<sup>14</sup> For a detailed discussion of the song and its ‘fate’ as well as its avatars in different Indonesian pop music styles and regional languages, see Yampolsky (1989).

as in the world (cf. Todorov 1984; Baumann 1993). In contrast, as for example Wallach (2008:189) has pointed out, Indonesians usually tend to prefer the noisy presence of multiple voices, coexisting side by side, over any attempt at forcing them into one unitary synthesis that eradicates contradictions and differences. This shows what Bauer (2011), referring to pre-colonial Islam's valuing of multiple, even contradictory meanings and a diversity of interpretations, has termed a high 'tolerance of ambiguity': a strong preference for a psychic flexible 'both – and' stance over a rigid 'either - or' mindset. For *dangdut* in the 1980s Weintraub (2010:146) argues that '[d]angdut opened up interpretive possibilities rather than neatly closing them off. Dangdut did not provide answers to problems. Rather, it pushed the limits of what was allowable in order to expose an excess of possibilities.' In this sense, it could well be argued that *dangdut* is Indonesia's idiom par excellence to articulate its deep rooted cultural emphasis of polyvocality, giving a voice to its high tolerance of ambiguity.

However, within hegemonic New Order discourse, *dangdut*'s voice was only assigned the status of a kind of *ngoko*/‘noise’. Its concomitant associations with childlikeness and immaturity, something rather to be ashamed of, are also suggested by the distinctly pedagogic way of speaking about *dangdut* in the media during the 1990s. This was the time of increasing political instrumentalization by the government of *dangdut*'s massive populist appeal (Weintraub 2010). Over and over we hear about *dangdut* not yet being *dewasa* (that is, ‘adult’ or ‘grown up’), and that *dangdut* has to be ‘educated’ in order to become an adult, respected art form that may represent Indonesia by *going international*. The following excerpt from an article about *dangdut* in the prestigious daily newspaper *Kompas* is illustrative:

Regarding its “maturity”, dangdut now appears more mature as can be seen, for example, in the singers’ appearance, which is no longer “vulgar”. Goyang dangdut, once a basic skill expected from every singer, is not so important nowadays. [...] Miniskirts, sexy outfits and abundant accessories are also becoming more and more rare among dangdut singers, especially among the successful women who made their way to the recording studios. In turn, this maturity is making dangdut music increasingly acceptable to the middle and upper classes. [...] One day dangdut music and dangdut singers will obtain a respectable place in the international world. Dangdut music will become something the Indonesian people are proud of, and it will strengthen the unity of the nation. (Yurnaldi and Rakaryan 1997)

Perceived as not yet ‘mature’, that is still ‘childlike’, are all aspects that might be associated with some sort of ‘excess’ be it the style of dance (too

erotic) or costumes (too sexy, too many accessories, etc.). Similarly the audiences at *kampung* shows are seen as uncontrolled masses, driven by their instinctual desires, in contrast to 'adult' *krama*-awareness of how to behave properly in a disciplined, self-controlled manner. In order to move up the social strata into the realm of official, 'legitimate' culture, *dangdut* thus has to pay a price, that is, it needs to be 'cleaned up' to become acceptable.<sup>15</sup>

This late New Order discourse about *dangdut* points toward an ideological emphasis regarding the need to conform to what is imagined as an 'international standard'. It is a perspective from without, from a supposed 'international standard' point of view, asking whether 'we are conforming to the standards of the Other/West?'. Parts of one's own inner being and cultural idioms that articulate the subject positions associated with it are experienced as failing to live up to standards set up by the outside world, that is, the hegemonic West. This elite discourse of local art forms as being something rather embarrassingly 'messy' that need a thorough cleaning-up and formation in order to upgrade them so that they will conform to 'modern', i.e. Western standards has long links back to colonial discourses (see, for example, Sears 1996 for *wayang kulit*).

The subject position offered by *dangdut* is indeed in many ways the antipode to the national subject constituted within New Order ideology: Not belonging to the male associated spheres of active subjectivity offered by politics, economy, the military and gender ideologies of male patriarchal dominance constituting the modern nation-state, *dangdut*'s subject is often a male that has failed to live up to the expectations of both his female lover and society at large. At the same time he indulges in the blissful pre-symbolic realm of semiotic pleasures and playfulness beyond the usual adult social restrictions, thus challenging the inevitable unambiguity regarding subject positions claimed by any ideological discourse. Either distancing oneself by assuming a playful, pleasurable ironic stance towards the lyrics, or surrendering to the marginalized feminine voice and the erotically charged corporeal dimension, in which one loses oneself in its emotionally exaggerated pathos and its sensual excesses, this subject forever eludes any normative subject interpellations.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> See Browne (2000) for an account of efforts to 'clean up' *dangdut*. Interestingly, these efforts to 'clean up' *dangdut* are similar to developments in Algeria where there have been attempts to establish a 'clean *rai*' (*rai propre*) (Schade-Poulsen 1995:95).

<sup>16</sup> One may even argue that in the interplay of lyrics (symbolic level of language) and corporeal pleasures (semiotic level of rhythm, melodic articulation, dance) the male dancers are offered the chance to 'not listen' to the lyrics in identifying with the semiotic. The

*Seductive Subjectivities: Some Concluding Thoughts*

As Wallach points out (Wallach 2008; see also Wallach in this volume), *dangdut's* powerful 'inclusiveness', erasing boundaries and defying clear-cut categorisations in constituting a communal populist idea of shared 'Indonesianness', eventually fails as the urban educated middle class and elite class-consciously resist its seductive powers. They allow themselves to be 'possessed' by *dangdut's* mighty sensual pull for only brief moments of indulgence in its 'guilty pleasure' (Wallach 2008:213). *Dangdut* seems to remind the middle and upper classes of something that still lurks deep inside them, which they experience as something highly ambivalent and disturbing. These disavowed subjectivity aspects continue to speak from behind the carefully cultivated appearances of consumerist lifestyles, whispering through the rhythm's irresistibility that they are still part of the collective body of that huge other Indonesia of the lower classes with whom they share a common origin in a *kampung* that in their class-conscious self-imagination they thought to have long left behind.

I thus suggest that the highly ambivalent feelings that *dangdut* stirs up in middle class and elite Indonesians might also be related to the specific kind of subjectivity constituted by it. In contrast to deeply internalised educated middle and upper class imaginations of modernization and development, characterized by their emphasis on an active subject and a focus on the future and global 'exemplary centers', *dangdut* is content to be an ephemeral celebration of collective bodily euphoria, just enjoying the present moment without presenting any explicit ideas about an ideal subject of the nation-state. The lyrics, moreover, are preferably backward looking, dwelling melancholically on lost loves, broken promises, past betrayals, often ridiculously exaggerated in their pathos – thus representing a challenge par excellence to any ideology that promises an optimistic 'You Can' that is so cherished and longed for by the middle classes seeking

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resistance to identification with sad or male-bashing lyrics, and the pleasure one gains by actively 'not listening to' the textual dimension may well lead to a liberating feeling of autonomy and mental disengagement that is highly valued in Javanese culture (cf. Keeler 1987; see also Siegel 1993). Seen this way, it is the rhythmic-corporeal dimension that becomes some kind of 'first' language, the one that has to be suppressed and disciplined when entering the 'official' realm of the adult socio-symbolic order. In not identifying with the lyrics, the rational-textual dimension is transcended and opened up to other dimensions of being, that is, the pleasurable corporeal 'pre-social' and 'pre-linguistic' ways of being beyond restricting and demanding adult responsibilities. In that way, in identifying with this dimension below or beyond language and the social order structured by it, one can in fact 'forget' the very problems of daily life that the lyrics are often about.

social upward mobility and international recognition. The passive surrender to *dangdut's* rhythmic corporeal communion and to the voice of a female, powerless in the lyrical narratives yet powerful in her command of the stage and audience, articulated in a musical idiom that is perceived as some kind of embarrassingly failed *kampungan* modernity, is, of course, anathema to both developmentalism's emphasis on progress and to any fetishisation of a self-conscious, consumerist global 'Modernity' lifestyle.

*Dangdut's* subject cannot speak back to the West or offer an alternative identity, just like its articulation of female suffering and male double standards provides no grassroots feminist discourse or supporting women's empowerment. *Dangdut's* corporeal bliss defies all ideological stances because one is always able to take it ironically, poke fun at it, or euphorically dance it away: *dangdut* can encompass it all without losing its inclusive soul. At the same time, *dangdut's* deeply pleasurable ambiguous subjectivity eludes the rigid identifications that are required by ideological identity positions.

In contrast to the active re-working of the symbolic in poetic practice referred to by Kristeva, the irruption of the semiotic element celebrated in *dangdut* performances does not change and rework the symbolic order, but rather exposes the semiotic basis of language and the symbolic. Change is induced more through 'boundary transgressions', like presenting Inul's dancing *kampungan* style *dangdut* in the national media, that lead to public contestations and negotiations about what should be allowed to be seen in which media or social domain. However, the fierce debate about Inul's drilling dance, and what it means to Indonesian legitimate self-representation, was tellingly led mainly by those who are usually not part of the audience at *dangdut* concerts. Rather, conservative *ulama* and strongly devout Muslims set the tenor of the debate in terms of Islamic normative stipulations on the one side, with urban activists who identified with global liberalist and human rights discourses taking the opposing side. *Dangdut's* immediate subjects, the male fans, were left once again without a distinct voice of their own as the ideological framing of the national debate was mainly beyond the reach of their subjectivity. They are still the ones spoken for, either by religious authorities, human rights activists, or the female singer who in many songs laments their multiple failures.

It might be interesting in this regard to compare *dangdut* with another ideologically mediated cultural idiom that exerts a strong attraction among the middle classes, that is, Islamic resurgence. Like *dangdut*, Islam

offers the experience of a shared *communitas* that is united across social status and class, and like *dangdut*, Islam offers a discourse to articulate, among others, feelings of grief, sorrow, guilt, as it allows the acknowledgement and negotiation of human imperfection and suffering. Like *dangdut*, it induces processes of surrender, but in this case to an all-powerful patriarchal God – representing, in Kristeva's terms, the Law of the symbolic order. As this concerns the level of the symbolic, it points toward psychic processes that emphasize rationalization and the emergence of a new kind of idealized subjectivity: the self-conscious pious Islamic subject, who identifies with the one voice of the Law, striving to purify itself of all un-Islamic 'noise'. The Islamic discourses of newly pious believers thus speak of guilt and sin, rather than in categories of shame about being not yet *dewasa* ('mature'). And, in contrast to *dangdut*, one is not supposed to take it ironically.

Thus, in contrast to *dangdut*'s subject, Islam can speak with and commands a powerful voice. Seen from this perspective, the new Islamic subjectivity may be attractive to the middle classes because ideologically it offers an identity position that is related to and compatible with other global identities. Like them, Islam urges its subjects to take a clear stance, preferring in its current hegemonic literalist discourses rather rigid 'either - or' identities over ones that are characterized by higher levels of tolerance of ambiguity. These rather closed notions of subjectivity seem to provide an identity ideal that promises to be sufficiently *dewasa*, so that one need not be ashamed of it, like one would be of *dangdut* seen through the eyes of the Other/West.

The biggest *dangdut* hit in 2011 was *Alamat palsu* (False address) by Ayu Ting Ting. The man left the girl with nothing but an address that turns out to be false, nobody knows the man, she has been cheated and tricked and asks in the refrain, where do I have to look for him? Simple and cliché as this lyrical narrative is, inviting us to straightforwardly enjoy it in a playfully parodied way, at a deeper level it also implies that in life one might also get false addresses, hinting at the ever lurking dangers of losing one's orientation, as the promises of ideologies and ideologised religions may indeed turn out to be nothing more than false addresses.

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PART FOUR  
MUSICAL NATIONALISMS



## CHAPTER NINE

### NOTES ON DANGDUT MUSIC, POPULAR NATIONALISM, AND INDONESIAN ISLAM

Jeremy Wallach

I'd like to begin with a short anecdote from 'the field'.<sup>1</sup> One afternoon in early 2000, I was being driven to a distant East Jakarta recording studio by the chauffeur of a wealthy Indonesian music producer. During our long ride through Jakarta's famously congested streets, a cassette containing a single *dangdut* song (*Apa adanya* [Whatever comes] by Ine Sinthya, from her forthcoming cassette) played continuously on the car stereo system. After a while, I finally asked the driver, whose name was Syaiful, if he was growing tired of hearing the same tune repeated over and over. He smiled and said no. A while later, searching for something to talk about, I asked him why he thought the lyrics of *dangdut* songs were often so sad. In reply, he explained:

Because *dangdut* songs represent the innermost feelings of us all. Pop singers just sing for themselves, but *dangdut* singers represent us all, like we were the ones singing...*Dangdut* is broader, closer to society.<sup>2</sup>

I realized immediately that Syaiful's response contained a succinct summation of a pervasive genre ideology concerning *dangdut* music and its place in contemporary Indonesian society. In the course of my research,

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<sup>1</sup> I am deeply grateful to the many *dangdut* producers, artists, critics, and fans who shared their experiences and opinions with me on this subject, especially Edy Singh, Pak Paku, Pak Hasanudin, Opie Sendewi, Lulis Karlina, Titiek Nur, Guntoro Utamadi, and Syaiful. I would also like to extend a special thanks to Donny Suryady and the members of OMEGA Group. I am greatly indebted to all the participants at the 2003 KITLV international workshop for their invaluable comments, criticisms and suggestions for this project; I especially thank workshop organizers Kees van Dijk and Bart Barendregt. I owe special thanks to Jeroen de Kloet for the thoughtful and incisive comments he provided as respondent to the workshop paper on which this chapter is based. I am also indebted to David Harnish, David J. Jackson, Michael Mooradian Lupro, and Sharon Wallach for their feedback on earlier drafts of this essay. Special thanks also to Esther Clinton for invaluable input at the final editing stage.

<sup>2</sup> *Karena lagu dangdut mewakili perasaan nurani kita semua. Penyanyi pop menyanyi untuk diri-sendiri, tapi penyanyi dangdut mewakili kita semua seperti kita yang menyanyi... Dangdut lebih luas, lebih bermasyarakat.*

I had found that an enduring notion of collective ownership by the ordinary people of Indonesia accompanies the sounds of *dangdut* wherever and whenever they materialize, strongly influencing the music's performance, recording, reception, and interpretation. The particular significance of the preceding ethnographic vignette is that, as an employee of a record producer, Syaiful knew full well how *dangdut* cassettes like the one he was playing are actually produced—namely through a professionalized, high-tech, capital-intensive, and not-especially-populist process developed for the purpose of reaping maximum commercial profits. Nevertheless, even members of the Indonesian elite who decry it as low class, immoral, and culturally inauthentic generally concede that *dangdut* music has a powerful connection with its vast nationwide audience that is quite unlike that of any other music genre (cf. Frederick 1982:124; Siegel 1986:215–8; Browne 2000; Wallach 2008; Weintraub 2010). Furthermore, particularly since the 1998 fall of the Soeharto dictatorship, growing numbers of middle-class Indonesians who had formerly shunned *dangdut* music as low class and ‘from the village’ have embraced *dangdut*’s musical national populism and its implicit critique of the pro-Western cultural elitism of the Soeharto years.

In the following essay, I discuss the lived experiences that lie beneath the multi-faceted and contentious cultural politics of *dangdut* music in Indonesia. My remarks are based on long-term ethnographic fieldwork conducted between 1997 and 2000 on the contemporary meanings and practices of *dangdut* music among urban Indonesians of different social classes. From this research I have concluded that *dangdut*’s ideological positioning as a distinctively ‘Indonesian’ music ‘close to the people’ evokes an inclusive social vision that constitutes a populist alternative to both the Soeharto era’s hegemonic ideology of ‘development’ and the exclusivist, moralistic rhetoric of Indonesian radical Islamists. My chief aim here is to examine the discourses of popular nationalism surrounding *dangdut* music in Indonesia, and discuss some of the limits to their ethos of inclusivity, particularly when the salience of gender differences in *dangdut*’s performance and reception is taken into account.

### *Sound, Lyrics, and Audience*

*Dangdut*’s inclusive, integrative eclecticism is exemplified by the diversity of its musical influences and its dense, layered sonic textures. While the genre has roots in the older *orkes Melayu* style (see Kartomi 1998; Weintraub 2010), contemporary *dangdut* music is perhaps best described

as an amalgam of various internationally circulating popular music styles – in particular Indian film song, Middle Eastern pop, Western hard rock, disco, and reggae – with the occasional regional Indonesian musical idiom mixed in. In other words, the music and the ensemble that plays it incorporate elements from globally hegemonic Western popular music, transnational popular Asian and Islamic musics, and local/regional archipelagic traditions (primarily Sumatran, Javanese and Sundanese) to forge a distinctive *national* popular music style. A basic *dangdut* ensemble includes two electronic keyboards, two electric guitars, electric bass, Western trap drum kit, a set of diatonically tuned bamboo flutes (*suling*), a tambourine, and a set of tabla-like hand drums called *gendang* (not to be confused with the double-headed cylindrical or barrel-shaped drums of the same name found in gamelan and other traditional Indonesian ensembles). Additional instruments found in larger ensembles and on recordings include electrified mandolins, saxophones, trumpets, and sitars. These instruments played together create a dense, interlocking musical texture to accompany *dangdut*'s sensual, plaintive vocals, which express emotions ranging from heartbroken despondence to sly flirtatiousness depending on the particular song (see David, this volume).

On recordings, *dangdut* music saturates the entire sonic frequency spectrum, from the trebly shimmers of the tambourine and sharp attacks of clean electric guitar strums to the thick, midrange-heavy instrumental timbres of synthesized strings to the powerful bass thumps of the low *gendang* drum, the *dhang-DHUT* from which the genre derives its onomatopoeic name. As such, *dangdut* incorporates both the high and low sonic extremes of hard rock music and the 'sweet' midrange sounds of pop into an integrative, all-encompassing whole that seems to straddle the ideological sonic divide between oppositional and mainstream popular musics (cf. Wallach 2003:47–8). For all its noisy eclecticism, however, the standard *dangdut* sound has remained fairly unchanged in the four decades following its emergence as an exciting new electrified entertainment music in the 1970s, even as the production of *dangdut* recordings has become significantly more high-tech (Wallach 2005:140–2).<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Since the mid 1980s, a number of dance floor-friendly offshoots of *dangdut* music have arisen that do modify the standard *dangdut* sound and instrumentation by adding drum machines, studio effects, digital samples, and electronic dance music rhythms and subtracting most of the acoustic instruments (Lysloff 1997:215; see also Wallach 2004, 2005). *Dangdut* fans and producers with whom I spoke kept these styles, collectively known as *dangdut trendy* in the music industry, discursively separate from the 'original' or

In recent years, various types of regional (*daerah*) *dangdut* styles such as *dangdut Bugis* and *dangdut Jawa* have become popular in particular ethnolinguistic niche markets in Indonesia, yet these variants are usually understood as local appropriations of a pre-existing, irreducibly national form. *Dangdut* music produced for a nationwide market is almost always sung in the national language, Indonesian. Song narratives tend to be simple and straightforward, and discourses of feeling are emphasized more than details of storytelling. Song lyrics, while not exactly mirroring colloquial Indonesian speech patterns, are written in concise, direct language that frequently incorporates well-known sayings, proverbs, and clichés to poignant or humorous effect, not unlike the lyrics of many American country and western songs.<sup>4</sup>



9.1. *Dangdut* performance in Jakarta nightclub Cipulir Sentrum, 2000 [photo by author].

'pure' *dangdut* style (*dangdut asli/murni*). Original *dangdut* appeared to enjoy a wider audience, and it accounted for the majority (about two thirds) of new *dangdut* releases during the period my fieldwork was conducted, even though it was far more expensive to record than the largely computer-generated *dangdut trendy*. Younger, more innovative *dangdut* artists like Lilis Karlina sometimes added a trendy-style track or two to collections of songs with more conventional arrangements to provide some musical variety on their albums.

<sup>4</sup> Two notable examples of this are the hit song performed by Meggi Z, *Lebih baik sakit gigi* (Better a toothache...), which is based on the common humorous expression, 'better a

*Dangdut's* linguistic accessibility and predictable musical and lyrical formulae contribute to its mass appeal: it is by far the most popular genre of popular music in the world's fourth most populous country, with a domestic audience numbering in the tens of millions.<sup>5</sup> Indonesia's large demographic majority of nonaffluent, non-fundamentalist Muslims from diverse ethnolinguistic backgrounds has embraced *dangdut* music. In addition, unlike the more youth-oriented and Western-sounding Indonesian pop music known as *pop Indonesia*, *dangdut's* appeal bridges generations, from the youngest child to the oldest grandparent. I have observed children as young as two and elderly women in their seventies singing along at neighbourhood *dangdut* performances in Jakarta. One of my main research associates, a Betawi man from Lebak Bulus, described to me how his elderly grandmother objected when his cousins' band used her front porch as a rehearsal space for performing loud rock music, but when the same group of musicians played *dangdut* songs at a similarly deafening volume, 'she would just *joget* [dance]!'

On the other hand, despite more than two decades of hyperbolic mass-media accounts of *dangdut's* growing 'acceptability' to the Indonesian middle class (cf. Perlman 1999:3), many middle class and elite Indonesians still openly despise the genre, which has not lost its associations with lewd, unruly behaviour and low-class tackiness. While one trendy young Jakartan resorted to using the English word 'disgusting' to describe her

toothache than a heartache' (*lebih baik sakit gigi daripada sakit hati*), and *Cinta bukan sayur asem* (Love is not sour vegetables), a song popularized by the *dangdut* 'girl group' Manis Manja. Written by the prolific *dangdut* songwriter Muchtar B, *Cinta bukan sayur asem* was inspired by a humorous saying that admonishes a potential lover not to treat the quest for true love as casually as he would the sampling of plates of *sayur asem*, a Betawi vegetable dish. Interestingly, phrases that originate in *dangdut* songs can also become common expressions in everyday spoken Indonesian. One *dangdut* producer proudly told me of the time he saw an anti-Suharto protestor with a sign depicting the former ruler's smiling face over the caption, 'Your smile, our sorrow' (*Senyummu duka kami*) – an obvious reference, he asserted, to the hit *dangdut* song 'Your party, my sorrow' (*Pestamu dukaku*) written by Asmin Cayder and recorded by a number of female *dangdut* artists in the 1990s.

<sup>5</sup> *Dangdut* also enjoys a sizable international audience, primarily in neighboring Malaysia, where both imported and domestically produced *dangdut* music have become musics of choice for a large segment of the ethnic Malay working class (which includes a large number of recent and not-so-recent immigrants from Indonesia). *Dangdut* music has also found an audience in Singapore, Brunei, and Thailand among Malay-speaking peoples. As an Indonesian import appealing to a specific segment of the national population, *dangdut* has not been, to my knowledge, appropriated for projects of national identity formation in these places. Outside of the Malay world, *dangdut* has achieved rather modest success as a 'world music' genre among middle-class listeners in Europe, Japan, and North America.

feelings to me about *dangdut* music, the most prevalent and injurious epithet used to derogate *dangdut* is *kampungan*, from the word *kampung* (village or poor urban neighbourhood; see also the contribution by Baulch). *Kampungan* is a culturally loaded term which can be loosely translated as ‘vulgar, low-class, and repellently characteristic of backward village/slum life’ or, in James Siegel’s words, ‘hickish’ (1986:215). *Dangdut*’s middle class detractors claim that *dangdut* music and its performers are indeed disgusting and vulgar, and for them *dangdut* appears to be an abject form, neither ‘traditional’ (that is, associated with indigenous performance traditions such as *gamelan* or *tembang Sunda*) nor truly ‘modern’ (which in Indonesia invariably means originating from the West). But *dangdut*’s lowbrow status in Indonesia’s hierarchy of musical distinction does not necessarily mean that status-conscious Indonesians truly dislike it: if *dangdut* is an abjected Other to middle-class Indonesians, it is – consequently – also a site of repressed desire.

During an interview with Melly Goeslaw, one of the top-selling *pop Indonesia* artists of 2000, she surprised me by baldly stating that Indonesians who claimed that they disliked *dangdut* music only did so out of concern for *gengsi*, appearances and status, and that when they actually heard *dangdut* they ‘*pasti goyang*’ – were sure to sway to the music.<sup>6</sup> While I had not expected to hear such an assertion from one of Indonesia’s hippest pop stars, Melly was certainly not alone in this sentiment, which I heard echoed and amplified in my conversations with numerous *dangdut* producers, performers and fans. I was told repeatedly that even though many middle-class people denied liking *dangdut* music, when *dangdut* was audibly present one could always observe *some* part of their body wiggling to the seductive beat of the music, even if it was just a single finger! Such statements imply a notion of a ‘natural’ susceptibility to the sensuous attractions of *dangdut* music among all Indonesians, regardless of their individual class positions or status preoccupations (see the contribution by David in this volume). Interestingly, foreigners were not expected to react to *dangdut* music in the same way.<sup>7</sup>

How can we account for these widespread claims regarding the power of *dangdut*? What purposes do they serve *vis à vis* the music and Indonesian

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<sup>6</sup> For a more detailed discussion of *gengsi* and its role in Indonesian musical taste hierarchies (which place Western popular music at the top and *dangdut* near the bottom), see Wallach 2002.

<sup>7</sup> Both *dangdut* fans and detractors expressed surprise when I revealed that I, an American researcher, enjoyed listening to *dangdut* music. The former tended to be pleased, the latter appalled.

national consciousness? Anthropologist Greg Urban has emphasized the crucial role that *metaculture* (culture about culture) plays in the reception and circulation of cultural forms: 'The interpretation of culture that is intrinsic to metaculture, immaterial as it is, focuses attention on the cultural thing, helps to make it an object of interest, and, hence, facilitates its circulation' (Urban 2001:4). I would add that not only do the metacultural constructs associated with *dangdut* facilitate its circulation in Indonesia, but also that *dangdut's* sensory qualities conversely make those constructs attractive, thus contributing to *their* circulation. Among these constructs is a particular type of popular, everyday, grassroots nationalism, which exists apart from what Benedict Anderson (1991) famously termed 'official nationalism' – nationalisms constructed and sanctioned by hegemonic state institutions. *Dangdut's* popular nationalism resembles the 'banal nationalism' found in the popular cultures of other countries (Billig 1995), though I would argue that, beyond its sheer ubiquity, *dangdut's* popular nationalism offers a compelling moral vision to its audience, one with roots in the early Indonesian nationalist movement.

### *The People's Music*

Many *dangdut* fans, including the chauffeur in the anecdote that began this essay, use the Indonesian verb *merakyat*, 'to be close to the people,' or *memasyarakat*, 'to be close to society', to characterize *dangdut* music and explain its extraordinary appeal to ordinary Indonesians. Statements such as these are metacultural claims that facilitate the constitution of the *dangdut* audience and the development of affective attachment to 'the people', which in the Indonesian political imaginary is synonymous with the masses of ordinary men and women called upon to work together toward building the great modern nation of Indonesia. *Rakyat* ('the people' or 'the folk') is thus a rather loaded term in Indonesian history. James Siegel (1998) has argued that the *rakyat* were the revolutionary force that animated the nation in the rhetoric of Indonesia's charismatic first president, Soekarno. However, during the repressive 32-year rule of Soekarno's successor, the decidedly uncharismatic President Soeharto, 'the people' was abandoned as the central rhetorical construct of Indonesian nationalism in favour of an authoritarian, paternalistic developmentalism. The Soeharto regime's commitment to 'progress' was fueled by foreign investment and the importation of consumerist desires for the benefit of an emerging middle class which sought to *differentiate itself* from the impoverished, 'backward'

masses. All the while, throughout the Soeharto era and the political upheavals which followed its abrupt demise in 1998, those 'impoverished masses' have held on to the dream of a self-sufficient, inclusive, egalitarian, and multiethnic Indonesia propagated by Soekarno and other nationalist leaders at the time of Indonesia's independence. These very same 'masses' were also quick to embrace *dangdut* as an 'authentically Indonesian music' (*musik asli Indonesia*) when it first emerged as a recognizable style in the early 1970s (Frederick 1982).

But how does a music genre become emblematic of a nation? Ethnomusicologist Thomas Turino's essay, 'Signs of imagination, identity, and experience: A Peircean semiotic theory for music' (1999), argues that 'national' popular musics are forged through a principle of double indexicality (1999:244–6). Drawing on conceptions of the sign formulated by American philosopher Charles S. Peirce, Turino argues that national musics are hybrid forms that combine 'local' musical elements, which index community and cultural uniqueness, with Western elements that index the modernity to which all nations aspire (1999:244–6). Not only does this strategic hybridization result in a national cultural form that mediates between the local and the global, but it also reconciles the dual yearnings of the citizenry for the cosmopolitan modern on the one hand and the preservation of cultural distinctiveness on the other. Put another way, national musics aspire to achieve a compelling synthesis of power and solidarity. I would argue, however, that such a formalistic definition is insufficient. Can we assume from the unquestionably hybrid nature of *dangdut* music that it necessarily serves nationalist agendas? As Webb Keane (2003:516) reminds us, when assessing national-culture-building projects in Indonesia and elsewhere, 'we should be wary of taking the attempt for the result.' Therefore, it is necessary to investigate critically the specific metacultural mechanisms by which, I contend, *dangdut* music has become a vehicle for popular nationalism in Indonesia, and how these interact with various constructions of intranational difference, including gender, religion, and most of all, class.

The prevailing metacultural discourse on *dangdut* music in Indonesia tends to emphasize both its irresistible, euphoria-inducing sensual pleasures and its powerful social leveling effects. Listeners within earshot of *dangdut* music, especially live *dangdut* concerts, are thought to experience the temporary dissipation of social distance and feel a sense of solidarity with other audience members – a state that brings to mind Benedict Anderson's characterization of nationalist sentiment as 'a deep, horizontal comradeship' (1991:7). According to many of its fans, *dangdut* music's

presence diminishes social differences: generational, ethnic, even occupational. When I asked a companion why most of the patrons at one particular *dangdut* bar were older or middle-aged, he smiled broadly and said, 'Young, old, it's just the same!' (*Muda tua sama saja*). A particularly striking example of the reported tendency of *dangdut* music to erase social boundaries can be found in a 2001 online news article about a *dangdut* concert held in a courtyard at Salemba Prison in Jakarta in an attempt entertain the prison's inmates on a national holiday. The article describes the audience as follows:

The heat of the sun's rays went unheeded by them. The spectators seemed to enjoy themselves very much [...] One thing was interesting: this entertainment did not just draw in the attention of the jail's inmates, but also the staff members of the prison.

It looked as though there was no distance between the staff and the prison inmates. They all were carried away in a spirit of togetherness (*Ratusan napi Salemba joget dangdut* 2001).<sup>8</sup>

The image of prison guards and inmates dancing together, temporarily oblivious to the divisions between them, brings to mind much anthropological writing, from Durkheim onwards, on the social effects of communal ritual. The state of consciousness described in the article and in numerous similar accounts I encountered during my fieldwork resembles anthropologist Victor Turner's classic formulation of *communitas* produced by ritual participation, which he defines as the experience of 'global community transcending all internal divisions' (1969:184). Indeed, the observer is struck by the ebullient, euphoric atmosphere among male dancers at outdoor neighbourhood *dangdut* concerts and in indoor night-clubs in Jakarta as they blissfully dance in pairs to the beat of the *gendang* drum, seemingly unconcerned with differences in age, social status, or ethnicity that exist between them.

A somewhat less successful instance of *dangdut* music bridging the gap between social groups occurred in October 2001 at a demonstration by students from Sunan Kalijaga State Institute of Islamic Studies (IAIN), a prestigious Islamic university, at the Yogyakarta Regional Military headquarters. According to *The Jakarta Post*,

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<sup>8</sup> The original reads: 'Panasnya sinar matahari tak mereka hiraukan. Para penonton nampak sangat menikmati...Satu hal yang menarik, hiburan ini pun tak cuma menyedot perhatian para penghuni penjara, tapi juga para petugas Rutan. Tak terlihat adanya jarak antara petugas dan penghuni penjara. Mereka hanyut dalam kebersamaan.'

The story began when the students, who were demanding the abolition of the military role in politics, found the main gate of the headquarters locked. They started making their speeches in very vigorous style, with their shouts getting louder and louder. Suddenly, the sound of *dangdut* music was heard, and started getting louder and louder also. Seconds later scores of soldiers started to dance in front of the students. The show lasted only about fifteen minutes until the protesters left. ‘This is harassment of students and democracy!’ one of the protesters, Zainu Rosyid, said. ‘This also shows how arrogant they (the soldiers) are’ (Hasani 2001).

According to the article, the soldiers declined to explain to reporters why they deployed *dangdut* music in this manner, but whatever their initial rationale, they did succeed in quickly dispersing the crowd of protesters without incident. One is left asking the question: how could *dangdut* music and dancing constitute ‘harassment’, and why would their use be considered a demonstration of ‘arrogance’?

While the information provided in the article is limited, there are a number of possible interpretations of this incident. The students may have become angered and dispersed simply because the sheer volume of the music drowned out their rally. This seems somewhat unlikely, and does not explain why the demonstrators chose to disband peacefully (Why, for example, did they not target the dancing soldiers in front of them?). I suspect that the students were unable to continue their rally because, whether they liked *dangdut* music or not (and many, being middle-class, observant Muslim students, probably did not), when faced with the sight and sounds of men dancing to *dangdut* music, the culturally appropriate response would be to join them, just as the prisoners in Salemba prison danced with their captors. The soldiers presumably knew this, and arrogantly (but correctly) assumed that their performance would sow confusion and temporarily nullify the undoubtedly legitimate grievances of the demonstrators. I conclude from this incident that even when *dangdut* music does not succeed in uniting the audience in *communitas*, its pull toward unity and the obfuscation of social distinctions (at least among men) can be difficult to ignore.

### *Gendering the Nation*

The community of *dangdut* enthusiasts supposedly transcends divisions between men based on class, ethnicity, age, and region. But does this imagined collective include women? This is difficult to answer. *Dangdut* performances are linked to a long history of Indonesian female singer-dancer

traditions, such as the Javanese *tayuban*, the Balinese *joged*, and the Sundanese *kliningan*, in which a woman performer interacts flirtatiously with members of an enthralled all-male audience (see Spiller 2010). Performances of this sort, which tend to be accompanied by the drinking of alcoholic beverages and other transgressive behaviours, have historically acted as instruments of carnivalesque male bonding across divisions of rank and status in many Indonesian groups. *Dangdut* performances have similarly been analyzed as events that both exploit female sexuality and celebrate women's performative power (e.g., Browne 2000; Pioquinto 1995). The question I want to pose is, what ramifications does this gendered division in performance and reception have for *dangdut* as a 'national' music?

Suad Joseph and Susan Slyomovics, drawing on the writings of feminist author Carol Pateman, argue that the Western nation-state, which became, in their words, the 'compulsory political form for the rest of the world' (2001:8), is predicated on a model of male fraternity, an association of unfettered, sovereign individuals who can form voluntary contracts with one another. They add that in much of the Muslim world this conceptualization tends to exclude women, whose contact with the nation-state is mediated by community and kin-based social structures – therefore they generally do not confront the national apparatus as individuals (2001:9–14). This certainly seems to be the case for Indonesian women, particularly members of the country's nonaffluent majority. In a sense, then, *dangdut*'s incomplete, gendered *communitas* effectively reinforces the nationalist overtones of *dangdut* fandom, since, according to the globally accepted model, the nation resembles the *dangdut* audience in that both are idealized fraternities of males who enjoy social equality as either fans or citizens.

*Dangdut* performances in the public sphere do appear to exclude women on several levels. For example, while large outdoor *dangdut* concerts often attract sizable crowds of mostly middle-aged women, they usually stand in a semicircle behind the crowd of all-male dancers who congregate directly in front of the stage. Similarly, the widespread informal streetside performances of *dangdut* music found all over Indonesia are mostly by and for men (cf. Wallach 2008:161). On the other hand, it is crucial to recall that *dangdut* is not just a performed music, but also exists on recordings that can be used in private listening encounters. In my research I found that ordinary Indonesian women frequently listened to *dangdut* albums, and, in fact, probably make up a majority of the consumers who purchase such recordings, and many identified strongly with *dangdut* singers and song texts. Indeed, the most popular *dangdut* songs

typically portrays of the specific agonies and heartbreaks of working-class Indonesian women: husbands remarrying, husbands' infidelity, and abandonment by deceitful lovers (see David, this volume). Given the gendered limitations of the dominant discourses of nationalism, it is still an open question whether the private enjoyment of *dangdut* recordings by Indonesian women constitutes an example of inculcating national consciousness. More likely is the possibility that the gendered division between private enjoyment and public dancing found in *dangdut* music culture reinscribes the patriarchal public/private split in modern nationalist thought.

### *Dangdut and Indonesian Islam(s)*

With its nasal, melismatic vocal style and propulsive hand drum rhythms, *dangdut* is in many ways a music of the Islamic world, although this does not mean it is generally considered a form of Islamic music. While pioneering *dangdut* star Rhoma Irama became famous for spreading a populist form of Muslim piety through his music (Frederick 1982), his performance persona remains the exception rather than the rule. Most *dangdut* songs deal with non-religious, sentimental themes, and the genre is frequently denounced as sinful and morally corrupting by strict Muslims in Indonesia.

Compared to Islam in many Middle Eastern countries, Indonesian Islam is far less opposed to music *per se* (Rasmussen 2001:36; Harnish and Rasmussen 2011). But *dangdut*, with its associations of sexual licentiousness and alcohol consumption, is a frequent target of moral crusades. A serious form of violence at outdoor *dangdut* concert events became increasingly common in Jakarta during the Wahid administration (1999–2001). Long before they made international headlines by threatening foreigners residing in Indonesia (not to mention American pop star Lady Gaga), members of Muslim extremist groups like the now-disbanded *Laskar Jihad* (Troops of the Holy War) and *Front Pembela Islam* (Islamic Defenders Front) clad in white prayer robes began to attack participants at *dangdut* concerts, assaulting audience members, musicians, even the bride and groom at wedding celebrations.

I heard several eyewitness accounts of such incidents. One *dangdut* singer reported that she tried to reason with her would-be assailants, reminding them that *dangdut* artists like Rhoma Irama and Elvy Sukaesih had completed the *haj* to Mecca and were pious Muslims, but to no avail. Emboldened by the general breakdown of law and order in post-Soeharto

Indonesia and by a Muslim scholar president (though Wahid would certainly not have endorsed their violent actions), Muslim fundamentalists became determined to wipe out sinful behaviour in the *umat*, the community of the faithful.

The modernist religious extremist ideologies that motivate groups like the *Laskar Jihad* were imported fairly recently from outside Indonesia. I would suggest that regardless of their popularity for a minority of Indonesian Muslims, the doctrines of fundamentalist Islam contradict a central feature of *dangdut* and cultural life in general in Indonesia—the tolerance of difference and the drive for inclusivity and incorporation. *Dangdut* performance expresses the will to create a noisy, heterogeneous, all-encompassing social body, a ‘primordial oneness’. Such a desire threatens the fundamentalist preoccupation with purifying and homogenizing the behaviour of the *umat* as well as maintaining an impermeable boundary between Islam and its non-believing Others.

Nonetheless, the popularity of violent fundamentalist Islam also illustrates another characteristic of contemporary Indonesia, the enthusiasm with which some foreign ideologies are adopted. This is evident not only in the sphere of Indonesian Islam; evangelical Christianity, Western technocratic developmentalism, and even punk rock all have their devotees. These ideologies attempt to draw sharp lines between self and other and eliminate ambiguity and hybridity, yet ironically the very fact of their ongoing coexistence in the Indonesian national context is *constitutive* of the polyvalency and diversity of contemporary Indonesian society.

In the contemporary world geopolitical climate, the success of a secular, inclusive, multiethnic Indonesian nationalism has taken on a new urgency. If *dangdut* music helped keep grassroots, Soekarnoist nationalism alive in Indonesia during the Soeharto dictatorship, perhaps it may yet play a role in the defence of an inclusive, nationalist ethos against the transnational forms of religious extremism that have taken hold in Indonesia and other parts of the world. Such movements seek to eradicate heterogeneity, and to replace the perhaps implicitly patriarchal values of inclusive nationalist discourse with a religious ideology of overt male dominance and social control.

#### *Dangdut and the Inul Daratista Phenomenon*

In 2002, a single *dangdut* singer arose in Indonesia to challenge the exclusivist, patriarchal orthodoxy of fundamentalist Islam. Inul Daratista, a humble East Javanese village girl turned superstar, has arguably become

the most internationally recognized Indonesian recording artist since the late 1980s when stories about rock legend Iwan Fals periodically surfaced in the global mass media. The story of Inul's rise from utter obscurity to national notoriety has appeared in a variety of international publications, and within Indonesia itself she became one of the country's hugest celebrities.

Numerous journalists and social scientists, both Indonesian and foreign, have related the Inul controversy to ongoing debates in Indonesia over freedom of expression and separation of mosque and state, as well as to current geopolitical realities in Indonesia and the world, especially the global political fallout from the terrorist bombings by Muslim extremists in Kuta Beach, Bali (2002) and Central Jakarta (2004), which have caused many Indonesian Muslims to question the extremist ideology of global jihadism.<sup>9</sup> While Indonesian politicians have for the most part been hesitant to confront Islamic fundamentalists directly, Inul Daratista has become an unlikely spokesperson of both democracy and moderate Islam in contemporary Indonesia. One example of Inul's outspokenness should suffice here. According to a 2003 article in *Time Asia*, when asked by a reporter about her much-publicized censure by the Indonesian Ulemas Council (MUI), a conservative Muslim organization, Inul replied, 'Write this down...The MUI should realize that Indonesia is not a Muslim country, it's a democratic country.' The article continues:

Inul, who says she prays daily, insists that her art doesn't clash with her Islamic beliefs and suspects the religious hierarchy castigates her because the real threats to Indonesia's fragile morality, particularly corrupt officials, are too dangerous to attack. 'Why should they care about me when there are pornographic VCDs and prostitutes in the street? They choose me because I am an easy target' (quoted in Walsh 2003).

How could this situation have come about, in which a popular entertainer in a majority-Muslim nation is unafraid to question the authority of religious officials?

While Inul's fame derived initially from her unique and highly sexualized dance moves, her subsequent career as an entertainment superstar suggests that she has since transcended the role of sexual object. Such

<sup>9</sup> See Faruk and Aprinus Salam (2003); Gunawan (2003); and Mulligan (2005). For articles about Inul Daratista in the Western media see, among many others, BBC News (2003); Lipscombe (2003); Mapes (2003); and Wilde (2003). The Inul Daratista Fans Club (IDFC) maintained an extensive Indonesian-language webpage devoted to the singer; a multilingual Google search of her name conducted on 5 February 2013 resulted in 1,120,000 hits.

power, I would argue, stems from the intimate link between *dangdut* music and Indonesian national identity that I have attempted to outline in this essay, and from the customary role of the female singer-dancer to envoke this link before an audience, thereby generating a sense of communal belonging for all those within earshot. I bring Inul up here to emphasize the extent to which she owes her celebrity status to the central role *dangdut* music historically has played in Indonesian national consciousness. In the words of 'Eri from Surabaya' (n.d.) the author of an essay in English praising Inul (which contains language from Walsh 2003) on a website called MyHero.com:

As many people know, Inul is recognized as a great Indonesian artist, who some say reminds them of American rap artist, Eminem. Why? Because she has made many differences in Indonesian music by adding some sexuality and sizzle into '*dangdut*'....Indonesian people really like *dangdut* music. In fact, they consider it their national anthem.

It is further possible that Inul's unique fame (which has surpassed that of more established and [many would say] far more talented *dangdut* performers such as Iis Dahlia, Ikke Nurjanah, and Evie Tamala) may stem from the forthright challenge her performances mount against the patriarchal leanings of both *dangdut* music and Indonesian nationalism. During one segment of her July 2003 comeback variety TV special *Rindu Inul*, Inul returned to her rock roots with a performance of Iwan Fals's classic anti-New Order protest song *Bento* – an anthem of popular nationalist sentiment (cf. Lockard 1998:110–11). As the camera panned across the faces of the batik-clad VIP audience members in the front rows singing along with Inul's spirited rendition of the tune, it was clear that the powerful links between popular music, social protest, Indonesian nationalism, and masculinity forged by Fals's music (see the contribution by Gjelstad, this volume) had been decisively denaturalized, perhaps irrevocably.

### *Conclusion*

The phenomenon known as *dangdut* music in Indonesia is a product of the complex interrelations between constructs of gender, class, religion, nation, and modernity. These constructs intersect in *dangdut*'s genre ideology, a crucial metacultural facilitator of its circulation. Perhaps the ideal outcome of this association between '*dangdut*' and 'Indonesia' is a *grand tautology* of music and nation, in which the music becomes an object of a metacultural ideology of belonging, while the idea of the nation acquires

an emotionally salient sensible, material form that allows (male) citizens the ability to feel that they are part of a larger whole experienced as 'national'.<sup>10</sup>

*Dangdut* music, as manifested in the practices of album producers, the multigenerational collective effervescence of concerts, and informal roadside performances, erases social boundaries and creates an inclusive—if often ephemeral—community in which identity is reduced to the inclusive ideological category of 'Indonesian-ness', with gender as the sole remaining divide. Just as Soekarno tried to encompass the contradictory streams of communism, nationalism, and political Islamism into a larger, integrated whole, *dangdut* music attempts to encompass the entire gamut of popular sounds: the polished production techniques and sweet timbres of pop; the expressive, ornamented singing of the Islamic world; the tantalizing folk-derived dance rhythms of Indian film music; the energy and power of Western hard rock; and the ethnic nuances of Indonesia's regional musical traditions. Indeed, there is very little in the contemporary Indonesian popular music scene that has *not* been introduced and incorporated into the *dangdut* sound. Even hip hop and electronic dance music have found their way into a subgenre dubbed *dangdut trendy*, as has an unprecedented array of traditional 'ethnic' instruments and sonic textures recreated through digital samples (cf. Lysloff 1997:215; Wallach 2004, 2005).

Like Soekarnoism, however, *dangdut* fails in its totalizing mission, unable to fully engulf the individualistic, xenocentric orientation and cosmopolitan longings of the elite and middle classes within its stylistic boundaries (see Wallach 2002). The developmentalist ideologies internalized by members of the Indonesian middle class justify the persistence of the social gap as a function of the perceived cultural backwardness of the

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<sup>10</sup> I have been accused of exaggerating *dangdut*'s contemporary significance as a quintessentially Indonesian music. Brent Luvaas (2009:177) writes, 'In fact, Wallach displays throughout [his 2008] book a clear preference for *dangdut*, as if it were uniquely equipped to the task of reconciling Indonesia's discursive struggles.' On the other hand, there is the runaway hit song by Indonesia's Pop Project released in 2003, *Dangdut is the music of my country* (English in the original), that proclaims, '*Ada orang Batak, ada orang Jawa, ada orang Ambon, ada juga orang Padang... Apakah yang dapat menyatukan kita? Salah satunya dengan musik!*' [There are Bataks, there are Javanese, there are Ambonese, also people from Padang...What can unite us all? Only music!] *Dangdut is the music of my country!*' The song is essentially the genre ideology of *dangdut* outlined herein expressed in musical form, For a detailed English-language examination of *Dangdut is the music...* and its accompanying video clip by an astute Malaysian blogger, see Mahdzan (2003).

poor. This mentality ensures that *dangdut* music, a cultural form that exemplifies this backwardness, will never lose its associations with the 'village', that imagined site of ignorance, stasis, and resistance to national modernity. The fact that even the urban poor are considered 'villagers' (*orang kampung*) reinforces the stereotype and conflates the traditional/modern dichotomy of modernization theory with the persistent economic inequalities produced by uneven and corrupted patterns of national development. *Dangdut's* obvious deviations from the sound and style of global pop music genres make it an abject form, neither traditional nor modern, that to its critics expresses nothing more than the nonaffluent majority's cultural inauthenticity and lack of cultivation. As an achieved rather than inherent state, the modern must be defined by what it is not – this holds as true for followers of modernist Islam as for developmentalist technocrats – but *dangdut* music does not exclude any possibilities. Instead, it incorporates them all into an unruly and impure hybrid formation that elicits disgust and disavowal from modernists and moralists, but whose democratic, participatory potential is embraced by its primary audience.

In 2001, to commemorate the centennial of President Soekarno's birth, Benedict Anderson composed an essay in Indonesian that was published in pamphlet form and distributed widely throughout the country. In its conclusion, he writes:

The 'Indonesian' imagined by [Soekarno's] National Movement was a human being who stood up straight, didn't grovel to, and didn't trample on, anyone, and was open-minded, dynamic, inclusive, steadfast in adversity, and with sympathy for all mankind. A human being of this kind is not a creature who appears in the world 'naturally,' but needs to be trained, day in and day out, both by him- or herself, and by his or her fellow human beings. This, I think, is the most important of those 'lessons' from Bung Karno that are still fresh and relevant for his countrymen (English translation from Anderson 2002:19).

I want to conclude by suggesting that this ethical being into which, according to Anderson, Soekarno sought to fashion his countrymen could not be 'trained' through words alone, but through embodied practices and affectively powerful experiences as well. Despite its tawdry commercialism and questionable gender politics—or perhaps even because of them—few cultural forms have matched *dangdut* music's role in shaping an Indonesian national consciousness among the humblest citizens of the nation, training them to be 'Indonesians.' Ultimately, the sensual grooves of *dangdut* music, like those of all great popular musics, seep

through the ideological and social boundaries that seek to contain them. Inul Daratista thus not only symbolizes resistance against the hypocritical prudishness of conservative Muslim clerics; she also provides a point of contact between elites and non-elites, who, carried away by the irresistible sensual pull of her music, can at last relate to one another as fellow countrymen.

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## CHAPTER TEN

# POLITICIANS WHO LOVE TO SING AND POLITICIANS WHO DETEST SINGING

Kees van Dijk

### *Introduction*

It is difficult for me to imagine Queen Beatrix or Queen Elizabeth bursting into an evergreen during or at the end of a public function. I can envision former Dutch Prime Minister, Jan Peter Balkenende, or George W. Bush singing hymns in a Protestant choir, but them joining a karaoke session passes beyond the bounds of my imagination. It is equally difficult for me to depict Gerhard Schröder, Tony Blair or Jacques Chirac turning a banquet in a singing session. And how about the then American Defense Secretary, Donald H. Rumsfeld, singing *My way* while he is having dinner in a restaurant? Prominent European and American politicians do not strike me as persons who make a hobby of singing popular songs in public. They go to bars and restaurants, but not to karaoke establishments. Socialist leaders may break into militant songs for sentimental reasons or as part of the political ritual, but when they do so they often appear uncomfortable and give the impression not to remember the lyrics. The 2003 annual conference of the British Labour Party held in Bournemouth confirms this impression. For the first time in years the conference was concluded by the party members who attended the conference singing in unison the militant song *The red flag* created by an Irishman, Jim Connell, in 1889. The tradition of closing Labour conferences with *The red flag* was abandoned by Blair in 1999 after he could be seen struggling to sing it. Part of the text might also have to do something with the decision. It is too wonderful not to cite here:

Look round, the Frenchman loves its blaze  
The sturdy German chants its praise  
In Moscow's vaults its hymns are sung  
Chicago swells the surging throng

For those who did not remember the words the text was projected on a screen during the Bournemouth party conference. Nevertheless, it was

reported that many delegates remained silent when a children choir struck up *The Red Flag*. Blair did sing along.

How different it is in Asia! When President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo of the Philippines went on an official visit to the People's Republic of China in October 2001 she knew what lay in store for her. The Chinese President Jiang Zemin had visited the Philippines five years before and on that occasion he had danced the cha-cha and had sung Elvis Presley's *Love me tender* in a karaoke duet with President Fidel Ramos. Aware of Jiang Zemin's love of singing, Arroyo displayed some apprehension in advance of her trip. She told journalists before she left that she was 'bracing for a round of karaoke' and that she would 'serenade Chinese President Jiang Zemin with a love song'.<sup>1</sup> The moment of truth came during the state dinner in Beijing when Jiang Zemin asked her if she sang. She apparently did. Accompanied by an accordionist Arroyo sang *Minamahal kita*. Jiang Zemin responded with *O sole mio* whereupon Arroyo again took the floor with *I have you to save my day*, a song by Karen Carpenter, the lead singer of the Carpenters. The singing session ended with a duet: *O sole mio*; in the English as well as the Italian version. Afterwards Arroyo confessed that she had been a bit nervous. She explained that she was not used to singing in public, especially not in the presence of such a 'good baritone singer' as Jiang Zemin was.<sup>2</sup> It appears that Arroyo got used to performing before a large audience. Occasionally on her tours to the province, she sings at the meetings she attends.

Nevertheless, Arroyo is not in the forefront of that special brand of karaokeing and singing politicians and military officers who have emerged in South-East Asia in the last few decades.<sup>3</sup> The ex-movie actor Joseph Estrada, her predecessor, was. He loved to sing and at dinners at the Palace frequently treated his guests to songs. One of Estrada's favourites was '*Endure I Will*', a song he wrote in the 1960s when he thought that he had lost a local election, though later this proved to be a wrong assessment. After he had become president, Estrada once even sang *Endure I will* accompanied by a 72-piece orchestra in front of a large audience.

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<sup>1</sup> *Japan Today* 27-10-2001.

<sup>2</sup> *Manila Bulletin Online* 31-10-2001.

<sup>3</sup> Their hobby extends outside Asia. At the conclusion of the annual meetings of the Association of South-East Asian Nations (ASEAN) Regional Forum, in which the so-called ASEAN dialogue partners participate, a show is organized in which foreign ministers and other diplomats sing and dance. In July 2004 the US Secretary of State Colin L. Powell and five other American officials performed the Village People's song YMCA. Powell could be seen singing and dancing in a builder's outfit, complete with a hard hat and a hammer hanging from his belt. His Russian colleague sang the Beatles' *Yellow submarine*.

The song was also recorded on a CD which Estrada intended as a special gift for diplomats and distinguished visitors. Ordinary Filipinos were also given the opportunity to hear Estrada sing. He released a commercial CD - featuring the love song *Kahit* (Even though) and the folk song *Planting rice*.<sup>4</sup> 'People Power' brought Estrada down. Accused of corruption and in jail, one of the points which were held out against him was that it was his wont to issue presidential decrees during nocturnal karaoke and drinking sessions.

Unlike Arroyo, a number of her cabinet ministers and presidential advisors love to karaoke and to perform as singers in public. During a two-day 'team-building workshop' of the full cabinet in Pampanga in October 2002, there was a lot of singing. It was reported that Arroyo was visibly touched when during luncheon on the second day of their trip her ministers and advisors sang to her *You'll never walk alone*. Dinner that evening turned into a full karaoke and singing session. The 'braver Cabinet members serenaded Mrs Arroyo with solo numbers, while others settled for group singing with the aid of the karaoke ...[o]ther Cabinet singers chose to be backed up by a keyboard player'.<sup>5</sup> Arroyo herself did not sing at that occasion. She had a sore throat. During other visits to the provinces, ministers accompanying her may wander off to a place where they can karaoke.

At least three members of Arroyo's 2001–2004 government were ardent karaoke singers and from time to time struck up songs in restaurants and other establishments: the Minister of Internal Affairs and Local Government, Jose (Joey) Lina, the Minister of Defence, General Angelo Reyes, and the Minister of Public Work and Chairman of the Metro Manila Development Authority (MMDA), Bayani Fernando. Their hobby won them an avalanche of publicity when the 'Manila's Three Tenors', as they called themselves, performed during a benefit concert, *Salute*, for the Free Legal Assistance for Good Cops (FLAG Cops) programme in Manila in May 2003. The songs they performed were popular songs from the 1960s and 1970s. Among these were Elvis Presley's *Wooden heart* and *Tonight* from the musical *West Side Story*. They also sang *Sana'y Wala Nang Wakas* and *Anak Dalita* and other Filipino love songs.<sup>6</sup> Their performance was

<sup>4</sup> See BBCNEWS 30-8-1999; *Asiaweek* 20-8-1999, p. 109.

<sup>5</sup> PS 4-10-2002.

<sup>6</sup> The three had the opportunity to rehearse during the 58th birthday party of Reyes on 17 March, 2003. Among the songs they sang in the presence of Arroyo was John Lennon's *Imagine*. Its text had been adapted to present-day worries in the Philippines. Reyes hinting at the brutal civil war which is fought in the south of the Philippines sang 'Imagine'

judged a great success. The producer of the charity concert even booked them for a concert tour of Australia.<sup>7</sup>

### *Singing Politicians*

In Indonesia the singing politician also has made his bow. A special initiative was made in August 2002. To commemorate the hundredth birthday of Indonesia's first Vice-President, Mohammad Hatta, a special video clip *Paduan Suara 'Indonesia pusaka!'* (The Choir 'Indonesia heritage land') was broadcast by three TV stations: TVRI, TPI, and ANTEVE. In the TV broadcast a range of politicians, businessmen, artists, and intellectuals sang a strophe from one of Hatta's favourite songs, *Indonesia (tanah) pusaka*, composed by Ismail Marzuki in 1944. The broadcast was symbolic in a number of ways. It honoured one of the founding fathers of the Indonesian Republic, expressed a love of one's country, and indicated the importance attached to patriotic songs by the leaders of the country. So that the clip would convey an additional social message, a *becak* driver and a refuse collector were also among those who sang a strophe of *Indonesia (tanah) pusaka*. Among those whom TV watchers could see perform were the Indonesian President Megawati Soekarnoputri, her predecessor, Abdurrahman Wahid, Vice-President Hamzah Haz (a figurehead of fundamentalist Islam in Indonesia), the powerful Coordinating Minister for Political and Security Affairs (and future President), Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono, Soeharto's daughter, Siti Hardiyanti Rukmana or more familiarly Tutut (and there could be no better indication that she still belonged to the Indonesian political elite), and Amien Rais and Akbar Tanjung, respectively chairman of the Indonesian People's Congress

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there's no faction, among Christians and Muslims. No attacks, no beheading, no terrorism, too. Imagine all people, living in peace night and day.' Lina's rendering contained the sentence 'Imagine that all policemen are trusted by all men. No police brutality and no fatality. Imagine all law enforcers, clean living every day, ui-ooh' (*Philstar.com* 19-3-2003).

<sup>7</sup> See *Philstar.com* 30-8-2003. Reyes was forced to resign in August 2003, after a soldier's mutinee in Manila's financial district Makati City on 27 July, 2003. The mutineers accused him and senior army officers of being behind the bomb blasts in a number of cities in the Southern Philippines in an effort to have the United States increase its military aid to the Philippines. After his resignation had been made public Reyes told journalists that he was contemplating pursuing a career as a singer. Instead, he was appointed ambassador-at-large on counter-terrorism, a function which carried Cabinet rank. He also became head of a National Anti-Kidnapping Task Force. One politician pointed out that people only remembered Reyes for his singing and dancing on stage and not for his combat record as a soldier. He could not see 'how a singing and dancing anti-kidnapping czar can install fear among ruthless criminals' (*Manila Times* 21-11-2003).

(MPR, Majelis Permusyawaratan Rakyat) and of the Indonesian Parliament (DPR, Dewan Perwakilan Rakyat). Some gave a good performance, but others were less proficient.

For many of the politicians *Paduan Suara Indonesia Pusaka!*<sup>8</sup> was a solitary departure from the norm. The video clip is also hors concourse. *Indonesia (tanah) pusaka* is a romantic patriotic song. It belongs to a class of songs popular in certain circles and sung spontaneously on occasions which are of national importance. Though some may find it difficult to believe – the patriotic songs are also known as *lagu wajib*, compulsory songs, indicating that schoolchildren are obliged to sing them – a number of the patriotic songs are imbued with a high emotional content. This is especially true for songs created just before and during the 1945–1950 struggle for independence (see Van Dijk 2003). Patriotic songs may be sung by members of the political elite to highlight patriotic campaigns, but also by demonstrators telling that same political elite that they have lost all sense of patriotism and social justice, that they had become selfish, greedy and oppressive.<sup>8</sup> Cassette tapes, and in recent years CDs and VCDs, reproducing such songs and also the less emotionally charged ones certainly have a market in Indonesia, but patriotic songs are not the type of music that concerns us here.

In the past occasionally Indonesian politicians sang at public political mass meetings. One such performer was Siti Hardiyanti Rukmana. She sang a song by Franky Sahilatua during a general election campaign meeting in Pasuruan in April 1997, at a time when it was rumoured that she was being groomed to succeed her father as president. She did so in duet with Basofi Soedirman, one of the few Indonesian politicians with music records to his name. At rare occasions, Indonesians could see and hear Megawati sing during her presidency. Like her friend and colleague Arroyo, Megawati, who initially refused to join in in the *Indonesia Pusaka* choir, is a modest public singer.<sup>9</sup> The first time she sang in public was

<sup>8</sup> In Indonesia demonstrators demanding Soeharto step down sang such patriotic songs. A comparable phenomenon could be observed during the People Power that brought down Ferdinand Marcos in the Philippines. Here the song that became the 'the anthem of the anti-Marcos movement' was *Bayan ko* (My country) which dated from 1896, the year Filipinos, under the leadership of Emilio Aguinaldo, rose in rebellion against Spain (Lockard 1991:100).

<sup>9</sup> When Megawati visited China in May 2002, she was spared the fate of having to sing a duet with Jiang Zemin during the state dinner. Instead she danced with him. In *Tempo* (English edition 7-4-2002, p. 60) it was recorded that the 'extraordinary sight could be interpreted as a new milestone in Indonesia-China diplomatic relations' and that the six minutes 'could end up being six extremely important minutes.'

when she visited Papua in December 2002. As a 'Christmas gift' she sang a duet with a singer from Papua, Frida Meles, and *My way*. *My way*, one of the top hits in karaoke bars, is Megawati's favourite song, but in view of the fact that her performance as president was widely criticized, not the best choice.<sup>10</sup> Her second public performance came in March 2003. After announcing the institution of a national Music Day and having been requested to sing, she caroled *Di wajahmu kulihat bulan* (On your face I see the moon), a love song from the 1950s.<sup>11</sup>

### *Crooning Generals and Patriotic Police Men*

There were also Indonesian politicians who did not hide the fact that singing is their hobby. In the days before karaoke burst into the world there was Police General Drs Hoegeng Imam Santoso, Chief of Police from 1968 till 1971, who played the ukulele and was a great lover of Hawai'i'an music. He was lead singer of the 'Hawaiian Seniors', a band founded in 1968. The 'Hawaiian Seniors' regularly performed live on a private radio station, Elshinta Radio, and on the national TV station, TVRI, in those days still the only TV station. Soon Hoegeng was being dubbed 'the singing general' (Yusra and Ramadhan 1993:373). After he had turned dissident and had become a member of the 'Petition of 50' group, Hoegeng became a political pariah. One of the consequences of President Soeharto's wrath was that Hoegeng and his band were banned from TV. Their show was replaced by one with 'national music' in 1980 (Yusra and Ramadhan 1993:374).

Since the days of Hoegeng much has changed. Opportunities for people to grab a microphone and sing in public, then still rare, have multiplied. The emergence of mass tourism in South-East Asia in the 1970s and the growth of an affluent South-East Asian middle and upper class in the same period has encouraged the mushrooming of hotels and thus also of hotel bars where one could sing. Later, in the 1980s, the invention of karaoke expanded such opportunities to take hold of a microphone in public even more. In Muslim countries, such places are little bit suspect, but, especially in Indonesia, luxury hotels have become an integral part of the

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<sup>10</sup> Megawati shares this love of *My way* with Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir bin Mohamad, Prime Minister of Malaysia from 1981 till 31 October, 2003, who occasionally sings *My way* at parties.

<sup>11</sup> Hari Musik Nasional (National Music Day), is 9 March, the birthday of the composer of the national anthem, Wage Rudolf Supratman.

public life of the elite. And, for those who have no desire to set foot in such places or cannot afford to do so, there still are the karaoke cassette tapes on which it is possible to switch of the vocal rendering. On other cassettes some songs are recorded in a vocal version and in karaoke version. Such cassettes are a sure indication that also in Indonesia karaoke, or to use another term used in South-East Asia videoke, is a favourite pastime. It may be by chance, but almost all the VCDs I have bought in recent years are 'karaoke VCDs' or at least have subtitles.

The Indonesian politicians best known at present for their public performances as enthusiast singers all have a military background: Basofi Soedirman, Wiranto, Moerdiono and Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono. Significantly, setting them apart from their Filipino colleagues, when they sing they prefer – but not exclusively so – to sing Indonesian songs. This preference is in concert with the trend that Western top hits are popular in Indonesia, but that Indonesian singers and bands usually release cassettes, CDs and VCDs with Indonesian songs. The same pattern can be found in Malaysia (Lockard 1991:73).

The trendsetter for the present generation of singing Indonesian generals was Basofi Soedirman, a retired major-general. Basofi Soedirman was Governor of East Java from August 1993 till October 1998, when the Armed Forces obstructed his re-election, giving preference to the candidacy of another retired officer, Major-General Imam Utomo. Basofi Soedirman appears from time to time as a singer on TV and released at least several cassette tapes in the 1990s. One is *Hanya kau yang kupilih* (Only you do I choose, a song composed by Leo Waldy). Another is *Tidak semua wanita* (Not all women, a song composed by Imam S. Arifin). There is no gender bias. The second tape also contains *Tidak semua laki-laki* (Not all men), written by Leo Waldy. It is Basofi's most popular song. His theme song as it was. When people write or talk about his musical exploits, it is almost invariably *Tidak semua laki-laki* they mention. Basofi Soedirman released a Karaoke VCD *Yang terbaik dari Basofi Soedirman* (The best of Basofi Soedirman) in 2000. His tapes and performances made him a well-known public figure. One of the consequences was that Basofi Soedirman is far better known by the ordinary people than Imam Utomo who succeeded him as governor. Many in the countryside of East Java even continued to think that he still was the governor of the province.<sup>12</sup>

The second singing general is the former Minister Secretary of State, Moerdiono. Moerdiono, a retired lieutenant-general, was one of the most

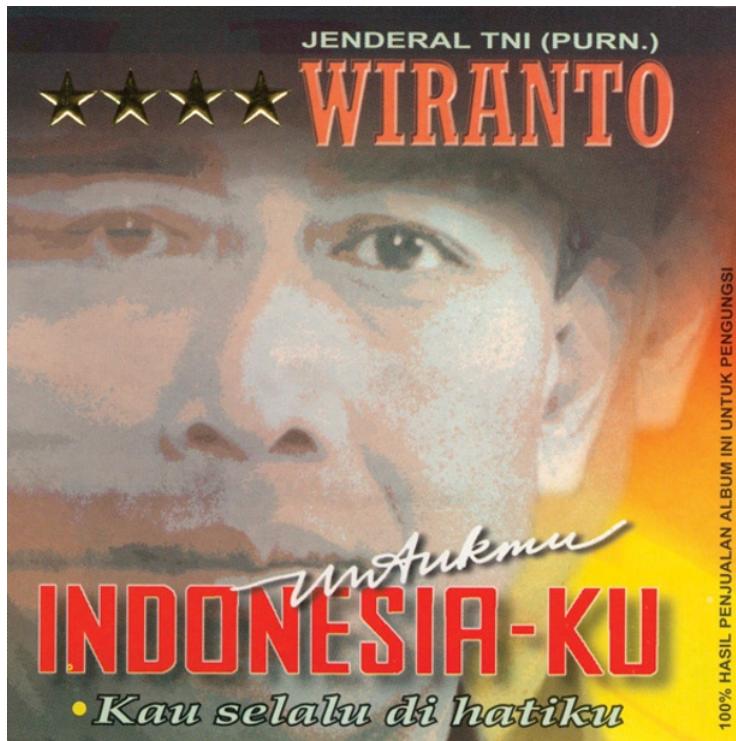
<sup>12</sup> *Kompas* 26-3-2003.



10.1. *Dari ulama untuk bangsa* (1999) a cassette recorded by Basofi Soedirman for the Islamic PKB party during the elections campaigns.

powerful politicians in the closing years of the New Order. He is a fervent singer and dancer on stage and is known as a promoter of the popular dangdut music genre. He even intended to institute a National Dangdut Day. Moerdiono was the man behind the *Pesta Rakyat Langlang Buana 95* (1995 Roaming People's Party), a dangdut tour travelling to twelve Indonesian cities to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the Declaration of Indonesian Independence. The festivities culminated in a mass concert at Ancol in Jakarta, *Semarak Dangdut 50 Tahun Indonesia Emas* (The Dangdut Lustre of the Golden 50 Years of Indonesia), on 17 August, 1995. At the concert Moerdiono himself did a duet with dangdut star, Elvy Sukaesih. Maybe the tour was the reason why the weekly *Gatra* called Moerdiono *Bapak Musik Dangdut*,<sup>13</sup> 'Mister Dangdut Music', in 1996. Moerdiono was awarded the 'Dangdut Figure of 1997' prize the following year (Bass n.d.).

<sup>13</sup> *Gatra* 24-2-1996, p. 22.



10.2. the cassette *Untukmu Indonesia-ku* (2000) by retired Indonesian army general Wiranto.

General Wiranto, described in the British *The Guardian* as 'a self-confessed karaoke addict'<sup>14</sup> is at present also retired. He was Minister of Defence and Security and Commander of the Armed Forces at the time when militiamen went on the rampage in East Timor. He narrowly escaped being tried in Indonesia and abroad for having committed crimes against humanity, but he did lose his job. After Abdurrahman Wahid had forced him to retire, Wiranto released the CD and cassette tape *Untukmu Indonesia-ku* (For you, my Indonesia) in October 2000. Of five of the twelve songs, a karaoke version is included. A video clip was produced of three of the songs. The proceeds of *Untukmu Indonesia-ku*—the cover promises a hundred per cent—were earmarked for domestic refugees, fleeing their homes in the many conflict-torn regions in Indonesia.

<sup>14</sup> *The Guardian* 24-10-2000.

To underscore this aim, Wiranto sang two of the recorded songs against the background of a video showing refugees in slow motion when the CD was launched in the ballroom of the posh Shangri-La hotel in Jakarta in October 2000. Because of what had happened in East Timor, the event raised some eyebrows, especially outside Indonesia.<sup>15</sup> After the launching of the CD Wiranto went on a tour through Indonesia to promote his CD and himself. He also appeared on TV shows, from time to time, as it was noted in the *Far Eastern Economic Review*<sup>16</sup> with the national flag draped around his shoulders; a sight not unfamiliar in Indonesia and Malaysia when patriotic songs are broadcast on TV.

With an army general braking ground as a music star the Indonesian police could not stay behind. Police Brigade General Drs Alex Bambang Riatmodjo SH MBA PhD (or more familiarly, Alex Bram) came with the cassette tape *Anak bangsa bersatulah!* (Indonesians unite!) in July 2001. The title, and to a lesser extent also that of Wiranto's album, is an example of a new kind of patriotic drive that took shape during the domestic turmoil that followed the fall of Soeharto, calling for patriotic feelings, unity, and domestic peace.<sup>17</sup> To strengthen this patriotic appeal the cover shows a picture of Soekarno and a quotation of one of his sayings *Kita kuat karena bersatu. Kita bersatu karena kuat!* (We are strong because we are one. We are one because we are strong!). *Anak bangsa bersatulah!* is one long eulogy about the police, and reminds me of a song from my youth, *De politie is je beste kameraad* (The police are your best friend). Songs have titles like *Do'a untuk polisi* (A prayer for the police),<sup>18</sup> *Wewenang polisi* (The authority of the police) and *Kaki kiri di kuburan, kaki kanan di penjara* (The left foot in the grave, the right foot in jail).<sup>19</sup> The texts are all

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<sup>15</sup> There had been even more indignation when Wiranto burst into Morris Albert's *Feelings* at a meeting of Army wives on 19 September 1999, just a fortnight after the carnage in East Timor had begun.

<sup>16</sup> *Far Eastern Economic Review* 21-8-2003, p. 57.

<sup>17</sup> Another avowed 'nationalist' is Abdurrahman Wahid. Reflecting the latter's position that the Indonesian Republic should remain a unitary state in which there is no place for separatist movements, a video clip was shown during 1998 election campaign gatherings of his party, the PKB (Partai Kebangkitan Bangsa, Party of the Awakening of the Nation). The clip, which was entitled *Indonesiaku menyanyi* (My Indonesia sings), contained songs like *Satu nusa satu bangsa* (One land one nation) and *Maju tak gentar* (Advance fearlessly).

<sup>18</sup> The prayer reads: *Oh ... Tuhan Yang Maha Esa* (Oh Almighty Lord), *Bimbanglah Bhayangkara ku sayang* (Guide my beloved Bhayangkara), *Lindungilah Polisi ku sayang* (Protect my beloved Police), *Juahkanlah dari kemalangan* (Preserve them from misfortune).

<sup>19</sup> *Di Akademi engkau diperingati* (At the Police Academy you are warned of), *Risikonya seorang polisi* (The hazards of being a policeman are), *Kaki kirimu di kuburan* (Your left foot in the grave), *Dan kaki kananmu di penjara* (And your right foot in jail).

garnished with the same sauce. The refrain of *Polisi harapan masyarakat* (Police, society's hope) reads:

|                                     |                                |
|-------------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| <i>Oh ... Polisi pelindung kami</i> | Oh .. the Police our protector |
| <i>Oh ... Polisi penayom kami</i>   | Oh ... the Police our guardian |
| <i>Oh ... Polisi sahabat kami</i>   | Oh ... the Police our friend   |
| <i>Oh ... Polisi pelayan kami</i>   | Oh ... the Police our servant  |
| <i>Bertindak tanpa pandang bulu</i> | Act irrespective of persons    |
| <i>Dan juga pilih kasih</i>         | And without fear or favour     |

### *The Sound of Campaigning*

The Filipino and Indonesian politicians who do karaoke and sing do so because they consider it to be fun. Their singing can also promote their career. They hope that their performances at election rallies may win them extra votes. Nevertheless, they also put much hope in the popularity of the bands and singers they engage to perform at campaign events. In Indonesia professional dangdut artists were and are the main attraction at political rallies. *Tempo Interaktif* even called dangdut the 'official music' of the 1997 general election campaign.<sup>20</sup> The magazine also noted that all top dangdut singers performed at rallies of the Golkar (the party which could bestow favours and which also paid the highest fees). Indonesians go to rallies during the campaign period before a general election to hear professional dangdut singers. They would be highly disappointed where they only to be treated to singing politicians, and for that matter they can get extremely angry when their idols change sides. The latter became evident when riots erupted in Pekalongan in March 1997 after it had become known that the immensely popular H. Rhoma Irama (or more intimately Bang Haji, Older Brother Haji) would perform at a rally of the Golkar, the party associated with New Order and the Soeharto family, thereby 'betraying' the Islamic Partai Persatuan Pembangunan (PPP, the United Development Party), the party he had campaigned for in the past.

For Wiranto his singing was clearly also a means to an end. His ambition was to become president. For this, he needed first to gain support of the Golkar chapters, to have that party nominate him as its candidate in the 2004 presidential election. He deliberately used his musical talents to better his chances, singing songs at the mass meetings when he toured the country to boost his popularity. It did help. In the evaluations of

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<sup>20</sup> *Tempo Interaktif* 27-5-1997.

Wiranto's chances of being selected by the Golkar as its presidential candidate, at times his singing was mentioned as a factor counting in his favour. Wiranto indeed succeeded in becoming Golkar's candidate for the Presidency. As the Golkar was one of the largest parties in Indonesia this made him one of the favourites in the race for the presidency.

There were many elections Indonesia in 2004: first in April for the legislative bodies, thereupon in July for the presidency in which parties which had received at least a minimum percentage of votes in the election for the national parliament could field a candidate, and finally – because none of the candidates had gained 50 per cent of the votes in the first instance - a second round with the top two of the July election contesting each other in September.

The run-up to the general election for seats in the representative bodies of 2004 still showed the familiar pattern, or as a journalist of *The Straits Times* observed, it was 'dangdut or song and dance time in Indonesia'.<sup>21</sup> Political parties tried to lure voters to rallies by hiring dangdut musicians, and when they stressed their religious background also, or exclusively so, groups performing Islamic music.<sup>22</sup> The party leaders themselves – Megawati, Wiranto, Siti Hardiyanti Rukmana, Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono, and Amien Rais – also sang their songs and danced along on the tune of the music by the bands hired. Abdurrahman Wahid and fellow PKB politicians even got in some trouble with local religious leaders in Bogor. In accordance with the rules a campaign location had been assigned by the municipality, but it had been overlooked that there was a mosque nearby. The rally had to be disbanded after protests that the music was too loud and disturbed the quiet of the mosque. The day before the same had happened with a rally organized by the equally Islamic-oriented PPP.

The campaign preceding the presidential election was of a somewhat different order. In the first round of the presidential elections two of the candidates threw their singing into the fray. One was Wiranto. The other was an outsider: Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono, who after a row with Megawati had left the cabinet and within a short period of time had succeeded in acquiring great popularity all over Indonesia. As it happened to be Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono was also an ardent singer who unlike Wiranto or Moerdiono had not made a public display of his hobby before

<sup>21</sup> *Straits Times Interactive* 30-3-2004.

<sup>22</sup> This time Rhoma Irama did not offer his services exclusively to one party but performed at rallies of different ones, singing at rallies of the Partai Keadilan Sejahtera (PKS, Prosperous Justice Party), the Partai Bintang Reformasi (PBR, Reform Star Party, a splinter off of the PPP), and the PKB.

he decided to run for president. With Wiranto and Susilo both being considered strong candidates with a good chance of beating Megawati and both being singers the first leg of the presidential election turned into a kind of singing contest between the two.<sup>23</sup> Both even appeared as guest performers in *Akademi fantasi Indosiar* (AFI), the Indonesian version of American Idol, complete with comments by members of the jury, and other TV programmes.<sup>24</sup> The phenomenon of 'crooning' generals bursting into love songs while campaigning was observed with some curiosity by foreign journalists. The Australian ABC television programme *Foreign correspondent* of 1 July 2004 spoke about 'the battle of the singing generals'.

There appears to be a great difference between Hoegeng and the later singing generals. Hoegeng links the 'Hawaiian Seniors' with tempo doeloe; the good old times. Its members all played in *Hawaiian* bands before World War II (Yusra and Ramadhan 1993:372). Pictures of him and his wife, Mery, appearing on TV, in his autobiography are also moving because of the Hawaiian shirts and leis Hoegeng wears. There is nothing macho about his musical performance. An ukelele is not a macho musical instrument. The state of the play with the present-day prominent cabinet members and retired army officers in the Philippines and Indonesia it is different. They may sing for fun or try to increase their popularity, but their performances create the impression that the singing of popular songs also has something to do with power, with high political and social status.

Politicians may use their hobby, singing, as a political instrument to attract voters, and parties may hire singers and bands to lure people to their mass meetings, but the state also at times turns to singing as a political tool. In Indonesia patriotic songs are a means to foster nationalist sentiments. At the same time they are an expression of them. The remark is equally applicable to Malaysia; though contrary to in Indonesia a market for such songs is virtually absent there. In both countries the drives to promote nationalism through music involve patriotic songs, songs explaining the political principles of the country, and songs singing the praises of the nature, the population and (with respect to Malaysia) its economic achievement. This raises the question why the reception of

<sup>23</sup> Once again Wiranto who escaped being tried by an international tribunal for the 1999 carnage in East Timor hurt some feelings. To raise funds for his campaign Wiranto, who had as his running mate Solahudin Wahid, deputy chairman of the Indonesian National Commission on Human Rights organized a gala dinner on 12 May. He said that he had done so deliberately to commemorate the killing of four students of the Trisakti University on that date in 1998.

<sup>24</sup> Other politicians at times also appeared in TV programmes singing songs. In one of these, *Tribute to Indonesia*, Amien Rais preferred to read poetry.

patriotic songs in Malaysia is so different from that in Indonesia. Partly it is because a number of the Indonesian song are related to the Indonesian War of Independence and may be rather romantic in tune and in lyrics. Another reason may be that, whatever bashing of the Indonesian military took place after May 1998, things military have continued to exert a great attraction in Indonesia. Small children just happen spontaneously to imitate a military parade step, while the members of the many para-military groups, which secular and Islamic political parties and organizations have established often are dressed in camouflage uniforms or semi-military outfits.

In Singapore, the efforts to promote good citizenship and patriotism and to make people proud of their country go beyond what is done in Indonesia and Malaysia. Songs praising the country and (especially so) its achievements are released, but in Singapore it is not only the message that counts. The underlying idea in Singapore seems to be that music is good for the spirit and that a singing citizen makes a happy citizen. This policy has its roots in the period just before Singapore became independent and for a short period of time formed part of Federation of Malaysia, created in 1963. What happened then is one of the examples which demonstrate that singing and making music can become an integral part of a political battle. The later President of Singapore, Lee Kuan Yew, writes in his memoirs that he 'believed music was a necessary part of nation-building. It uplifted the spirit of a people' (Lee Kuan Yew 2000:301). Lee Kuan Yew makes this remark when he recounts the events in a kind of music war between him and the Federal Government in Kuala Lumpur which had forbidden the police band of Singapore to perform on Singapore State Day in June 1964. Lee Kuan Yew hit back a few months later. A visit to Brussels, where he attended a meeting of the Socialist International gave him the inspiration. Impressed by the 'great array of bands' which marched in a parade organized by the Socialist International, Lee Kuan Yew decided 'to form them in our schools and the People's Association' (Lee Kuan Yew 2000:300).<sup>25</sup> Consequently, a 'crash programme for brass

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<sup>25</sup> The People's Association was established in April 1960, when bitterness among the Chinese-educated community was one of the main causes of concern for the government. It had been founded by Lee Kuan Yew in his effort to mobilize the citizens of Singapore to counter Communist agitation and was intended as an umbrella for all kinds of social organizations. The People's Association is chaired by the Prime Minister and, according to its legislation, aims at 'the organisation and the promotion of group participation in social, cultural, educational and athletic activities for the people of Singapore in order that they realize that they belong to a multi-racial community, the interests of which transcend

bands in secondary schools' was launched (Lee Kuan Yew 2000:301). The drive was successful. School bands and a band of the People's Association marched through town on Singapore State Day in June the following year. Music was again resorted to in the aftermath of 11 September and the discovery of a terrorist plot in Singapore. The holding of a marathon karaoke session was one of the many initiatives undertaken to foster integration between the Muslim and non-Muslim citizens and to ensure that the Chinese, Malay and Indian community did not grow more widely apart after being informed of plans of Singapore members of the Jemaah Islamiyah to bring to explosion seven truck-bombs of the seize that had been used in the 1995 Oklahoma bombing in the United States.<sup>26</sup>



10.3. The VideoCD *A place in my heart: Sing Singapore* that was released in 2003.

Even today, to get its citizens singing is still among the many campaigns run by the Singaporean government. In 1988 the Ministry of Information, Communication and the Arts (MITA) launched *Sing Singapore*. In 1995 the National Arts Council (NAC) took over. *Sing Singapore* wants 'to promote national bonding through group singing of national and community songs'. Another aim is 'to discover and promote songs written by Singaporeans for Singaporeans, while developing a love for music and singing and thereby

sectional loyalties' (Vasil 2000:71). Among its activities is also the management of community centres all over Singapore.

<sup>26</sup> In the southern Philippines, a 'Singing for Peace in Mindanao' Contest was held in General Santos City in February 2003, in which members of the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF), the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF), the Army, Police and jail management participated. The contest was won by a member of the MILF.

cultivating a greater sense of togetherness among Singaporeans' ([www.singsingapore.org.sg](http://www.singsingapore.org.sg)). A *Sing Singapore* CD with songs in English and in Mandarin, Malay and Tamil, the languages of the three main communities in Singapore, is released each year. The titles and also the lyrics of part of the songs make it clear that it is not just singing that the Singaporean government wants to promote: *One people, one nation. One Singapore, tanah airku* (My fatherland), *One (We are one)*. Singaporeans should consider themselves to be citizens of one Singaporean nation instead of being members of one of the three communities first. They should also be proud of what that nation has achieved since it became independent.

### *Those Who Detest Singing*

At the opposite end of the spectrum are those who want to ban much singing and making music. Such persons can have political or religious reasons for opposing specific music genres and the two sources of motivation at times may meet when both are also inspired by anti-Western sentiments or when the Western influences are considered a threat to the people's own culture. Bans can range from the specific, when offense is taken to the lyrics of particular songs to the general, when a whole genre of art is forbidden.<sup>27</sup> With the present upsurge of hard-line strict Islam in South-East Asia, at the moment those most active in the field of censorship are fundamentalist Muslims who want to purify society. Such Muslims want to forbid a whole range of activities: oral sex, anal sex, pre- and extramarital sex, the being together in a closed room of a man and a women not married to each other and not connected by close family ties, homosexuality, women (even with a headdress) on billboards, crop tops (in October 2000 the spiritual leader of the fundamentalist Muslims in Malaysia, Nik Abdul Aziz Nik Mat, admitted that his own faith could be weakened by the sight of an exposed female navel), lipstick, shaved chins, and so forth and so on.<sup>28</sup> It would be a miracle were making music, singing and dancing to escape unscathed.

<sup>27</sup> A recent Indonesian example of the first is the castigation by KH Ali Yafei, at that time chairman of the MUI, of the singer Desy Ratnasari, for singing the song *Takdir* (Fate), the soundtrack of the *sinetron* of the same name in 1998. He accused her of blasphemy and demanded a public apology from her for singing the line *Takdir memang kejam, tak mengenal perasaan* (Fate really is cruel, it has no compassion), because the text implied that God was cruel and had no compassion, as fate was God's will.

<sup>28</sup> It goes without saying that the desire for prude legislation is not confined to devout Muslim circles. Oral sex is a crime in Singapore. Though not mentioned explicitly prosecution

In Indonesia this movement is pursued under the aegis of the Majelis Ulama Indonesia (MUI, the Indonesian Council of Ulama), created by the New Order government as its interlocutor with the Islamic community and its different streams. The MUI issued and issues *fatwa*, religious rulings, but whether Muslims follow such *fatwa* depends on their own affinity with the religious ideas those issuing a *fatwa* espouse. Before 1998, the MUI in part served the interests of the New Order and its elite. After May 1998 the council unexpectedly transformed into a body preaching puritanical ideas. The MUI issued a *fatwa* against *pornografi* and *pornoaksi* in August 2001 and emerged as one of the organizations which spearheaded the campaign against what its members consider pornography in newspapers, magazines and on TV, that is of women showing a little bit of cleavage and too much of their legs. The showing of *Baywatch* was a thorn in the flesh of its members. A similar reaction was elicited by *Dansa yo dansa* (Come let us dance), a TV show showing the public performing mainly ballroom dances interspersed with the dancing of *Assereje*, which at that moment was immensely popular in Indonesia and elsewhere in South-East Asia. *Dansa yo dansa* was described in one newspaper as showing 'old Indonesian couples embracing one another in ballroom dancing competitions on television'<sup>29</sup> and in another as 'a sentimental showcase for ageing couples to twirl around the dance floor'.<sup>30</sup> Nevertheless, men and women were dancing together, and worse were holding each other; a way of behaving unacceptable in the eyes of some strict Muslims. The protests uttered by the MUI seem to have had some effect. *Dansa yo dansa* was not broadcast during the Fasting Month of 2003. Nevertheless, a comparable programme *Kenangan tembang* (Musical souvenirs) was.

Another thorn in the flesh of the MUI was the dangdut singer Inul Daratista and (especially) her *ngebor* (drilling) hip movements, and, in fact its displeasure expanded to anybody else who took up this kind of performance (see Wallach, elsewhere in this volume).

#### *A Theological Approach to Music*

Recently in Indonesia a number of books have appeared about Islamic law and music which represent a very strict uncompromising point of

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can be based on Section 337 of the Penal Code dealing with voluntary intercourse 'against the order of nature with any man, woman or animal'.

<sup>29</sup> *Straits Times Interactive* 3-6-2002.

<sup>30</sup> *Japan Today* 17-3-2002.

view, and which propagate views definitely not shared even by a large part of the Indonesian fundamentalist Islamic community. They base their ban of almost all singing and making music on the Traditions about the life of the Prophet Muhammad. Among the authors of such books are Syaikh Muhammad Nashiruddin al-Albani (2002), Muslim Atsari (2003), and Abdurrachman al-Mukaffi (n.d.). Their views amount to a near complete ban on singing and dancing; thus also excluding popular genres as Islamic pop, dangdut, and nasyid singing the praise of Islam and its institutions. One section of Al-Mukaffi's book deals with devilish music and singing on radio and TV.<sup>31</sup> It states that listening to a female singer is *haram* (and it has to be assumed that he has men in mind as the public, but this is not completely clear) and harms religion. Al-Mukaffi calls the lyrics of songs 'mantras of unlawful intercourse' (*zina*) and 'verses of the devil' and their tunes the 'flute-playing of the devil'. It goes without saying that he fulminates against the body movements of male and female singers make (Al-Mukaffi n.d.:67, 72). He and others give the impression that they consider singing a greater sin than drinking: 'The drug of singing and music on TV and radio unites the soul of singers, musicians, and listeners. Because of this they can do something that is more dangerous than drinking alcohol' (Al-Mukaffi n.d.:67). He explains what he means by this obscure observation. The bonding of singer and listener holds the danger of *syirik*, polytheism. It often cannot be ruled out that a listener adores the singer more than he loves God. A listener also may be lured into committing 'cruel' things.<sup>32</sup>

Atsari (2003:43–52) goes to great pains to demonstrate that it is no sin to destroy musical instruments, except when they are used to play *rebana* music, and then only on two occasions: women singing at marriages and little girls singing on days of religious festivals. Atsari (2003:68) also allows for some exceptions. He states that singing without a musical accompaniment is still acceptable, providing that the lyrics are not sinful and do not follow the rhythm of music of unbelievers and wicked people. Albani is more extreme. In his view there are no exceptions to a total ban on singing. Albani concludes that singing with and without music is forbidden. From this it follows that he also does not want to hear about Sufi music, Islamic *nasyid* or Islamic songs (Albani 2002:183, 211). The whistling and clapping which are part and parcel of Sufi music will influence the soul.

<sup>31</sup> Of course, there is also a section on showing the *aurat*, that part of the body that should remain covered.

<sup>32</sup> The author is also sure that murder often takes place at concerts (Al-Mukaffi n.d.:77).

It can make people more drunk than alcohol (Albani 2002:193). His translator, Abu Umar Basyir, fully agrees. He leaves no doubt about his position: singing and music are *haram*. There is no such thing as Islamic music (Albani 2002:vi). 'Missionary activities with music? How about missionary activities by means of drinks? Missionary activities by means of unlawful intercourse? Missionary activities by means of extortion?' (Albani 2002:vii). Putting singing and dancing on a par with drinking seems to have struck a favourable chord in Indonesia. A recent book by Suhardi (2003) condemning Inul is entitled *Inul lebih dari segelas arak* (Inul worse than a glass of brandy). The first part of the book is given the title *Ngebor pintu neraka* (Drilling is the gateway to hell).

Such – often translated – literature is no basis for judgment. The strict fundamentalist Indonesian publications are as indicative as they are not. There are still only a few such books on music and their number pales into insignificance compared to literature about Islamic dress codes for women which have been published in Indonesia in the last few decades (books about dress codes for men are conspicuously absent). The attire propagated in some of these publications, black head-to-toe dresses (and skirts no trousers, wearing trousers is dressing like men, which these authors also abhor) often but not always without a face-concealing veil has never become popular in Indonesia. What did emerge as a *vogue* are Islamic fashion shows, which are a contradiction in terms for strict Muslims. Nevertheless, the number of publications indicates that there are people who are interested in the subject, that money, much of it probably coming from abroad, is available to publish these books and booklets, and also, though especially in the Soeharto era it was difficult to gain an impression about this, that there are people who agree with the lifestyle these books propagate.

### *Malaysian Morals*

In Indonesia the assault on un-Islamic singing and indecent dancing is not part of mainstream Islam. For a time Inul gained immensely popularity. At the height of the craze she appeared regularly on TV and her shows attracted huge crowds, among whom some women with headscarves can be observed. After she had come under fire from Muslim circles, a number of influential people rallied to Inul's defense. One of them was Abdurrahman Wahid, leader of one of the largest Islamic organizations in Indonesia, the Nahdlatul Ulama, and at that time already former

president. On one occasion he even said that he would mobilize the Banser, the para-military organization of the Nahdlatul Ulama, if people – and he specifically mentioned Rhoma Irama – were to take action against Inul (Suhardi 2003:174). Abdurrahman Wahid explained that he came to the support of Inul not because he liked her dancing, he did not, but because individual freedoms and human rights were at stake.

In Malaysia the situation is different to that in Indonesia, almost the opposite in fact. Compared to Indonesia many more women dress in a strict Islamic style, but paradoxically Malaysian publications on Islamic dress prescripts are rare. The same observation can be made about singing and dancing in Malaysia. Few books deal with the subject but opposition to certain genres of music and certain types of dances and other art forms is far greater and more institutionalized than in Indonesia.

One of the groups in Malaysia amongst whom a revival of Islam in its more puristic form first manifested itself in the late 1970s and early 1980s was university students and graduates. One of the consequences of this was that in the 1980s students were in the vanguard of the protests against what strict Islamic circles consider practices which violate Islamic norms. Students who adhered to such ideas frowned upon secular entertainment. Among the contemporary fundamentalist student organizations was the Persatuan Mahasiswa Islam Universiti Malaya (PMIUM, Union of Islamic Students of the Malaya University), a close ally of the Parti Islam seMalaysia (PAS), and an Islamic political party which propagates a scripturalist form of Islam. The PMIUM, which aspired to an Islamic Republic, had a great following among the students of the Universiti Malaya in the 1980s. In 1985 it spearheaded a protest against a concert to be given at the campus by the male singer Sudirman Haji Arshad. The PMIUM wanted to enforce a strict segregation of men and women and one of the transgressions which upset its students and also members of the university staff was that Sudirman appeared on stage in the company of women. Dress, of course, was also an issue (Anwar 1990:42–4). Sudirman's concert had to be cancelled, but the Malaysian Federal Government (and at that time Mahathir was already Prime Minister), somewhat alarmed by the wide support fundamentalist Islam had gained among university students and staff, could not agree with what had transpired. Kuala Lumpur saw to it that Sudirman could give a concert at the university later on in the year. In the years that followed, the female singer Sheila Madjid (in 1989), and the male singer, M. Nasir (in 1994), had similar collisions with conservative Islamic radicalism (Metzger 1996:40–1).

Puristic Muslims got the chance to enforce some the rules to which they aspire in wider society in the 1990s when the PAS achieved a position that enabled it to act as the main custodian of scriptural Islamic morals in two Malaysian states. It became the ruling party in Kelantan since the end of 1990 and was in power in Terengganu between 1999 and 2004. Constituting the government meant that the PAS could implement its strict Islamic concepts in these two states; though the Federal Constitution gives the federal government the authority to set limits to a full implementation of an Islamic society as the PAS sees this. PAS rule had far reaching consequences for the entertainment sector. Karaoke bars and discos, and 'un-Islamic' traditional as well as modern music and dance performances were forbidden. The implementation of such bans is a different matter, but the fact that they were issued is indicative of the mentality of the leaders of the PAS, while it should also not be forgotten that by stressing fundamentalist Islam, PAS hoped to lure away Malay Muslims from the United Malays National Organisation (UMNO), the party that was in power in the other states and controlled the Federal Government.

When the PAS came into power in Kelantan, traditional art forms such as *makyong*, *dikir barat*, and *wayang kulit* were banned.<sup>33</sup> Implementation of such bans is a different matter, and in Terengganu, even PAS leaders organized *dikir barat* performances. Thai Buddhists living in the area were allowed to perform their manora dance, but only in temples, not in public places. The Malay *makyung* dance-drama performed by women was also forbidden in Terengganu when the State was under PAS administration. The reason given for the ban was that 'the dresses of the female dancers are revealing'.<sup>34</sup> It goes without saying that dangdut, especially when it involves 'mixed dancing' was also abhorred. The Malaysian Minister of Entrepreneur Development, Nazri Aziz, earned himself much disdain in PAS circles for dancing with a dangdut singer at a Putri UMNO charity event for victims of the Iraq war in June 2003. The PAS monthly *Harakah* published a picture of the two dancing contrasting it with a photo of Nazri Aziz wearing a skullcap during a discussion about Islamic

<sup>33</sup> In March 2003 the Kelantan administration lifted its ban on *wayang kulit* (frowned upon because of the Hindu influences), providing that the performances were stripped of un-Islamic elements. So, no Ramayana and Mahabarata stories. Nik Abdul Aziz Nik Mat explained that the plots should be based on real life. The sort of subjects he preferred were propagating learning and combating the use of drugs.

<sup>34</sup> See BBC 6-6-2000. An opposite trend could be observed in Johor where the Chief Minister initiated a cultural conservation programme to revive traditional music and dance such as *ghazal* and *zapin* in 2003. The initiative gained the full support of the successor of Mahathir, Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, at that moment still Deputy Prime Minister.

schools (a hot issue as the Malaysian government wants to get rid of the Sekolah Agama Rakyat (SAR), the People's Religious Schools because of the fundamentalist religious ideas and anti-government propaganda taught at part of them).

The music the PAS allows is Islamic music. When there is musical accompaniment it has to be by percussion instruments. Wind and string instruments are taboo in the religious views adhered to in PAS circles. To prevent any other form of art being performed and to guard morals, bans were instituted in Kelantan and Terengganu. An Entertainment and Places of Entertainment Control Enactment (with a maximum punishment of five-year imprisonment and/or a fine of 20,000 ringgit) has been in force in Kelantan since October 1998. The Act forbids any form of entertainment which in the view of PAS leaders goes against Islam, or more particularly against the puritanical views they hold about the social interaction of men and women. Pop groups may perform, but only in hotels, and providing that the bands are all male. Female artist are only allowed to sing and dance before a female public. Only girls under the age of 12 are allowed to perform before a mixed public. To justify this decision, Nik Abdul Aziz Nik Mat said that he deplored the use of female artists to attract a public. Such behaviour was an aberration which had come into existence under British rule and had survived even though the colonial period had already passed long since (see for a historical perspective, the contribution by Jan van der Putten in this volume). A halt should be called to such exploitation of women for commercial ends. Women should not be treated as objects of men's desire.

It took some time before the entertainment act was strictly enforced. In May 2002 an official of the Kelantan administration announced that in future only nasyid, Islamic music, would be allowed. Pop music would be strictly forbidden. The following month Nik Abdul Aziz Nik Mat explained to protesting artists that concern about declining morals was the reason behind the ban. He promised that non-Muslim female artists would be allowed to perform before a mixed audience, but only when this was made up of non-Muslims.

Similar legislation and restrictions were issued in Terengganu. A state-owned hotel in Terengganu, the Primula Beach Resort, banned stage performances and no longer allowed its guests to dance in the hotel in July 2003. Initially the hotel management had also stopped the sale of liquor, but it revoked this decision after it realized how much income this would cost the hotel. Chinese residents had already protested. They had pointed out that at wedding receptions and other occasions proposing a toast was

'an important cultural practice' and that disallowing toasts was an infringement of the rights of non-Muslims.<sup>35</sup> The lifting of the ban on alcohol came just in time. A few days later, an East Coast Senior Citizens Karaoke Contest with sixty participants and organized by the Malaysian Chinese Association (MCA) could proceed as planned in the hotel.

The decision of the Primula Beach Resort to prohibit dancing seemed to signify a new state-wide policy. The then Chief Minister of Terengganu, Abdul Hadi Awang, who also is President of the PAS, indicated that he was in favour of outlawing the consumption of alcoholic drinks and 'social dancing', including traditional Indian and Chinese dances in which both men and women participated, even in privately owned hotels.<sup>36</sup> Drinking and dancing (and on one occasion Abdul Hadi Awang indicated that this could only concern cultural activities allowed by the religions adhered to in the Chinese and Indian communities, such as the dragon dance) should only be allowed on premises owned by Chinese or Indians. He also said that the same regulation would come into force in all states in Malaysia where the PAS should come to rule, and eventually throughout the whole country, should the PAS succeed in controlling the federal government.

In February 2004 the MCA openly accused the PAS of harming racial harmony when the Terengganu administration refused a permit to stage a multicultural Chinese New Year Show. The MCA, the Chinese Chamber of Commerce and Industry and the Ministry of Culture, Arts and Tourism were among the organizers. The formal reason for the refusal was not only a ban on the public performance of female dancers and singers, but also, or even especially so, that the State's Entertainment and Places of Entertainment Enactment of 2002 forbade entertainment in schools and during Muslim evening prayer-time.<sup>37</sup> Abdul Hadi Awang explained that non-Muslims were allowed their entertainment but that they should not invite Muslims. Backed by the ministry and with a police permit the three-hour show went on, but started after evening prayers. The event was reportedly attended by 40,000 people.

What was being fought out was not just confrontation over entertainment. The conflict between the PAS and UMNO concerns the whole

<sup>35</sup> *Sunday Star* 3-8-2003.

<sup>36</sup> *Berita Harian Online* 14-8-2003, 15-8-2003.

<sup>37</sup> See *New Strait Times Online* 5-2-2004; *Straits Times Interactive* 6-2-2004. A similar show had also received no permit in Kelantan, but notwithstanding this had also still been held.

fabric of society, with each of the two trying to blacken and pester the other, wherever and in whatever field they can. UMNO and PAS are contesting the nature of an Islamic state. Both say they have the blueprint of a ideal Islamic state. PAS leaders favour strict scriptural rules. UMNO politicians stress modernity and claim that they have succeeded in transforming Malaysia into an affluent, modern Islamic state. They accuse the PAS of wanting to establish a Taliban-like Islamic state in Malaysia. It is a bitter conflict. There are wars of words between politicians of the two parties, while with certain regularity video clips are broadcast on state TV designed to blacken the PAS. The conflict centers on the question of whether *hudud* sentences and *qisas*, 'an eye for an eye' rules should be applied in the States under PAS control. Hudud concerns sentences of crimes mentioned in the Koran and Traditions about the life of the Prophet Muhamad which 'require public punishment of convicted offenders which include the public mutilation of limbs, *rejam* or stoning to death, crucification, and lashing' (Othman 1995:31). Legislation introducing such sentences has been gazetted in Kelantan and also in Terengganu when that State was still under PAS rule, but the federal government has so far prevented its implementation. Religion is the preserve of the individual states, but the Federal Constitution decrees that criminal law falls under the authority of the Federal Government.

The arts is one of the sectors where the battle rages between PAS and UMNO about who represents the right form of Islam. One of the ways for the PAS to question the ideas about Islam as promoted by the UMNO is to attack it for permissions to have Western pop artist perform in Malaysia.<sup>38</sup> Arts is also one of the fields in which the central government claims it and not the administrations of the individual states has the final authority to take decisions. In Kuala Lumpur, the federal Minister of Culture, Art and Tourism, Abdul Kadir Sheikh Fadzir, reacted to the ban on social dancing in Terengganu by stating that the administration of Terengganu did not have the right to ban dancing and singing, especially not when it concerned traditional Malay dances and Malay cultural performances linked to the royal courts. This was the preserve of the Federal Government. Nevertheless, Abdul Kadir Sheikh Fadzir, made one exception. State administrations were entitled to forbid performances which

<sup>38</sup> Other examples are concerts by and Mariah Carey in February 2004 and the rock group Scorpions in September 2004. Opposition to these two concerts was the greater as that of Carey had been planned on Islamic New Year and after being moved forward took place on a Friday, while that of the Scorpions was held on Isra Mi'raj, the Ascension Day of Prophet Muhammad.

were indecent, provocative and insulting to people's feelings; which, of course are exactly criteria on which PAS and UMNO cannot agree.<sup>39</sup>

The Federal Government does not only assert its power to protect the arts or make it possible that artists still perform in PAS-controlled regions. Where dance and music are concerned the impression is created that the UMNO and the Federal Government deliberately act to irritate PAS leaders and followers. One of the occasion when this happened took place in May 2002, when Nik Abdul Aziz Nik Mat and his cabinet ministers in Kelantan refused to attend the closing ceremony of the national water month festival. There were conflicting reports about what the PAS leaders had detested most: the singing and dancing of women on stage or men and women performing at the same time. Whatever the reason, PAS blamed Abdul Kadir Sheikh Fadzir for adding the contested performances to the programme at the last moment. After a second similar incident in September, Nik Abdul Aziz Nik Mat threatened to issue no more licenses for live entertainment, not even to art institutions and hotels. It seems that he had been enraged by a performance of artists from Kuala Lumpur, among them women, and this in the Islamic month of Rajab, the month of Isra Mi'raj, the Ascension Day of the Prophet Muhammad. Similar 'confrontations' were reported from Terengganu. In May 2002 an angry crowd of about one hundred protestors carrying banners on which was written *Allahu Akbar* (God is Great) demonstrated against a charity concert organized in Terengganu by the police (a federal institution) because it was in violation of the strict segregation of the sexes. Abdul Hadi Awang considered the holding of concerts by the police as serious as the refusal by the police to enforce the hudud legislation in Terengganu and Kelantan after it had been gazetted. The government of Terengganu threatened to take the state police to court for violation of the entertainment legislation in December 2002.

What is still permissible in the eyes of its leaders can be gathered from a PAS-style pop concert held Kuala Lumpur in October 2004. It was a feeble effort to revamp the party's image. The PAS had performed poorly in the general elections held a few months earlier and had lost Terengganu to the UMNO. Party leaders realized that one of the reasons for the defeat

<sup>39</sup> Because the UMNO is also striving for an Islamic society, albeit a different one to that which the PAS envisages, at times Kuala Lumpur also acts when artists violate Islamic rules. The Malaysian government urged its Muslim citizens in 1981 not to listen to, or buy cassettes of, the Singaporean singer Anita Sarawak because she wanted to marry an Indonesian Christian singer, Broery Marantika. She was also banned from performing in Malaysia. In the end Broery Marantika converted to Islam (see Metzger 1996:39–40).

was that the PAS had failed to gain the support of young voters, especially of those who had voted for the first time. It was even admitted that the UMNO strategy to use 'immoral entertainment' had been successful.<sup>40</sup> In the audience men and women were segregated. The *New Straits Times Online* reported that '[n]early 2,000 people sat sedately and watched an all-male lineup perform pop, blues and Islamic music that preached family values and worship mixed with poetry and parable recitals'.<sup>41</sup> The organizer, explained that the aim of the concert was 'to show that there is entertainment in Islam' (NSTO 5-10-2004). A leader of the PAS youth wing spoke about 'non-controversial, clean entertainment that is allowed in Islam'.<sup>42</sup>

Nik Abdul Aziz Nik Mat and Abdul Hadi Awang do not have their own way completely. As the controversy over the charity concert indicates the federal institutions are beyond their reach. The concerts which cause them so much grief are still organized. In April 2003, the PAS Youth of Kota Bharu protested against the holding of a float procession and the staging of concert to celebrate the 53rd birthday of the Sultan of Kelantan. In advance the Kelantan administration made it clear that it did not object to a procession of floats or a concert providing that no women artists were involved. Nevertheless, women participated in the floats and performed traditional dances. At the arts and cultural show that was organized by the Kelantan People's Action Council females also did sing and dance. The chairman of Karyawan, the Malaysian Artists Association, Zaienal Abidin Omar, saw in the many people who came to the show an indication that the Kelantan people 'were being deprived of entertainment'.<sup>43</sup> The following day, the Municipal Council of Kota Baru lodged a complaint at the police station against the People's Action Council for violating the Entertainment and Places of Entertainment Control Enactment of 1998. The president of the council, Abdul Aziz Abdul Rahman, claimed that the license for the show had held the stipulation that singing and dancing for female artists was forbidden.

Performances of the *dikir barat*, the popular competitive jesting chorus performance, first introduced in Kelantan in the 1940s, are also used to get under the skin of the PAS. The Ministry of Youth and Sport organized a three-day *Dikir Barat Carnival* in Kota Bharu in Kelantan in October 2003.

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<sup>40</sup> *New Straits Times Online* 2-11-2004.

<sup>41</sup> *New Straits Times Online* 5-10-2004.

<sup>42</sup> *Straits Times Interactive* 3-10-2004.

<sup>43</sup> *New Straits Times* 15-4-2003.

Sixteen *dikir barat* groups (including one female one) competed for the prize for the best performance. The themes they had to improvise on were also enlightening: *Keranamu Malaysia* (Because of you Malaysia), *Mahasiswa gemilang negara cemerlang* (Brilliant students means a bright nation), *Muafakat membawa berkat* (Consensus brings blessings), and *Belia ceria tanpa dadah* (A healthy youth without drugs). At UMNO political meetings in Kelantan the *dikir barat* is at times also performed.

The UMNO can present itself as the custodian of traditional arts and modern entertainment but it is a tricky policy. The aversion to some forms of singing and dancing is not confined to the PAS community. UMNO was even placed in a difficult position when some of the most important spiritual leaders in the country spoke out against a series of concerts organized by a local TV station in August 2004. Spearheaded by the Mufti of the State of Perak, Datuk Seri Dr Harussani Zakaria, the highest religious functionary in the State, they denounced these as encouraging vice and weakening the character of the Malay population, especially of school-age children. In the same breath they condemned Malaysian Idol (also detested by the PAS for its name, for promoting a culture of glamour and emotionalism, and for making people who were practicing for the show neglect the daily prayers) and a number of other TV shows as being in violation of Islamic law and Malay culture. The considerations for them to plead for a ban of the concerts were the free mingling of boys and girls who in the narrow crowd touched each other, the indecency of the dresses of the performing artists, the advance of Western culture, and also the suspicion that young boys and girls who went early to the detested series of concerts did not perform the sunset prayer.<sup>44</sup> Confronted with such opinions the Malaysian Minister of Information, Paduka Abdul Kadir Sheikh Fadzir said that there was nothing wrong with the concerts and that they were 'wholesale family fun'.<sup>45</sup> Malaysia's Prime Minister, Abdullah Badawi, pointed out that the Mufti of Perak had expressed a personal opinion and had not issued a binding fatwa, and that it thus was not necessary to start a debate about the issue.

<sup>44</sup> Earlier, in April, the rumour had already spread that after one of the contested concerts organized by TV3, held in the stadium of Kedah, more than 500 condoms had been found. The Malaysian Prime Minister, Abdullah Badawi, had dismissed the rumour by saying that it was impossible to have sex in a packed stadium (*Straits Times Interactive* 10-8-2004).

<sup>45</sup> *Straits Times Interactive* 5-8-2004.

### *Conclusions*

Malaysia has its PAS and related groups. In Indonesia a number of Islamic political parties and religious organizations aim at propagating a strict Islam and detest Western influences, at times deliberately singling out those in the field of entertainment. At times, the MUI acts as a religious watchdog, while various other organizations and para-military groups propagate the full implementation of Islamic law. 'Wahabism' is gaining support among Muslims in South Thailand and in Cambodia, while in the southern Philippines the Muslims fight for an independent Islamic State. Of the (recently deceased) leader of Abu Sayyaf, another insurgent group operating in the south of the Philippines, Abdurajak Abubakar Janjalani, it was said that he 'disapproved of TV, movies, dancing, songs on radio, even laughing with bared teeth'.<sup>46</sup> Singapore also has its strict Islamic community. With the advance of such fundamentalist Islam groups in Southeast Asia conflicts over music and dance may well become more frequent in the future. The implementation of harsh Islamic criminal law and dress codes are often mentioned as the most conspicuous issues which set hard line fundamentalist Muslims apart from the rest of society. The entertainment sector, even the traditional and national ones, is a third bone of contention. Singing and karaoking politicians and military officers do not seem congruous with politicians out for a ban on all un-Islamic art forms. In Kelantan they would even have little chance to indulge in their hobby as karaoke outlets are banned there. The capital of Terengganu is also off limit for them. A ban on karaoke centres remained in force in Kuala Terengganu after the UMNO had regained the State. And, would as a gesture to the Chinese inhabitants of the two States, permission be given for karaoke outlets Filipino politicians could go there to sing, but the establishments would remain off limit for the Indonesian singing retired officers and to all other karaoke loving Islamic compatriots.

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<sup>46</sup> *Asiaweek.com* 5-5-2000.

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PART FIVE  
THE ETHNIC MODERN



## CHAPTER ELEVEN

# MUSICAL ASPECTS OF POPULAR MUSIC AND POP SUNDA IN WEST JAVA

Wim van Zanten

### *Introduction: Sundanese Music and the Technology of Enchantment*

Research on popular music, particularly in the field of cultural studies, has tended to focus on political and sociological aspects, to the exclusion of musical structures and actual sounds. Whereas in most societies musical genres are in the first place classified by social criteria, it is undeniable that also the technicalities of the music play a role: audiences hear the differences between, for instance, *jaipongan* and *degung kawih* performances. This is because these musics are produced in different ways, using different instruments, tone material, musical structure, etc.

Alfred Gell made an important contribution to the anthropological study of art by pointing out that the production of art is a technological process. He mentions that there are 'beautiful' things, like beautiful women, beautiful horses and a beautiful sunset. However, art objects are made 'beautiful' by human beings and this requires technology. He criticizes sociologists like Pierre Bourdieu, who do not really look at an art object as a concrete product of human ingenuity, but only elaborately look at the represented symbolic meanings (Gell 1999:162). In contrast, Gell proposes that anthropologists should look at art as a 'component of technology.' We call something an object of art if it is the outcome of a technological process, the kind of processes in which artists are skilled.

Gell (1999:163) considers the different art forms – painting, sculpting, performing arts, literature, etc. – as components of a vast and often not recognized technical system that is essential for the reproduction of human societies. He calls this system the 'technology of enchantment'. The power of art objects results from the technological processes that they embody, the technology of enchantment is based on the enchantment of technology:

The enchantment of technology is the power that technical processes have of casting a spell over us so that we see the real world in an enchanted form.

I shall address the issue how the technology of enchantment works for creating different forms of popular music in West Java. By which musical techniques do the artists try to let us see the real world in an enchanted form?

One of the important points of discussion will be the distinction between what has locally been called *pop Sunda* (Sundanese pop) and the other kinds of popular music produced in West Java. Is it useful to restrict the term *pop Sunda*, as it has been defined in a workshop in 1989, to a fairly limited number of popular musics of West Java?

Obviously the use of the Sundanese language and some of the topics in the song texts are important factors for Sundanese-ness. However, musical features also make that the music may be called 'Sundanese'. For instance, I shall show that in the popular music produced in West Java the bamboo flute does not only still play a significant role in a symbolic way, but also in a music-technical sense: its sound is heard. Does this sound of the bamboo flute in popular music still evoke feelings of sadness and Sundanese-ness, as it is expressed in older Sundanese texts, like 'the sound of the bamboo flute is melancholy', 'the sound of the bamboo flute is plaintive' and 'the bamboo flute and the mouth harp are lamenting'?<sup>1</sup>

The popular music created by the Sundanese composer Koko Koswara since the 1940s clearly uses Sundanese musical principles and the playing style and sound of the zithers is based on Sundanese entertainment music. The popular singer Doel Sumbang includes instrumental interludes with the typical Sundanese bamboo flute in some of the songs. However, at the same time it is undeniable that, after more emphasis on Sundanese musical elements in the 1970s and 1980s, since the 1990s the popular music produced in West Java increasingly uses musical elements from outside West Java and outside Indonesia that are then localized.

In the next section I shall discuss the concept of *pop Sunda* (Sundanese pop music) as it has been defined in the 1989 workshop in Bandung. Then I shall give some historical notes on popular music and musicians in West Java. This will be followed by an analysis of the musical history of a few songs and critical remarks about the restriction of the term *pop Sunda* to only a limited number of popular musics. Different performances of the recorded songs *Bajing luncat* (The jumping squirrel) and *Sorban palid* (Turban floating down the river) in the last 30–40 years will be the basis of the music-technical discussion. In my analysis I shall mainly make use of

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<sup>1</sup> See, for instance, Van Zanten (1989:70–1, 105, 211–2).

popular music disseminated via cassette tapes (MC), VCDs and some audio CDs.

### *Pop Sunda as a Specific Kind of Popular Music in West Java*

The Sundanese usually distinguish between Indonesian music (*karawitan*) and music in other parts of the world, in particular Western music (*musik*). Similarly, in the 1980s a distinction was made between *pop Sunda* and popular music in West Java that is not necessarily classified as *pop Sunda*. *Pop Sunda*, as it has been defined locally, differs from understandings of most other localized 'popular musics', in that a number of genres considered popular, including *jaipongan* and *degung kawih*, are relatively close to 'traditional' musical styles and do not feature the Western harmonies, electric guitars, and keyboards found in many (if not most) Indonesian popular music forms of today. There is a lot Sundanese-ness in *pop Sunda*.

What makes popular music specifically Sundanese, that is, *pop Sunda*, rather than popular music produced in West Java? This question was discussed at a workshop that took place on 10 June 1989 at the television station in Bandung with the theme 'What is a regional pop song?' (*Apa itu lagu pop daerah?*; see also Subagio 1989). Although the title was general, the discussion was only addressed to *pop Sunda*. The participants, consisting of several well-known musicians, composers, scholars of music and writers, agreed that popular Sundanese music is not the same as just popular music using Sundanese song texts; it should also have 'local colour' in musical terms (Us Tiarsa et al. 1989:63).

Popular music may be classified according to its use of instruments, tone material, and other musical characteristics. For the participants of the workshop, the used tone material was always a very important aspect; it could be one of the Sundanese pentatonic systems (*pélog/degung*, *sorog/madenda*, and *saléndro*), Western diatonic, or some Arabic tone system (Nano Suratno 1989:24–5; Wahyu Wibisana 1989:34; Ading Affandie 1989:54).<sup>2</sup> Pop music in West Java could make use of Sundanese or diatonic (Western) tone materials, but to be called *pop Sunda* the general feeling was that it should make use of the Sundanese tone systems (Us Tiarsa et al. 1989:63). The very successful composer of the popular *degung kawih* music and teacher at the secondary music school (SMKI) in

<sup>2</sup> See also Deni Hermawan (2000:74, 80–82) and (2002:27).

Bandung, Nano Suratno – known as Nano S. – therefore excluded the popular songs *Panon hideung*, *Manuk dadali*, *Bubuy bulan*, and *Peuyeum Bandung* from ‘Sundanese music’. Although these songs were sung in Sundanese, they made use of the Western tone system and were therefore excluded from *pop Sunda* (Nano Suratno 1989:24).

Nano S. explained that apart from the tone system and instruments used, the older forms of Sundanese music make a fairly limited use of chords: only fifths (*kempyung*) and fourths (*adularas*), whereas Western music makes extensive use of all kinds of chords. The 4-beat measures, and phrases ending on the 8th beat (*kenong*) and 16th beat (*goong*) are also important musical features. Last but not least the Sundanese vocal ornamentations, including many types of vibratos are special; *pop Sunda* should definitely not be sung with Western vibrato, because that would sound ‘odd’ (Nano Suratno 1989:25–7).

The tone system is also connected to the used instruments: Sundanese, Western – like flute, cello, trumpet, electric guitars and keyboard synthesizers – or instruments from other parts of Asia, Africa, or South America. Whereas the *pélog* tuning of the *gamelan degung* and the *sorog* tuning used in other Sundanese ensembles can fairly well be reproduced on Western instruments, based on a division of the octave in 12 equal intervals, the *saléndro* tuning cannot (Nano Suratno 1989:24–5; Van Zanten 1989:124–6). It should be remarked that the better-quality keyboards could be tuned according to any tone system, if a musician would like to do so. However, I have not heard this, although it seems to be done by the Krakatau band.<sup>3</sup> It still needs to be systematically investigated how often the tuning of keyboard synthesizers has been adjusted for popular music in West Java, but my impression is that the answer is: seldom, until 2005 almost all keyboards used the Western 12-tone tuning. Nevertheless, it should not be excluded that in the future keyboards may be tuned according to Sundanese tone systems, especially *saléndro*, on a larger scale.

For our discussion of *pop Sunda* the remarks made by Deni Hermawan (2002:27) about contemporary music are relevant. Deni Hermawan classifies contemporary music (*musik kontemporer*) made in West Java, in three categories of compositions:

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<sup>3</sup> During the discussion of an earlier version of this essay at the KITLV workshop in December 2003, Edwin Jurriëns remarked that the Krakatau band uses keyboards tuned to the *saléndro* tone system.

1. Sundanese music by the instruments used, the tone material, and the Sundanese language used in the song texts;
2. both Sundanese and Western music: instruments and tone material are both a mixture of these two music traditions;
3. Western music: Sundanese instruments using Western tone material.<sup>4</sup>

If these categories were applied to popular music in Sunda, most of this would belong to category 2 and *pop Sunda* as defined by the 1989 workshop would fall in category 1. In his list Deni Hermawan does not include music with Western instruments and using Western tone material, although such music may still have some Sundanese musical characteristics, like musical patterns and ornamentations.

In this 1989 Bandung workshop 'What is a regional pop song?' the participants agreed that the musical aspects of popular music were very important. There were many kinds of popular music around in Sunda, but much of that did not belong to *pop Sunda*. However, without any doubt, according to the participants of the 1989 Bandung workshop, the popular genres to be discussed below, *jaipongan*, *degung kawih* and Mang Koko's *kacapian* songs, all belong to *pop Sunda*. We may ask whether this clear distinction between popular music in West Java and the much smaller subcategory of *pop Sunda* is still very useful today. In other words, would it not be better to use *pop Sunda* for a much wider range of popular music with Sundanese characteristics?

### *Musical Change*

Musical genres are always recreated and changing; therefore the concept of 'authenticity' is not relevant for music.<sup>5</sup> It is the processes of hybridization, change and continuity that need our attention. How did and do Sundanese musicians and composers include the different musical possibilities in the context of the existing musical forms in West Java to enchant their audiences in and outside West Java?

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<sup>4</sup> See a similar classification of Balinese *musik kontemporer* in Harnish (2005:116–7).

<sup>5</sup> See for the problem of the concept '(historical) authenticity' in the case of music, for instance, Heins (1975:20) and Stockmann (1988:4–5); for the irrelevance of the concept 'authenticity' in the wider field of intangible cultural heritage see UNESCO's Yamato Declaration in *Proceedings* (2004:18–21) and Van Zanten (2004:37).

Already in the beginning of the twentieth century several scholars, both Indonesian and Dutch, expressed fears that the existing older forms of music in Indonesia would soon be replaced by Western music. These fears could, for instance, be heard in 1921 at a congress in Bandung, organized by the Java Instituut that had been established in 1919 to study and develop culture and language in Java.<sup>6</sup> The main concern of the organizers of this congress was to find ways to stimulate Javanese and Sundanese music. It was felt that the influence of Western music had become a threat: 'Sundanese music would possibly easily be replaced by European music' (*Beraadslagingen* 1921:296). The well-known Dutch musicologist and researcher of Indonesian music Johann Sebastian Brandts Buijs<sup>7</sup> said that it was felt that in Java 'the music and also several other forms of art had come to a standstill during the last 50 years or more' and that 'the main course of the paralysis of the arts was most probably the Dutch domination' (*Beraadslagingen* 1921:284).

Musical experiments with Western instruments in Sundanese, and more generally Indonesian, music had indeed been going on already in the first half of the twentieth century. In Cianjuran music the piano, guitar and violin have been used to accompany the singing, instead of just the *kacapi* zithers and the *suling* bamboo flute. Nano S. also mentions the string orchestra (*strijkorkest*) that was combined with Sundanese instruments like the *kacapi*, the *suling*, *kendang* (drums), *gong buyung* ('gong' formed by iron plate above big earthenware pot), and the Tanjidor orchestra, consisting mainly of Western brass wind instruments (Nano Suratno 1989:23). The Tanjidor orchestras were integrated into Sundanese culture, especially for procession music during weddings and circumcisions (Image 11.1).<sup>8</sup>

Since the above mentioned congress of the *Java Instituut* in 1921 the fear that Sundanese music would possibly easily be replaced by European music has regularly been voiced until today. It did not realize. Although some older musics of West Java almost disappeared (for instance, *pantun* storytelling) and other musics changed considerably (such as *gamelan degung*), many did not change dramatically and are still existing (such as the sung poetry *tembang Sunda Cianjuran*, shaken bamboo instruments ensemble *angklung*, puppet play *wayang golék* and the reading and reciting of exemplary deeds of Islamic saints *manikaban*). Moreover, after

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<sup>6</sup> See, for instance, Mak van Dijk (2007:90–3) for some information on establishing the Java Instituut in 1919, and the study of the music in Java, including West Java, at that time.

<sup>7</sup> A curriculum vitae of Brandts Buijs (1879–1939) is given by Ernst Heins (2008).

<sup>8</sup> These brass bands were also integrated in similar ways in other parts of Indonesia and the world (see Boonzajer Flaes 1993).



11.1. *Tanjidor* musicians with Western brass instruments taking part in a *bénjang* procession in which boys are carried around the villages on the day before their circumcision. Ujungberung, 6 October 1981.

political independence in 1945 new types of music developed. Whereas in the 1950s-1960s Western instruments and musical idiom were often included in popular music, in the 1970s-1980s the new popular genres were more firmly based in the Sundanese music tradition, a development that started in the early 1960s when the Soekarno regime stimulated regional forms of pop music and discouraged / forbade Western pop music. However, since the 1990s keyboard synthesizers seem to become increasingly used as the sole accompaniment of the songs, and one reason is that it is cheaper than using a few Sundanese instruments.

The grandfather of today's Sundanese popular music is often understood to be Koko Koswara (1915–1985), usually referred to as Mang<sup>9</sup> Koko,

<sup>9</sup> *Mang* means 'uncle' and is used to address men of an elder generation in a friendly way.

whose popular songs for solo voice accompanied by a small *gamelan* orchestra or *kacapi* zither (the *kacapian* music) became widely known in West Java starting in the 1950s. Much of Mang Koko's music used Sundanese musical idiom, but he also created new musical sounds, for instance by introducing new playing techniques on the zither. Initially Mang Koko was inspired by the Jenaka Sunda style (music with humorous texts), but later he developed what was called a 'new style' (*wanda anyar*) (Deni Hermawan 1996:1, 4, 6). Many of his compositions were love songs, but he is also known for his songs about topical subjects like *Zaman atom* (The atomic era), *Badminton* and *Beus kota* (City bus),<sup>10</sup> and also some religious songs.<sup>11</sup>

Mang Koko also composed the song 'Tanjung flower' (*Kembang Tanjung*) to a text by the well-known Sundanese author Wahyu Wibisana, in which a mother sings to her child about his missing father – a guerrilla fighter of the Darul Islam movement that was trying to establish an Islamic state in West Java in the 1950s-early 1960s<sup>12</sup> (MC *Kembang tanjung panineungan* 1984). Mang Koko's music became popular through Bandung radio, gramophone records and, since the 1970s, has often been featured on commercial audio cassettes and in the last years appears on VCDs. In 1971 the Indonesian government honoured Mang Koko with the Satya Lencana Kebudayaan award for his work in music.

In the 1970s and 1980s two popular genres *jaipongan* and *degung kawih* developed, which also became well-known outside the Sundanese area. These genres are definitely considered to belong to *pop Sunda*, like Mang Koko's music, and they developed out of the existing Sundanese music and dance. *Jaipongan* is said to have been 'created' by Gugum Gumbira around 1978, and at first he called his new creation of dancing, accompanied by female solo singing with a small gamelan ensemble in *saléndro* tuning, 'the continuation / development' (*terusan*) of the *ketuk tilu* genre (Images 11.2 and 11.3). However, later he decided to give it the name *jaipongan*, because Sundanese people thought the new genre was too different from the *ketuk tilu* genre (Hellwig 1989).<sup>13</sup> *Jaipongan* became very

<sup>10</sup> See text of *Beus kota* in Jurriëns (2004: 117–8); see further Tardi Ruswandi (1996:48).

<sup>11</sup> See, for instance, the cassette tape *Shalawat Nabi al-Imam; Kawih pupujian Sunda* (1995).

<sup>12</sup> A Cianjurian song related to the Darul Islam movement is mentioned in Van Zanten (2007:10–1).

<sup>13</sup> Hellwig (1993:47, 48) states that 'the beginning of Jaipongan dates back to the late 1970s.' This conflicts with other sources, as it seems to be known earlier under that name. Robert Wessing informed us that the Jaipongan music with dance was already 'hot' and



11.2. Women at a party in Jakarta, 14 July 1979. This popular music and dance is related to *jaipongan*, and in the late 1970s it was also performed at night on the streets of Jakarta [photo by author].

popular in West Java, and was – and still is – played during wedding and circumcision parties.

What is called *degung kawih* (vocal [gamelan] *degung*) is the genre that started to develop from the *gamelan degung* music in the 1950s. Its tuning is in *pélog* (*degung*), and therefore different from the *gamelan saléndro* as used in *jaipongan* and the wayang plays with three-dimensional puppets (*wayang golék*). From its creation between 1800 and 1850 the *gamelan degung* has been used for purely instrumental music and it was only played by men until about 1950 (Van Zanten 1993:150). Since then female vocalists were added to the *gamelan degung*.<sup>14</sup> The performance style changed so much that since the 1980s the popular *degung kawih* is very

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popular in Bandung in 1970 (Barendregt and Van Zanten 2002:74, footnote 8). Tatat Rukmiati and Iyus Rusliana (1994:19–20) mention that Nandang Barmaya ‘did pioneering work for the birth of the dance creation that is called the Jaipongan dance’ in the middle of the 1970s and that later this was carried on by Gugum Gumbira.

<sup>14</sup> The increasing role of female vocalists was a development that in fact had already started in other musics around 1900.



11.3. Drums and a few gamelan instruments accompanying the dancing on Photo 2 at a party in Jakarta, 14 July 1979 [photo by author].

different from the instrumental *gamelan degung*, which developed in Cianjur and was considered the prestigious gamelan for the regents. Nano S., a student of Mang Koko and teacher at the secondary music school in Bandung (SMKI), composed many songs for *degung kawih* and some of them became very popular in the 1980s, also according to the high number of cassette tapes sold (Williams 1989).

Both *jaipongan* and *degung kawih*, considered to be *pop Sunda* according to the 1989 definition, were very much related to the Sundanese music tradition: the traditional instruments (basically gamelan ensembles) and to a large extent the Sundanese musical idiom were used. The impact of *jaipongan* and *degung kawih* was great, although there were also popular music groups in West Java, like the group Bimbo that used Western instruments with a diatonic tuning.<sup>15</sup> Also gamelan that combined the different Sundanese tuning systems (*pélog*, *sorog*, *saléndro*) were used for popular music.

Aside from *jaipongan* and *degung kawih*, there were many other musical experiments based on Sundanese musical instruments and idiom going on in West Java. Hellwig (1989) shows how the Sundanese immediately started experimenting with the genre *jaipongan* after it was created

<sup>15</sup> For the Bimbo group see Jurriëns (2004:137–43).

around 1978. Also, more traditional genres started to include music from outside Sunda. The ensemble consisting of two zithers and bamboo flute (*kacapi-suling*), led by the well-known Uking Sukri, was combined with a piano played by the famous jazz pianist Bubi Chen (MC *Kedamaian* 1989). However, this music did not achieve popular success and this may have been caused by the fact that the pianist stayed too close to the part of the small zither (*kacapi rincik*) and did not take enough freedom to improvise. In 1994 the *kacapi-suling* group of Radio (RRI) Bandung<sup>16</sup> recorded and broadcast Sundanese songs in a Japanese style; the songs were played in the high *sorog* tone system that is similar to a Japanese *ryo* tone system (Van Zanten 1989:114, 118). In these recordings the *suling* flute plays longer notes with a 'Japanese/ non-Sundanese' type of vibrato, the small zither imitates a Japanese type of playing by hitting the same note twice and especially in the beginning of the songs the zithers produce 'grace notes' before every main note. Also groups around the Bandung conservatory, the Patareman group (Deni Hermawan 2002), Zithermania, the very popular Sambasunda group and the ath-Thawaf group have been actively involved in musical experiments (Van Zanten 2007:7, 13–7; 2011:253–9).

### *Travelling Musicians*

The Sundanese music scene has always included many different forms of music and many interpretations of the same music. This can partially be attributed to the fact that, in comparison with Central Java, the rulers in West Java had much less power to set performance standards. The Sundanese consider their cultural scene as varied: not every Sundanese would attach the same meaning to symbols and social phenomena. The context of Sundanese culture is becoming increasingly multi-cultural.

The different musics all need a proper social setting to be performed. However, musicians often cross the boundaries between the different musics: they can and do play several types of music. If we look at the musicians of popular music, it is for sure that quite a few of them 'travel' between different kinds of music; they often can also perform the less popular, 'traditional' types of music quite well. The boundaries between the different musics are certainly not prohibitive in Sunda, not only for most musicians, but also not for their audiences.

<sup>16</sup> Consisting of Dede Suparman (*kacapi indung*), Rohayani (*kacapi rincik 1*) and Ade Suwandi (*suling, kacapi rincik 2*).

There are several examples of musicians who started in the 'classical' *tembang Sunda Cianjur* tradition, and then became also well known in popular music. For instance, the female singer Nénéng Fitri (born 1975), daughter of the well-known zither player Uking Sukri, won the prestigious DAMAS<sup>17</sup> 1998 singing contest for Cianjuran music. At the same time she also made several cassette recordings of the popular *degung kawih* music with Nano S., and once also entered – with some success – a singing contest for *kroncong*.

Yus Wiradiredja (born 1960) is a teacher of *tembang Sunda Cianjur* music at the Bandung conservatory (STSI) and also winner of the DAMAS singing contest in 1984. He made several cassettes with recordings of popular music, including *jaipongan*. In 1997 he experimented with several other musicians of the Dasentra group with a recording of popular music, combining some Cianjuran 'classical' singing with a background of instrumental music (MC *Saha eta?* 1984; video *Patareman* 1997; see also article Deni Hermawan 2002). After his stay in the Netherlands and subsequent pilgrimage to Mecca in 1999, Yus Wiradiredja started the ath-Thawaf music group to make 'ethnic music with Islamic flavour' (*musik etnik Islami*). The music of the ath-Thawaf group is a fusion of several musical traditions and includes electronic instruments, but certain musical features, such as the frequent use of the *sorog* tone system and the use of instruments originating from West Java, make it specifically Sundanese (Van Zanten 2011:256–9).

Another example of someone travelling between several genres is Burhan Sukarma (born ca. 1945), the famous bamboo flute player in Cianjuran music of the 1970s and 1980s, who left for the USA. He was involved in the making of the 'fusion' music of the CD *Sunda Afrika* (1998; see Barendregt and Van Zanten 2002:74).

In November 2003 the music group Bimbo released a CD (and MC) *Taqobbalallohu minnaa waminkum* with *qasidah* (*kasidah*) music, using religious texts and topics. In the review in *Kompas cyber media* (16 November 2003) of this new album it was said that the Bimbo group from Bandung this time had a flavour of *tembang Sunda*.<sup>18</sup> They know Sundanese music (*karawitan Sunda*) very well. According to this review, the Sundanese flavour in this album could be heard in the form of the

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<sup>17</sup> DAMAS stands for Daya Mahasiswa Sunda, the organisation of Sundanese students that is based in Bandung.

<sup>18</sup> Bimbo, 'Taqobbalallohu Minnaa Waminkum', <http://www2.kompas.com/kompas-cetak/0311/16/hiburan/691751.htm> (last accessed 18-5-2009).

melody, and the vocal ornaments sung by Iin Parlina that reminded of the *sinden* style of singing. The reviewer remarked that the 'fresh and peaceful' (*sejuk dan damai*) Sundanese feeling was enforced by *suling* bamboo flute and drum playing, notably in the songs *Marhaban* and *Sifat 20*.

Well-known vocalists like Tati Saleh (1944–2006) and Euis Komariah (1949–2011) were trained as all-round musicians at the music schools (KOKAR).<sup>19</sup> The ease with which these musicians perform several types of music makes it sometimes difficult to determine the boundaries of the different kinds of music. Both Tati Saleh and Euis Komariah are known as performers of Cianjuran, *jaipongan*, *degung kawih* and many other types of popular music. Tati Saleh, Euis Komariah and Yus Wiradiredja are performers on the recordings to be analysed next.

### *Recorded Songs for Musical Analysis*

The different performances of the recorded songs *Bajing luncat* (9 recordings, listed in Table 11.1) and *Sorban palid* (12 recordings, listed in Table 11.2) were used to look at some musical characteristics and the issue of what makes popular music 'Sundanese'. I shall present a musical transcription of one recording of each of the two songs. The recordings were used to analyse tone material, structural aspects of time and melody, and also performative aspects, such as instrumentation, some vocal qualities, absolute pitch and tempo. I want to know how the musical aspects differ in the analysed performances and how it changed in a 30-year time period. Therefore there are about 30 years between the first and the last recording of each song.

Each of the songs *Bajing luncat* and *Sorban palid* exists already for such a long time that during a period of at least 30 years there are many recordings available on mass distributed media: cassette tape, CD and VCD. The song *Sorban palid* is the oldest of the two songs and the composer is unknown. *Bajing luncat* was composed by Kosamanjaya in the first half of the 1960s. The two songs share the characteristic that they use one of the Sundanese tone systems that may 'reasonably' be reproduced on instruments tuned according to the Western equidistant 12-tone tuning: *pélog* (*Sorban palid*) and *sorog* (*Bajing luncat*). From the available recordings in

<sup>19</sup> KOKAR is an abbreviation of Konservatori Karawitan, conservatory of Indonesian music (and dance) that is now called SMKI, Sekolah Menengah Karawitan Sunda.

this period I have chosen several types of performing ensembles and tried to cover the period from the 1970s until the beginning of the twenty-first century in order to get an overview of the different ways of performing these songs during that time period.

Almost none of the analysed recordings of *Bajing luncat* and *Sorban palid* could be classified as *pop Sunda* according to the definition of the 1989 workshop 'What is a regional pop song' because electronic instruments were used. Nevertheless, most producers indicated their albums as *pop Sunda*. It shows that the restrictive definition of *pop Sunda* may not be very useful. The 1989 workshop (rightly) saw the tone material used as one of the important criteria to decide whether a song was *pop Sunda*. However, are the Sundanese tone systems *pélog* and *sorog* played on electronic instruments no longer 'Sundanese'? Musicians will hear the differences, but I guess that for most Sundanese audiences it will sound 'Sundanese', be it in a different musical setting. Moreover Sundanese audiences have been used to similar phenomena in other types of music: it is possible to have, for instance, a Cianjuran *sorog* song accompanied by instruments that are tuned in *saléndro*; in this case the *sorog* intervals of the song are slightly adjusted to the *saléndro* tuning of the instruments (Cook 1993:75).

On the VCD *Tembang kenangan pop Sunda* (2002) Endang S. Taurina sings quite a few songs by Nano S., including the very successful *degung kawih* song *Kalangkang*, accompanied by electronic instruments and I assume most audiences will call this *pop Sunda*, like it is written on the cover. Also well-known 'classical' musicians, like Uking Sukri and Yus Wiradiredja, saw no problems in playing together with piano and electronic instruments on which the Sundanese tone systems may only be approximated, as I have pointed out above.

The singers on the analysed recordings were all women, except for S. Mansyur and Yus Wiradiredja (numbers 2 and 5 in Table 2). This is not because the selection was heavily biased, but it reflects the situation in West Java: in the twentieth century Sundanese popular and classical stages have become increasingly a female domain (Williams 1998:77) and live music has more and more been conceived of in gendered terms. Elsewhere I have stated that the Sundanese arts represent female aspects of human communication (see, for instance, Van Zanten 2008:48–9). These days Sundanese female singers are apparently better in 'casting a spell over us so that we see the real world in an enchanted form' (Gell 1999:163).

*The Song Bajing Luncat between 1960 and 2002*

The song *Bajing luncat* was composed by Kosamanjaya<sup>20</sup> in the first half of the 1960s, and the song was meant to be played by Western-style bands (Jurriëns 2004:114; liner notes audio CD *Detty Kurnia – Coyor panon* 1993). However, it has also been adopted by other ensembles, something that has been common practice in West Java, as well as in other parts of the world. In all but one recording that I used for my analysis (see Table 11.1) the accompaniment of the song was with electric guitars, keyboard synthesizers, programmed drumming, drums, other Western instruments, and only now and then a Sundanese instrument, mostly a *suling* bamboo flute, was added for a short melodic phrase. Recording 4 is instrumental and played by a *kacapi-suling* ensemble, consisting entirely of Sundanese zithers and bamboo flute. For the transcription of *Bajing luncat* I used Upit Sarimanah's rendition. The transcription starts after the instrumental introduction of 41 seconds.

The two recordings of *Bajing luncat* by Upit Sarimanah<sup>21</sup> and Tati Saleh on the MC Album *nostalgia pop Sunda* (1980?; with some re-issued recordings of the 1960s) are remarkable. Upit Sarimanah's recording was presumably made in the first half of the 1960s. Here a trumpet playing with damper, and so producing the typical 'wow-wow' sound a few times, has been added to the electric instruments. The singing style of Upit Sarimanah, who also sang as *pesinden* (*sinden, pasinden*) in *wayang golék* theatre, is a mixture of Sundanese and Western styles. The many grace notes, and other singing ornaments, are a significant part of Sundanese singing; a grace note after the main note often leads to a sudden stop ('glottal stop') common in Sundanese singing.

As can be seen from the musical transcription, Upit Sarimanah ends her song on a high note, which does not happen in the older Sundanese styles. Tati Saleh ends with section D and her last phrase, ending on the first note of C (text in transcription '... pakait ati', although Tati Saleh uses another text) is also high: one octave higher than in the transcription.

<sup>20</sup> Alias Kosoman Djaya, Koesmana Djaja, Kusmana Jaya, Kasaman Djaya.

<sup>21</sup> Upit Sarimanah (1928–1992) belonged with Titim Fatimah (1936–1995) to the first generation of singers of popular Sundanese music after independence. Posthumously they both received the *Satya Lencana Kebudayaan* award from the Indonesian government on 10 November 2002 (Hana Rohana S. 2002:64). Whereas in most publications 1936 is given as the year Titim Fatimah was born (see for instance, *Ensiklopedi Sunda* 2000:662), Endang Caturwati (2003:478–80) gives the year 1929 and also mentions that Titim Fatimah married six times, for the first time at the age of 13 in 1942 with Edi, a village secretary.

Table 11.1. Analysed recordings of song *Bajing luncat* (by Kosamanjaya).

| Vocalist and source   | Date of Recording* | Notes about the accompaniment   | Pitch**<br>1st and<br>3rd note | Tempo<br>(♩)*** | Total duration<br>m:sec |
|---|--------------------|---|--------------------------------|-----------------|-------------------------|
| 1. Upit Sarimanah (1928–1992)<br><i>MC Album nostalgia pop Sunda</i> (1980?)                        | 1960–65            | Trumpet, other Western instruments, electronic instruments            | c / eb                         | 56              | 3:52                    |
| 2. Tati Saleh (1944–2006)<br><i>MC Album nostalgia pop Sunda</i> (1980?)                            | ca.1970            | Electric guitars and hammond organ                                    | a / c                          | 50              | 3:21                    |
| 3. Nining Meida AS<br><i>MC Tibelat</i> (ca. 1988) and identical Audio CD <i>Bubuy bulan</i> (1988) | 1987/1988          | Electronic instruments, drums   | b / d                          | 47              | 4:03                    |
| 4. Instrumental<br><i>CD Kacapi-suling – Cinta</i> (1992)   | 1992               | <i>Kacapi-suling</i>  | b / d                          | 54              | 7:20                    |
| 5. Detty Kurnia Audio CD <i>Detty Kurnia – Coyor panon</i> (1993)                                   | 1992               | <i>Suling</i> (bamboo flute), electronic instruments, drums           | d / f                          | 52              | 4:29                    |
| 6. Aty Surya VCD <i>Pop Sunda nostalgia</i> (ca. 2000)  | 1999               | <i>Suling</i> , keyboard synthesizer and other electronic instruments | a / c                          | 52              | 4:30                    |
| 7. Helvy Maryland VCD <i>Sorban palid disco Sunda</i> (ca. 2000)                                    | ca. 2000           | Keyboard synthesizer and other electronic instruments                 | a / c                          | 60              | 4:32                    |

Table 11.1. (Cont.)

| Vocalist and source  | Date of Recording* | Notes about the accompaniment   | Pitch**<br>1st and<br>3rd note | Tempo<br>(♩)*** | Total duration<br>m:sec |
|--|--------------------|---|--------------------------------|-----------------|-------------------------|
| 8. Endang S. Taurina<br>VCD <i>Tembang kenangan pop Sunda</i> (2002)   | 2002               | <i>Suling</i> , keyboard synthesizer and other electronic instruments                   | b / d                          | 52              | 4:26                    |
| 9. Unknown<br>VCD <i>Mega hits nostalgia pop Sunda 1</i><br>(ca. 2002) | ca. 2002           | <i>Angklung</i> (shaken bamboos), keyboard synthesizer and other electronic instruments | a / c                          | 59              | 3:32                    |

\* Dates are mostly approximate, as clear information is missing on the volumes.

\*\* Pitch measurements are approximate and rounded to the nearest Western semitone, also in the following table. In measuring the pitches I used my own ears, compared with the standard a of a tuning fork, and checked these measurements with a Korg Master Tune MT 1200. The 1st and 3rd tones are the ones on which the following italic syllables are sung: *'Ba-jing lun-cat ...'* In Western terms the first note gives the 'minor key' note; so Upit Sarimanah's version is written in 'c – minor', with three flats, and Tati Saleh's version is in 'a – minor', without any accidentals (sharps and flats).

\*\*\* The number of beats per minute (that is, the number of crotchet notes per minute) is an average; most performers keep a fairly constant tempo.

The other six female singers stayed fairly close to this transcribed melody; however, they end with section E, and do not sing the 'non-Sundanese' section F that ends with a high note.

The tone material used in *Bajing luncat* is basically pentatonic and it could be considered to be the Sundanese *sorog* system, from high to low approximately: eb-d-c-ab-g-eb. In Western terminology this could be described as a part of the c-minor scale. The '*pélog* notes' f in bars 10, and 27–28, and b-flat in bars 28–29 may be considered as ornamental notes. Also in the older Sundanese musics ornamental notes may be outside the pentatonic system. This is, for instance, the mixing of the *pélog* and *sorog* tone systems: in *tembang Sunda Cianjur* music it is very common that the '*pélog* note' (here b-flat) appears together with the '*sorog* note' (here c); see further Cook (1993:59–63).

The song is sung in the order of sections A-B-C-D-E-F, indicated in the transcription, where section E is identical with A, and section D is the same

## Bajing Luncat

Version Upit Sarimanah

Recorded 1960s; from *Album Nostalgia Pop Sunda* ca. 1980?

Kesamanjaya

(composed between 1960-65)

• 56

Ba-jing lun - cat. ba-jing lun - cat ka as-ta - na a-dih Ab-di le-  
 pat na - ros - an teu ti ang-gal - oa Ba - jing lun - cat, ba-jing lun - cat ka as-ta-  
 ma i-pu-di Ab-di le - pat na - ros - an teu ti ang-gal - oa Ku tap sa - ny -  
 Ta - di - na  
 sa - li - ra ket lu - as pi - san Teu ba - wa - tos ka na ke - sel agan - tos - naga -  
 mab su - ga - teh du - lang ti - na - née Nu di - pi - ceun ceun - na - teh rga - ju - kau -  
 los mut A - pi - a - pi teu ti ang - gal ka ng pa - si - ni Pa - si - ni pa - ka - it a -  
 Teu fe - rang - meli fos en - kek - rek di - ree - deng - keuh Mo - al li - pur ku - sa - fa -  
 ti, um, j - gal a - dih pa - ka - it a - ti hgn - pa - han - na - ti  
 Ba - jing un - cat. ba - jing ur - cat. ba - jing lun - cat.  
 con. ba - jing lun - cat

transcription Wim van Zanten 9 August 2006

11.4. Transcription *Bajing luncat* by author.

as B, except for the words. The structure of the song is very regular; the sections A, B, C, D and E each consist of 8 times a 4-beat bar;<sup>22</sup> each section is again divided into two parts of 4 bars. The final section F is – without the last note – only 4 bars. This structure looks fairly ‘Sundanese’: the older metric music only uses ‘4-beat’ time units that can be transcribed as 4-beat bars in Western notation, placing the structural ‘gong notes’ ending a musical phrase on the first beat.

The second rendering of *Bajing luncat* in this album is by Tati Saleh (1944–2006), a well-known singer of popular music. In this recording, presumably from around 1970, she is accompanied by *Hawaiian*-motives played by the electric guitar and a Hammond organ. Some accompanying patterns of the electric instruments remind us of the patterns played by the fast and high instruments in Sundanese music, like the *kacapi rincik* zither and *saron* metallophone.

The recording of *Bajing luncat* by Nining Meida around 1988 (MC *Tibelat* ca. 1988) is in instrumental accompaniment not very different from the recording by Tati Saleh. However, the singing style of Nining Meida with many inflections is closer to the style used in other Sundanese music.

Tempo is an important element in music. In the 9 versions there are differences in tempo, but these are not very striking. Nining Meida takes the slowest tempo ( $\theta = \text{ca. } 47$ ) and Helvy Maryland takes the fastest (ca. 60). For singers a slow tempo allows for more detailed ornamentation than a faster tempo, and especially Nining Meida used the slow tempo for many ornamentations. Nining Meida became famous with her interpretation of the song *Kalangkang* by Nano S. to the accompaniment of a *gamelan degung* ensemble (see Williams 1989:115–25), and which belongs to the *pop Sunda* repertoire. The instrumental *kacapi-suling* ensemble takes a tempo of 54 that is well in the range of most vocalists.

The variation in the total duration of the song is not just because of the different tempo taken, but also because the number and length of the instrumental sections, including introduction and ending, differs. For instance, the instrumental introduction is 41 seconds for Upit Sarimanah and 11 seconds for Nining Meida. Further, texts and music are added or repeated. The instrumental performance by the *kacapi-suling* ensemble (number 4) is an exception and is much longer than the other ones with a vocalist.

The absolute pitch of music is also relevant for Sundanese music (Van Zanten 1989:116–9). Detty Kurnia has the highest pitch (d). On average the pitch of the first note is around c and the range is within 500 cents (or

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<sup>22</sup> It could also be transcribed in 16 times a 2-beat bar, but that is less satisfying to me.

5 semitones, from a to d). The data in Table 11.1 suggest that the pitch of the VCD versions, where the accompaniment is mainly a keyboard synthesizer, are more standardized than in the other recordings. The VCD renderings by Aty Surya, Helvy Maryland and Unknown are the same as Tati Saleh's: in Western terms in a-minor, which is music-technically the simplest key, without sharps or flats (hence no black keys on the keyboard are used). This standardization will be confirmed by the analysis of *Sorban palid*, and there I shall discuss the matter in more detail.

Detty Kurnia's recording of *Bajing luncat* includes a section with Sundanese bamboo flute (*suling*) playing, which applies typical Sundanese flute phrases. Pictures of a *suling* player also appear on the VCD recording by Endang S. Taurina: a real *suling* sound is heard, although the music is not synchronous with the movements. On the VCD with singer Aty Surya a *suling* player is seen and the sound is synchronous with the movements. Only the VCD with singer Helvy Maryland does not have any sound of a *suling* or other Sundanese instrument; it is just keyboard synthesizer and other electronic instruments for the accompaniment.

On the VCDs the information about the performers and their instruments is unfortunately very meagre. On six covers of the eight different volumes with recordings of *Bajing luncat* the type of music is called *pop Sunda* and once it is called *disco Sunda*. In the English liner notes of Detty Kurnia's CD it says: 'This album is a hybrid of many Sundanese musical styles such as Degung, Jaipongan, Calung, Pop Sunda and Kecapi Suling'. The CD of the instrumental *kacapi-suling* ensemble speaks of 'original Sundanese music'; only in this recording there are no electronic instruments. *Bajing luncat* is a song that belongs to the popular music repertoire of West Java, however, according to the contributions in Subagio (1989) most of these nine renderings would not be classified as *pop Sunda*.

The seven female singers do not differ very much in the text used for *Bajing luncat*, but several times part 3 of the text below was not used. The given text is the one as sung by Upit Sarimanah and also, with some different words, by Helvy Maryland and Endang S. Taurina.

#### *Text Bajing luncat*

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <i>Bajing luncat (2x) ka astana<br/>aduh/ ieuuh<br/>Abdi lepat narosan teu ti<br/>anggalna</i></li> <br/> <li>2. <i>Ku teu sangka salira bet luas<br/>pisan</i></li> </ol> | <p>The squirrel jumps into the graveyard,<br/>oh!</p> <p>I was wrong not to ask him earlier to<br/>marry me (two lines repeated)</p> <p>Because I did not guess and never feared<br/>this ending</p> |
|--|--|

|   |  |
|---|--|
| <i>Teu hawatos ka nu kesel<sup>23</sup></i>           | I showed no compassion with him who  |
| <i>ngantos-ngantos</i>                                | was bored by waiting   |
| <i>Api-api teu émut ka na pasini</i>                  | As if he did not remember the agreement                                    |
| <i>Pasini pakait ati ieuh pakait ati</i>              | The agreement between hearts, yes,<br>between hearts                       |
| <br>  |  |
| <i>3. Tadina mah sugaran téh dulang<br/>tinandé</i>   | Maybe I should earlier have given in to<br>all his wishes                  |
| <i>Nu dipiceun (ceunna) téh<br/>ngajakan imut</i>     | The one who was jilted was asking for a<br>smile                           |
| <i>Teu terang mah tos cakét rék<br/>diréndéngkeun</i> | It did not happen, that those, who were<br>already close, also got married |
| <i>Moal lipur ku sataun, aduh<br/>ngupahannana</i>    | I have not calmed down in a year, oh, his<br>comforting caresses!          |

Although Detty Kurnia also uses almost exactly the above text, the liner notes of *Detty Kurnia – Coyor panon* (1993) explain the meaning of the song thus: '[T]his song is about a superstitious young girl, who, when she sees a bat [sic] flying into a graveyard, thinks it is a bad omen. She is reassuring herself.' This seems an interpretation that is only partially correct, as the text is rather about the loss of the beloved one, associated with the squirrel, who 'jumps into the graveyard', that is, disappears. Now that her beloved one has left her for another one, the woman regrets that she did not give in to his wishes, including his wish to make love to her. A sad text set to hot music and images.

*Bajing luncat* (or *bajing loncat*), the jumping squirrel, is also the name for a thief who operates on lorries, trains or buses.<sup>24</sup> They jump on lorries when these slow down, or when there is a traffic jam, and steal some of the contents.<sup>25</sup>

From the analysis it becomes clear that the way of performing changed over time. Around the 1960s-1970s the style of performing included many

<sup>23</sup> Tati Saleh and Detty Kurnia sing *kersa*, 'want', 'willing to do (something)'. In the lyrics presented on the Internet, most places, including the ones that give Detty Kurnia's text, use the word *kesel* (checked 12-5-2009).

<sup>24</sup> *Bajingan* is a pickpocket, thief, crook, gangster in Indonesian and Sundanese.

<sup>25</sup> See, for instance, the report in *Kompas cyber media*, 23-04-2009, 'Awas, bajing loncat beraksi', <http://www.kompas.com/read/xml/2009/04/23/12221395/awas.bajing.loncat.beraksi> (last accessed 18-5-2009). This meaning of *Bajing luncat* is referred to in the images of the version sung by Endang S. Taurina on the VCD *Tembang kenangan pop Sunda* (2002), where a young man tries to steal the purse of another man who is walking with his girl friend. *Bajing luncat* is also used to indicate politicians, who are corrupt, enrich themselves and stay in office forever; see <http://www.hamline.edu/apakabar/basisdata/2002/01/12/0004.html> (last accessed 27-11-2009).

Western aspects, like a high final note by the singer (Upit Sarimanah, Tati Saleh), trumpets and Hammond organs for accompaniment and musical phrases from blues, *Hawaiian* guitars and rock-'n-roll. In the later recordings the addition of the Sundanese *suling* to the electronic instruments is remarkable. The sound of the *suling*, and also the sound of other Sundanese instruments like the *calung*, *kendang*, and *kacapi*, still forms an essential part of most of these recordings.

### *The Song Sorban Palid between 1970 and 2002*

The song *Sorban palid* is older than *Bajing luncat* and its composer is not known. In the recordings there are – on the whole – less musical ornaments than in *Bajing luncat* and all ornaments stay within the Sundanese tone system (*pélog*). This could be, because *Sorban palid* is from a more distant past than *Bajing luncat* and the characteristic of keeping the ornaments within the used tone system has been preserved.<sup>26</sup> Further, in contrast to *Bajing luncat*, the song *Sorban palid* has a section that is used for one-part chorus singing in performances 2, 7 and 9–12.

In the analysed recordings listed in Table 11.2 it may be seen that there is much more variation in accompaniment (including gamelan<sup>27</sup> and *kacapi* zither), tempo and total duration than in the discussed recordings of the song *Bajing luncat*. The tempo of Detty Kurnia is remarkably fast, in the first section her tempo is twice the one taken by Titim Fatimah. Titim Fatimah makes a clear tempo difference between the first part (46) and the second part (52) that starts with the words: *Kaso pondok, kaso panjang ...* (see transcription). In Titim Fatimah's version the first part of the singing is close to a rubato style, without a strict beat. In the version by Nining Meida chorus singing and solo singing alternate in the second part. The total duration of the song varies also between the different performances, because more or less verses are sung. The duration of the vocal versions of *Sorban palid* varies more than the versions of *Bajing luncat*.

The tone material used in *Sorban palid* is pentatonic and it could be considered to be the Sundanese *pélog* tone system, from high to low approximately: f-e-c-b♭-a-f. In Western terminology this could be

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<sup>26</sup> This phenomenon occurs in Cianjuran singing: performers in the beginning of the twentieth century used ornaments that stayed more than nowadays within the used tone system (as given on the *kacapi* zither), although occasionally using notes from one of the other Sundanese tone systems: *pélog*, *sorog* and *saléndro*.

<sup>27</sup> It is not clear from the recordings and the given information what gamelan instruments are exactly used in items 1, 3, 5 and 7 of Table 11.2.

Table 11.2. Analysed recordings of song *Sorban palid* (composer unknown).

| Vocalist and source   | Date of recording | Notes about the accompaniment                                       | Pitches first note * | Tempo (♩) ** | Total duration m:sec |
|---|-------------------|---|----------------------|--------------|----------------------|
| 1. Titim Fatimah (1936–1995)<br>MC <i>Titim Fatimah 1</i> (1970s)                 | 1970–75           | Gamelan; with <i>gambang, rebab</i>                                 | a♭                   | 46 [52]      | 6:35                 |
| 2. Mansyur S.<br>MC <i>Asa can lami</i> (ca. 1980)                                | ca. 1980          | <i>Suling, saron</i> metallophone, electronic instruments and drums | f                    | 50           | 5:10                 |
| 3. Elis Wizaksmi<br>MC <i>Peuting nu urang</i> (ca. 1980)                         | ca. 1980          | <i>Kacapi siter, rebab, suling</i> with gamelan                     | a                    | 52           | 7:30                 |
| 4. Imas Permas<br>MC <i>Reuntas harepan</i> (1980)                                | 1980              | <i>Gamelan degung</i> (with <i>suling</i> )                         | a♭                   | 62           | 5:02                 |
| 5. Euis Komariah and Yus Wiradiredja<br>Audio CD <i>The sound of Sunda</i> (1990) | 1990              | <i>Kacapi siter, suling, gamelan</i> and tuned Sundanese drums      | g                    | 54           | 5:26                 |
| 6. Instrumental MC <i>The best sound of kacapi-suling</i> (2004)                  | 1992              | <i>Kacapi-suling</i>  | g                    | 54           | 6:20                 |
| 7. Detty Kurnia<br>Audio CD <i>Detty Kurnia – Dari Sunda</i> (1995)               | 1995              | Gamelan, <i>gambang</i> xylophone, electronic instruments           | f                    | 92           | 5:27                 |
| 8. Instrumental MC <i>Tibelat</i> (ca. 1988)                                      | 1996?             | <i>Kacapi siter, suling, rebab, kendang</i> drum                    | a♭                   | 54           | 3:52                 |

(Continued)

Table 11.2. (Cont.)

| Vocalist and source   | Date of recording | Notes about the accompaniment        | Pitches first note * | Tempo (♩) ** | Total duration m:sec |
|---|-------------------|--------------------------------------|----------------------|--------------|----------------------|
| 9. Helvy Maryand<br>VCD <i>Sorban palid disco Sunda</i> (ca. 2000)                                      | ca 2000           | Keyboard synthesizer                 | f                    | 62           | 5:03                 |
| 10. Nining Meida<br>VCD <i>Kalangkang</i> (ca. 2000) and identical on VCD <i>Kawah putih</i> (ca. 2000) | ca. 2000          | Keyboard synthesizer                 | f                    | 55           | 4:38                 |
| 11. Irma<br>VCD <i>Pop Sunda nostalgia</i> (ca. 2000)   | 2002              | <i>Suling</i> , keyboard synthesizer | f                    | 56           | 5:28                 |
| 12. Unknown<br>VCD <i>Mega hits nostalgia pop Sunda 2</i> (ca. 2002)                                    | ca. 2002          | Keyboard synthesizer                 | f                    | 64           | 4:21                 |

\* This note is also the final note. In Western terms the first note presents the 'major key' note; for the transcribed version of Nining Meida this is f-major.

\*\* Titim Fatimah sings the second part [in these brackets], starting with 'Kaso pondok, kaso panjang...' slightly faster than the first part. This is not the case with the transcribed version of Nining Meida and the other versions.

described as a part of the f-major scale. In the transcribed version of Nining Meida, there are no notes outside this *pélog* tone system. The transcription starts after the short instrumental beginning.

It is remarkable that the four VCD versions all start at the same pitch (f) and the other recordings show a variety of starting notes. This confirms what we have remarked about the song *Bajing luncat*: the tuning of a gamelan cannot be changed easily and the different gamelan ensembles are tuned to different pitches (up to 4 semitones difference). The zithers can easily be tuned to another pitch, according to the wishes of the performers. This is different for the keyboard synthesizers that are tuned to the Western equidistant 12-tone system with a fairly narrow range of the note A

(between 400 and 404 Hertz). This Western equal-tempered tone system allows for transposing the song up or down. However, a transposition by one semitone up or down would add technical difficulties for the playing (adding seven sharps or seven flats). From a music-technical perspective, transposing two semitones up or down would make a better option; however, this is apparently not done on these VCD renderings of *Sorban palid*.<sup>28</sup>

The musical structure of the first part of *Sorban palid* is – like *Bajing luncat* – according to most Sundanese metric songs: 4-beat ‘bars’ and a section of 8 ‘bars’ (that is repeated) or  $8 \times 4 = 32$  beats. However, the second

## Sorban Palid

Version Nining Meida

from VCD *Kalangkang*, ca. 2000

N.N.

The transcription consists of three staves of musical notation. The top staff is labeled 'Voice' and shows a single melodic line. The middle staff is labeled 'Chorus' and shows a harmonic progression. The bottom staff is also labeled 'Chorus' and shows another harmonic progression. The lyrics are written below each staff, corresponding to the musical notes. The tempo is marked as 55 BPM. The notation includes various note values (eighth, sixteenth, thirty-second) and rests. The vocal line starts with a rest followed by a series of eighth and sixteenth notes. The harmonic progression involves changes in key and instrumentation, indicated by 'N.N.' (No Name) above the staff.

55

Voice

N.N.

A - kang - ja - ji      sor - ban pa - lid      Pa - lid - na - ka

Cl - ka - mi - ri      A - kang ha - ji      ku - na - o! su - lik

Cl - a - ma - ya

A - kang - ha - ji      su - mang - ga - ca - lk

U - lab - o - sek      da - ngr - nye - a - nye - ri      A - kang ha -

Kyanga - ga - keun - mah

ya - Ka - so pun - dok      ka - so pen - jaung      Ka - so uga - ro - youn ka - ja - lan      Na -

lan      Ka - so pun - dok      ka - so pen - jaung      Ka - so uga - ro - youn ka - ja - lan      So -

Chorus

10

2

sol

15

[instrumentation section]

jan - so - jo      na - lan - he - nam      Teu - sa - é      ugo - pol      ci - ja - lan

no - mon - dos      so - no - ngan - jaung      So - no - pa - te - pang      ci - ja - lan

transcription Wim van Zanten, 17 August 2006

### 11.5. Transcription *Bajing luncat* by author.

<sup>28</sup> In contrast: this was done in the VDC versions of *Bajing luncat*, where the pitch of Endang S. Taurina was 2 semitones higher than the other VCD versions (b against a).

part consists of 5 times a 4-beat 'bar' that is repeated (see transcription). An uneven number of 4-beat 'bars' is less common in older Sundanese music; and if so, such section is mostly repeated, like it is in *Sorban palid*.

The presented text of *Sorban palid* is the one used by Nining Meida and also by Helvy Maryland. The third and fourth verses are very well-known texts in *sisindiran* form, that is, sound association between the first two and the last two lines, where the first two lines are the 'rind' and the last two lines are the 'content' of the verse (see further Van Zanten 1989:68–70). This *sisindiran* text may also be used in other songs. Similarly, in these recordings of *Sorban palid* some singers used a different text in *sisindiran* form.

### *Text of Sorban palid*

#### *Solo:*

|                                  |  |
|----------------------------------|--|
| <i>Akang haji Sorban palid</i>   | Brother <i>haji</i> , the head cloth floats away |
| <i>Palidna ka Cikamiri</i>       | It is floating to Cikamiri                       |
| <i>Akang haji ku naon balik</i>  | Brother <i>haji</i> , why do you go home?        |
| <i>Ulah osok da nganyenyeri</i>  | Don't do that, as it will hurt [me].             |
| <i>Akang haji Sorban palid</i>   | Brother <i>haji</i> , the head cloth floats away |
| <i>Palidna ka Cilamaya</i>       | It is floating to Cilamaya                       |
| <i>Akang haji sumangga calik</i> | Please (elder) brother <i>haji</i> , sit down    |
| <i>Nyanggakeun mah saaya-aya</i> | Take whatever we have                            |

#### *Chorus:*

|  |  |
|--|--|
| <i>Kaso pondok kaso panjang</i>            | Short grass and long grass                       |
| <i>Kaso ngaroyom<sup>29</sup> ka jalan</i> | The grass bends over the road                    |
| <i>Najan sono najan héman</i>              | When full of strong desires and tender care      |
| <i>Teu saé ngobrol di jalan</i>            | It is not good to talk on the road               |
| <i>Kaso pondok kaso panjang</i>            | Short grass and long grass                       |
| <i>Kaso ngaroyom ka jalan</i>              | The grass bends over the road                    |
| <i>Sono mondok sono nganjang</i>           | [Those with] strong desires stay and pay a visit |
| <i>Sono patepang di jalan</i>              | [Those with] strong desires meet at the road.    |

The different versions of other popular songs with a record history of 40 years or more, like *Es Lilin*, *Bubuy Bulan* and *Mojang Priangan*, show similar characteristics and variations as described above for *Banjing lun-cat* and *Sorban palid*. Several of these songs are still popular and video versions may be found on YouTube, although not always with the correct

<sup>29</sup> Sometimes *ngaroyong* is used instead of *ngaroyom*: 'The grass is carried by several people together on the road.'

information. Es Lilin seems to be most widely available, for instance in *jaipong*, *angklung* and *dangdut* versions, a *kroncong* version by Hetty Koes Endang, a Malaysian version by Siti Nurhaliza and in an instrumental versions, for instance by the Kwartet Panakawan that includes a piano.

### *Conclusion*

In this essay I have concentrated on some musical aspects of popular music in West Java between 1960 and the beginning of the twenty-first century. It cannot be denied that texts in the Sundanese language and social context play an important role in popular music, however, the musical aspects are also very important for to make it sound 'Sundanese' or not.

As most performers of popular music in West Java are also able to perform other types of Sundanese music, this affects the sound of the popular music. I have argued that the present-day popular songs still have much Sundanese sound and structure, even when performed on electronic instruments. Therefore audiences may not experience *pop Sunda*, as it has been defined by the 1989 Bandung workshop, in a very different way from other types of popular music in West Java. It seems better to use the term *pop Sunda* in a much wider meaning than defined in 1989. The use of keyboard synthesizers has a standardising effect on the pitch of the popular songs. Nevertheless the musicians are still able to let their audiences see the world in an enchanted form, musically coloured 'Sundanese' by the use of Sundanese tone systems, mostly 8 and 16-beat musical phrases, singing ornaments, musical patterns, and the melancholic sound of the *suling*.

I consider my musical analysis only a modest start; this research still awaits more thorough investigation: what are the technologies that Sundanese musicians have been applying to let us see the world in an enchanted form? For instance, in most popular musics the vocal part is very prominent. However, as yet we do not know very much about the voice qualities, appreciated by the different audiences. Which voice qualities of Titim Fatimah or Nining Meida are appreciated by the listeners? It would be very interesting to know more about the perception of musical and vocal qualities in popular music. In *tembang Sunda Cianjur* music voices are described in a number of ways, like sweet, vigorous, modest, pleasing, hoarse and 'not clear' (Van Zanten 1989:160, 180). A careful study of the musical aspects of popular music, for instance with perception experiments, would give the opportunity to contribute to the discussion on Sundanese aesthetics in a globalising world.

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## CHAPTER TWELVE

### MODERNIZING SONGS OF THE FOREST: INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES NEGOTIATE TENSIONS OF CHANGE IN MALAYSIA

Tan Sooi Beng

'World music'<sup>1</sup> or 'world beat' are marketing terms referring to music which combines the Anglo-American pop music idiom with musical elements from other parts of the world primarily Africa, the Caribbean, and Latin America. World beat emerged in the 1980s 'specifically to cultivate and nurture the appetites of the North for exotic new sounds of the South' (Pacini Hernandez 1993:49–50). Some American and European folk music and musics of indigenous peoples of other parts of the world have also been brought to the concert stage, recorded commercially, and promoted as world music.<sup>2</sup> To the outside international audience, the appeal is the 'exotic' or 'ethnic' sounds and rhythms of the music.

World music brings into the foreground the dialectics between the local and the global and the tensions between cultural homogenization and heterogenization (Hall 1991:62; Appadurai 1990:2–3, 5). On the one hand, world music has been criticized for exoticising the 'other', engaging the audience in visual spectacle and stereotyping 'traditions'. It promotes musical 'cut and paste' and appropriates rhythms and melodies from their social contexts. As Veit Erlmann writes, 'even though the products of the global entertainment industry purport to represent local tradition and

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<sup>1</sup> The term 'world music' has been used in ethnomusicology to refer to the indigenous music of people from different parts of the world. The term contests Eurocentrism and promotes musical diversity. However, today 'world music' commonly refers to the marketing label employed by the global music industry.

<sup>2</sup> World music includes Jamaican reggae, Raï music of Algeria, Ghanian Highlife, Nigerian Afrobeat and Juju, Mbaqanga from South Africa, Qawwali from Pakistan, Zouk from Antilles, Soca from Trinidad, Salsa from New York, and Bhangra and Ghazal which are popular among Anglo Indians. The first musicians from the South who established themselves as world beat musicians were Bob Marley (Jamaica) and King Sunny Adé (Nigeria) who introduced reggae and African pop respectively to the world. The exposure of African-derived musics was given impetus through mega events such as Sun City, the Mandela Concerts, and the multi-cultural WOMAD (World of Music and Dance).

authenticity, 'world music', in this reading, would appear as the soundscape of a universe which, underneath all the rhetoric of 'roots' has forgotten its own genesis' (Erlmann 1993:7). On the other hand, others argue that 'local musicians, fans, and entrepreneurs take over hegemonic pop forms for themselves...with remarkable skill, vigour, and imagination' (Frith 1989:5). They indigenize the global idioms to create transcultured forms with local content and concerns (Hannerz 1991; Malm and Wallis 1992).

Critics such as Feld (1994 a and b, 2000) and Meintjes (1990) have drawn attention to issues of 'ownership' and 'cultural equity' in world music. Pop artists supported by transnational recording companies 'appropriate' the performance styles, beats, and genres of musicians from other parts of the world but the ultimate recording belongs to the pop artist. In the *Graceland* record, for instance, Paul Simon employs South African musicians to perform but sings over their music with his own lyrics. However, the credit on the record jacket reads 'Words and Music by Paul Simon' and the collaborative role of the musicians is not highlighted. At the same time, many critics also acknowledge that world music encourages dialogue and participation especially among the younger generation in developing countries and could lead to cultural revitalization (Taylor 1997; Feld 2000).

Local Malaysian musicians began to respond to world music in the 1990s. Using the global pop idiom, local musicians experiment with African and Latin American rhythms as well as their own Malay, Chinese, Indian, and Middle Eastern musics. World music festivals such as the annual Sarawak Rainforest World Music Festival have been attracting local and foreign performers and audiences.

Many of the issues regarding homogeneity/heterogeneity and ownership/cultural equity apply to the local variants of world music in Malaysia. Local music has not been appropriated by foreign singers supported by transnational recording companies. Rather, various forms of local music have been taken out of their social contexts and packaged as world music for state cultural shows and for foreign tourists. Nevertheless, world music has increased rather than decreased musical diversity in Malaysian pop. As I have shown in an earlier article, world beat musicians from various ethnic backgrounds attempt to portray their diverse modern identities by incorporating a variety of local instruments (especially drums), rhythms, singing styles, and forms. For instance, Zainal Abidin combines Malay, Indian, Latin American, and African drumming. Noraniza Idris and Siti Nurhaliza juxtapose Malay rhythms such as *asli*, *zapin*, and *joget* over

Anglo-American pop while the BM Boys adapt Malay texts and folk songs in their Teochew and Mandarin songs. Raihan sings Islamic devotional song or *nasyid* with the accompaniment of Malay and Latin American percussion. By mixing diverse musical styles and instruments, these musicians are indirectly contesting the integrated national identity promoted by the government as stated in the national culture policy (see Tan Sooi Beng 2002).

This chapter illustrates that world music has had a positive effect of validating musicians and musics of the indigenous communities in Malaysia who have been marginalized and are trying to survive under precarious conditions. Despite the contradictions arising from commodification, appropriation, and detachment from social contexts, modernizing and concertizing music of the indigenous people as well as commercial recordings have generated a new interest and cultural revitalization among the younger generation. World music has helped to raise the self-esteem and dignity of the indigenous people as others become more aware of and show an interest in their music and lives. Through the new music, the indigenous people are able to articulate the anxieties they face as aggressive development agendas impact on their survival in the forest. As case studies, this article looks at the music of Akar Umbi, a musical group comprising indigenous and non-indigenous people based in Pertak, Selangor and the musical presentations/workshops at the Rainforest World Music Festival in Sarawak.<sup>3</sup>

### *Songs of the Dragon: The Temuan Sing About Indigenous Identity*

The *orang asli* (meaning 'original people') are the indigenous minority people of Peninsular Malaysia whose ancestors inhabited the peninsula before the Malay kingdoms were established. They comprise 19 different groups which make up 0.5 % of the total population of 21.9 million. While a few have become professionals and businessmen and some work in factories in urban areas, the majority still live in the forest and forest-fringed areas. They depend on swiddening, hunting, gathering, fishing,

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<sup>3</sup> For a discussion of issues of cultural ownership, copyright and how aboriginal music has been incorporated into world music in Taiwan, see Tan Shzr Ee (2008 and 2012). She has looked at the history and trends of how aboriginal songs have been 'recontextualized' to cater to the world music market and are sung by karaoke singers. Unlike Taiwan where aboriginal singers and bands have made it to the mainstream media, Malaysian world music recordings by indigenous people are mainly small DIY projects.

and trading in forest products for survival. To bring development, the government has adopted a policy of integrating and assimilating the *orang asli* with mainstream society, more specifically Malay society and the adoption of Islam.<sup>4</sup> The Jabatan Hal Ehwal Orang Asli (JHEOA) or the Department of Orang Asli Affairs has been assigned this task.<sup>4</sup> Assimilation together with increased deforestation and dislocation (as a result of logging and development projects) have threatened to cut the *orang asli* off from their ancestral lands, source of livelihood, and cultures.

The *orang asli* have responded to the state's goal of 'integration with the mainstream' and the appropriation of their ancestral lands by uniting, lobbying politicians, and bringing their cases to the court. They formed organizations such as the Peninsular Malaysian Orang Asli Association (set up in 1976) and the Indigenous Peoples' Network of Malaysia, a network of indigenous peoples' organizations in Sabah, Sarawak, and the Peninsula. The *orang asli* began to claim an 'indigenous identity' to 'regain their cultural symbols' and to counter control by the state (Nicholas 2000:173).<sup>5</sup> One of the ways to assert this identity was to set up cultural troupes (involving old and young people of the *orang asli* communities) to perform indigenous music and dance and their own versions of popular music. The various *orang asli* groups come together to perform and exhibit their handicraft in the annual International Indigenous People's Day events.

Akar Umbi (meaning 'Tap root') is an example of a cultural group of the Temuan, one of the indigenous *orang asli* groups living in Pertak, a forest reserve just outside of Kuala Kubu Baru (KKB). Akar Umbi is a musical collaboration which was initiated by Antares and Rafique Rashid, two musicians who moved to KKB in 1992. These two musicians encountered the rich culture of the Temuan<sup>6</sup> and have been documenting the oral

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<sup>4</sup> The precursor of JHEOA is the Department of Aborigines which was first set up in 1950 by the British to take care of the needs of the *orang asli*. The name was changed after Malaysia received its independence in 1957.

<sup>5</sup> For an indepth discussion of the *orang asli* and the effects of the state policy of 'integration with the maistream', see Nicholas (2000: chapter 1). Nicholas looks at how the *orang asli* have responded to state intervention and control in chapter 8. In particular, he writes that the *orang asli* have 'realized that an assertion of their indigenous identity is a prerequisite for their survival.' There is a need to 'assert both their personal and collective identity in order to counter the power of 'outsiders', particularly the state.' Nicholas also stresses that not all *orang asli* contest state control. Some prefer to take the 'development path of the state' (Nicholas 2000:13, 17).

<sup>6</sup> The Temuan live in the states of Selangor, Pahang, and Negri Sembilan. They speak the Temuan language and Malay. Many still depend on jungle products such as durian, *petai*, bamboo, and *rotan* for survival. The Temuan have great reverence for the mountains,

traditions, stories, and music of the Temuan which are in danger of disappearing.<sup>7</sup>

Since its formation, Akar Umbi has presented live renditions of the songs of Mak Minah Anggong, a Temuan ceremonial singer who lived in Kampung Orang Asli Pertak. Mak Minah sang her songs at various concerts including the Second Rainforest World Music Festival in Kuching before she passed away unexpectedly on 21 September, 1999. To pay a special tribute to Mak Minah and to share her passionate love for the rainforest with others, Antares and Rafique assembled a CD of 10 tracks using whatever material that has been recorded at rehearsals and performances. The CD is entitled *Songs of the dragon* (2002) as the dragon refers to Mak Minah's clan lineage whose totem is the *Naga* (the spirit guardians of rivers). The tracks include traditional Temuan songs with contemporary musical arrangements as well as healing ritual songs (*sawai*) with *buluh limpong* (pairs of bamboo instruments struck on a long block of wood) accompaniment.<sup>8</sup>

In the CD, Mak Minah Anggong is the lead singer while Mak Awa, Mak Nai, and Mak Indah perform their traditional sacred songs on the *buluh limpong*. The Temuan women who sing in the Temuan language, are accompanied by other Malay, Chinese, Indian, and Eurasian musicians performing on guitars, keyboards, and percussion. According to Antares, the music 'breaks through traditional cultural barriers'.<sup>9</sup> Not only are the musicians multi-ethnic, the music is 'a musical fusion' (personal communication, Antares, 23 Feb. 2002).

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rivers, and forests. They believe that rivers are guarded by dragons which will cause chaos if their homes are destroyed.

<sup>7</sup> The video documentary, *Guardians of the forest*, documents how the indigenous people of Malaysia are struggling to retain their traditional ways of life in a rapidly developing nation. The video focuses on the Temuan who are about to be displaced by the Selangor dam project. Antares (who is married to a Temuan) and has been living with the Temuan for the past ten years initiated 'Magick River', a 'rainbow alliance of individuals with diverse talents to promote ecospiritual activities and community arts projects that involve the Temuan' ([www.xlibris.de/magickriver/akarumbi.htm](http://www.xlibris.de/magickriver/akarumbi.htm), last accessed 22-09-2005). Magick River has become the centre of a national campaign to halt the Selangor Dam project.

<sup>8</sup> Bamboo tubes stamped on blocks of wood are used by the various groups of *orang asli* to accompany healing rituals (*sewang* or *sawai*) as well as for entertainment. In the healing ritual, the shaman sings melodies which are taught to him through dreams. He is answered by a chorus playing the bamboo tubes. For an analysis of the healing ritual music, see Roseman (1991).

<sup>9</sup> Information on Akar Umbi is mainly from personal communication with Antares and from his informative website <http://www.xlibris.de/magickriver/akarumbi.htm>, last accessed 22-09-2005.

In *Hutan manao* (Akar Umbi 2002), for instance, Mak Minah sings in the Temuan language using the traditional style of singing with a narrow vocal tension. She is accompanied by the alternating rhythms of the *buluh limpong*, consisting of a longer lower-sounding tube known as ‘father’ and a shorter higher-pitched tube known as ‘mother’ which are both struck on a long block of wood. The two tubes are pitched approximately a minor third apart. Although the keyboard and electric guitars play western chords, they emphasize the minor 3rd interval and the rhythms of the bamboo stampers, thereby keeping harmony to a minimum.<sup>10</sup> The bamboo flute and electric guitar are also given melodic interludes. The song describes the joys and hardships of roaming the forest for days in search of jungle cane (*manao*) for the furniture stores.

Akar Umbi performed *Hutan manao* live at the Benefit Concert for Bosnia at the Shah Alam Stadium on 16 September, 1994 and a series of other songs at the Second Sarawak Rainforest World Music Festival (August 28 & 29, 1999). Since the Shah Alam concert which had an audience of 42,000 and was broadcast live on national television, Mak Minah has become a ‘cultural representative’ for the marginalized *orang asli* community.

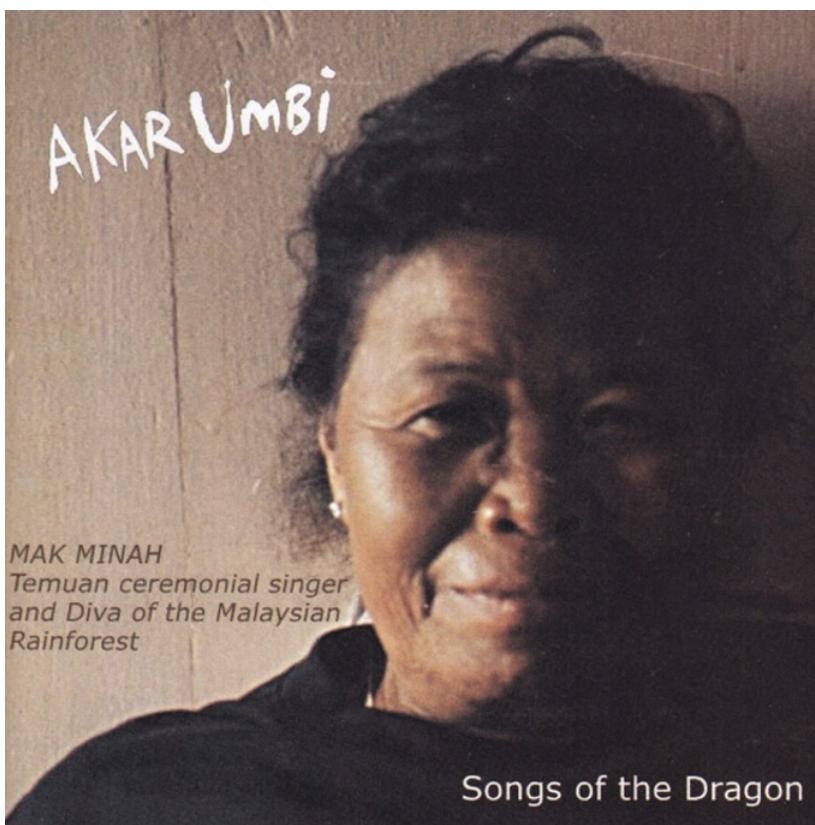
Mak Minah’s songs portray the love the indigenous people feel for the forest, river, and mountains that surround them.<sup>11</sup> Indirectly, Mak Minah’s songs advocate the cultural autonomy of the *orang asli* at a time when two Temuan villages were to be relocated and Temuan sacred sites and ancestral heartland flooded to make way for a 400 feet high dam across the Selangor River. Mak Minah opposed the building of the dam strongly. The Temuan believe that they were placed on earth to be guardians of the rainforest. Legend says that ‘when the *orang asli* are no longer visible, the world will end.’<sup>12</sup> Experts have emphasized that the wetlands and the famous firefly colony near Kuala Selangor would be affected by the dam project. Despite protests, work on the dam began in February 2000. Logging and rock blasting have begun but Temuan families living in Pertak and Gerachi have not been properly resettled.

*Sungai Makao* (River Makao) is a lyrical song with Minah Anggong on vocals, Rafique on acoustic guitar, and Antares on Balinese flute. Mak Minah sings about the Makao River which flows through Pertak Village

<sup>10</sup> Analyses and examples of songs are based on the CD *Akar Umbi, Songs of the dragon* (2002).

<sup>11</sup> See [www.xlibris.de/magickriver/minah.htm](http://www.xlibris.de/magickriver/minah.htm), last accessed 22-09-2005.

<sup>12</sup> See [www.xlibris.de/magickriver/dam.htm](http://www.xlibris.de/magickriver/dam.htm), last accessed 22-09-2005.



12.1. Mak Minah on the cover of the Akar Umbi album.

where she was born. The Temuan believe that the Makao River has its source in Gunung Raja, the sacred mountain, and regard it as the symbol of abundance and good health. Mak Minah incorporates into the lyrics a reproof against the destructive logging activities at the Temuan reserve.

In *Kuda lari* (Running horse), Minah Anggong warns those who intend to disturb the spirit guardians of the river that some mishap might occur. *Kuda Lari* is a Temuan nursery rhyme and a humorous account of how Cecil Ranking, the first magistrate and revenue collector of Kuala Kubu Baru, fell off his horse and had to chase it all the way to Pahang. According to legend, Ranking attempted to kill a crocodile *penunggu* or sacred guardian of the river in 1883. This may have triggered a dam disaster which killed Ranking and flooded the town of Kuala Kubu Baru.

|                                      |                                |
|--------------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| <i>Lari, lari, kuda lari</i>         | Run, run, horse run            |
| <i>Belang, belang, kuda belang</i>   | Stripe, stripe, striped, horse |
| <i>Lari, lari, kuda lari</i>         | Run, run, horse run            |
| <i>Pahang, Pahang, pergi Pahang.</i> | Pahang, Pahang, go to Pahang.  |

*Songs of the dragon* has been produced the DIY way<sup>13</sup> so that Akar Umbi has complete control over the production and distribution of the CD. Some of the tracks such as *Burung Meniyun* were recorded by Rafique in his home studio, using a four track cassette, MIDI sequencers, and a programmable drum machine. Other tracks featuring traditional bamboo ritual music, such as *Raja perahu*, were recorded on a portable digital audio tape (DAT) during rehearsals at Antares' house at KKB with a relaxed ambience. Additional tracks featuring the voice of Awa Anak Lahai (sister of Mak Minah who has taken over the lead singing) were recorded at a private studio. Antares has been raising funds from friends and private funding agencies to pay for studio time, musicians, and other aspects of album production. Distribution is being done mainly through the website and through friends in the music world.

The CD has helped 'to keep Mak Minah's memory alive through her beautiful songs, and encourage the younger generation of *orang asli* to cherish and value their traditional songs'. Through the album, 'the Temuan in particular and *orang asli* in general have begun to feel a sense of pride in seeing one of their own become a singing celebrity... The overwhelming response of the crowd to Mak Minah's singing at the benefit concert for Bosnia at the Shah Alam Stadium on 16 September, 1994, has shown the Temuan that other people do value their traditions and believe there is much to learn from their culture' (personal communication, Antares, 23 Feb. 2002).

By presenting the songs in a modern setting, younger Temuan have been inspired to learn these songs and play them at weddings and other festivities. Using modern instruments such as the guitar and keyboard and the world music idiom also helps the younger generation to connect and engage with modernity. Ten per cent of the proceeds from the sale of

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<sup>13</sup> Pop music in Malaysia is dominated by global mainstream pop which includes the latest releases from the USA, Europe, Japan, Korea, or Hong Kong. Local musicians who sign up with major recording companies sing mainly chart-oriented commercial pop. Nevertheless, the DIY philosophy has empowered a small number of musicians to compose non-commercial music that is not promoted by the government or music industry. Most bands who practise the DIY ethic (such as the metal and alternative music bands) do not get airplay on national radio or television.

the CD go towards a Mak Minah memorial fund for children, widows, and old folks of Pertak Village. Antares says that part of the memorial fund will be used to help young *orang asli* with athletic or music potential. He is convinced that helping individuals achieve something in the field of culture and sports is the most effective way of raising the *orang asli*'s self-esteem. This is in contrast to the officers of the state Jabatan Hal Ehwal Orang Asli who seem 'obsessed with assimilating *orang asli* into modern Malay society by destroying their natural habitat and their spiritual links to the land.'

Through their own version of world music, Akar Umbi has generated an awareness that the survival of Temuan culture is dependent on the forests, rivers, and land around them. The Akar Umbi performances and CD have stimulated concern about the destruction of ancestral land and environment of the Temuan due to the construction of the Selangor Dam and action on their behalf.<sup>14</sup> The Temuan songs assert that Temuan identity and the intimate relationship of the people with the natural resources of the forest are the basis of the continued existence of present and future generations. World music speaks to the dynamism of the modern world and has inspired the younger generation *orang asli* to be proud of their traditions. However, the mainstream media in Malaysia has not given air time to the songs which are deemed critical of government policies and agencies pertaining to *orang asli* and do not conform to the easy-listening and non-controversial musical styles promoted by the market and local media. Nevertheless, other *orang asli* musical groups such as the Mah Meri of Carey Island and *orang asli* rock bands such as Jelnol, Seniroi and Sarihan have been created and they perform regularly at the World Indigenous People's Day Celebrations (Nicholas 2000:194–5).

We now move to the second case study which is set in Sarawak on the island of Borneo.

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<sup>14</sup> The Temuan have also resorted to legal recourse to fight for their rights over their ancestral land. In 1996, when their land in Kampung Bukit Tampoi, Dengkil, Selangor, was acquired to build the Kuala Lumpur-Nilai Highway for the Kuala Lumpur International Airport (KLIA), seven Temuan sued the Federal and State governments, United Engineers (M) Bhd, and the Malaysian Highway Authority for the loss of their land and dwellings. In a landmark decision the High Court ruled that the *orang asli* have a proprietary interest in customary and traditional lands occupied by them and they have the right to use and derive profit from the land. The court also ruled that eviction was unlawful and that compensation must be paid according to the rates prescribed under the Land Acquisition Act (*New Straits Times*, 21-04-2002).

*The Sarawak Rainforest World Music Festival (RWMF)*

Sarawak joined the Federation of Malaysia in 1963 after it gained independence from the British. Although security and financial affairs come under the jurisdiction of the Federal Government, the state government controls matters related to land tenure and the utilization of forest resources. Sarawak has 35 indigenous ethnic communities including the Iban (the largest group), Bidayuh, Melanau, and Orang Ulu (Kayan, Kenyah, Kajang, Penan etc). These communities are involved in swidden agriculture, hunting, gathering, and fishing and maintain a close relationship with the forest. Unlike the case of the *orang asli* of Peninsular Malaysia, there is no policy of assimilation and integration with Malay society. Nevertheless, the indigenous groups are increasingly being cut off from their traditional cultures and source of livelihood due to relocation to make way for development projects (such as hydroelectric dams), deforestation through logging activities,<sup>15</sup> and the conversion of forest land into agricultural plantations. The state government justifies development projects by claiming that the indigenous people need to come into the 'mainstream of development' (Hong 1987).

In their study of the music of the Orang Ulu, Langub and Khoo Khay Jin (1997:5) emphasize that social change has brought about the demise of traditional musical instruments (such as the jaw's harp, nose flute, mouth organ, and the lute) in the long houses. Belawing and Khoo Khay Jin (1997:25) suggest that Orang Ulu children who go to boarding schools away from their longhouses (community dwellings) do not grow up learning their musical culture. They do not 'appreciate' or 'value' their musical traditions and often 'see the music and instruments of the Orang Ulu as somehow primitive, simple, backward, if not downright boring....Coupled with the presence of contemporary popular music, almost invariably guitar-based, as well as the legitimization given to the guitar in the context of Christian religious worship,'<sup>16</sup> it is then hardly surprising that the

<sup>15</sup> The forestry sector is crucial in Sarawak's economy. Timber concessions granted by the state government as part of political patronage and the destruction of land claimed as Native Customary Rights by indigenous communities have been well documented. Very often, private companies and the state government bulldoze lands and longhouses without consultation. Those who try to protect their land are arrested. For an analysis of the law regarding Native Customary Rights, the dislocation of indigenous peoples due to logging, oil palm plantations, tree plantations, development projects, and their effects on the indigenous people, see IDEAL (1999) and Hong (1987).

<sup>16</sup> Except for the Melanau and Malays who are Muslims, the other indigenous groups in Sarawak such as the Iban, Bidayuh, Kayan, Kenyah and Kajang mainly practise Christianity

instrument of choice for the young is indeed the guitar. It is modern and it is seen as having a wider musical range.'

To revive interest among the younger generation, the state government (specifically the Sarawak Tourism Board and the Minister of Tourism himself) as well as some urban cultural enthusiasts have advocated that local traditions need to be contemporized as in world music so as to resonate with the modern world. The Minister of Tourism, Datuk Abang Johari Tun Openg told reporters that 'the country's ethnic music should be explored within contemporary culture. We should seek ways to widen the participation of music students in new environments while exploring new technologies and different art forms...It is therefore imperative for composers, performers, teachers, and artistic leaders who have the skills, confidence, imagination, and vision to create live and innovative approaches...Sarawak's traditional music could attract worldwide music fans if creatively infused with modern music elements' (*Sarawak Tribune*, 9 July 2003). World music is seen as a way to remove the image of 'backwardness' in the ritual music of the longhouses.

Efforts to contemporize traditional music were initiated in 1998 with the organization of the first Sarawak Rainforest World Music Festival (RWMF). The festival was established as a platform for new innovative ensembles creating new sounds from Sarawakian sources to play alongside international world music artists and perhaps gain recognition internationally.<sup>17</sup> The RWMF was also a means to promote tourism by inculcating interest in the musical traditions of Sarawak. Held at the Sarawak Cultural Village annually (where visitors are introduced to the longhouses and cultural traditions of the main indigenous groups of Sarawak), the festival attracts about 10,000 local and foreign participants.

During the day, local and foreign musicians conduct concurrent workshops held at various long houses. They introduce their instruments and music, jam, and blend with others to create new music. At night, performances take place on the main stage set up in the grounds of the Cultural

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or traditional animist religions. Christianity was brought by the missionaries as early as the colonial period and is widespread among the indigenous communities.

<sup>17</sup> In conjunction with RWMF 2003, the Sarawak Borneo International Ethnic Music Conference with the theme 'Repositioning the Ethnic Music of Sarawak Borneo in a Global Soundscape', was organized by the Sarawak Tourism Board and the Sarawak Development Institute to explore ways on how to inculcate interest and participation in indigenous music especially among the young. This conference brought together musicians and academics from Malaysia (including myself), Asia, the United States, Europe, Africa, and other parts of the world to discuss and exchange experiences about the preservation of traditional music and instruments (*Star*, 09-07-2003).



12.2. Amplified *sape'* at the Rainforest World Music Festival, Sarawak 2003. (photo by author)

Village. Each evening performance begins with selected local groups performing traditional acts. They are followed by international and local fusion groups.<sup>18</sup>

The 2003 festival which I attended highlighted Omar Pene (Senegalese master musician who interweaves popular M'balax groove with jazz and blues); Tarika (Madagascar's fusion group committed to social activism), B'net Marrakech (five female Berber singers from Marrakech, Morocco, accompanied by various drums and percussion instruments), Huun Huur

<sup>18</sup> Gorlinski (n.d.) discusses the frictions that arose as a result of different ideas of what constitutes world music among the organizing committee of the RWMF in the formative years of the festival (1998–1999). The Majlis Adat Istiadat (Council on Custom and Tradition) advocated the performances of traditional forms as a means of preservation, the Sarawak Tourism Board and other representatives from Universiti Malaysia Sarawak and the Sarawak Cultural Village promoted the mixing of traditions with the global pop idiom while the Canadian consultant, Randy Raine-Reusch, agreed to both definitions. After six years, the parties seem to have reached a compromise. At the 2003 RWMF, traditional forms of music from Sarawak and other parts of Malaysia were presented at the afternoon workshops and at the beginning of the night performances. The main international groups were fusion-oriented. The traditional musicians were also given the chance to talk about their instruments and music in the afternoon workshops.

Tu and Malerija (throat singers of Russia), Ensemble Kaboul (exiled folk musicians of Afghanistan), Valeri Dimchev Quartet (Bulgarian folk music), La Volee D'Castors (dancing band from Quebec, Canada), Habana Son Club (Cuban rhythms and music), and *Krakatau* (Indonesian jazz fusion music).

Local groups included Lan-E-Tuyang who opened the festival with Orang Ulu songs played on the *sape*; Belaga Asap Group singing *parap* songs of love, happiness, loneliness, and anger; Bisayah Gong Orchestra performing traditional music on gongs; Anak Adik Rurum Kelabit (Kelabit children) singing and dancing songs about the hornbill; the Mah Meri, one of the *orang asli* groups of Carey Island, Peninsular Malaysia performing their ritual and entertainment songs and dances using the bamboo stamping tubes; and the Bedok Drum Ensemble of the Sarawak Cultural Village combining the drums of various indigenous groups.

Three fusion bands have emerged since the festival was initiated. They are Tuku' Kame' of the Sarawak Cultural Village, MITRA (MuzIK TRAdisional) of the Ministry of Social Development, and Sayu Ateng of Ibraco House Development Co. These groups combine various types of traditional music and instruments to portray a harmonious image of Sarawak. Texts portray aspects of life in Sarawak, celebrate the splendour of the rainforest, mountains, and rivers, and remind listeners to respect nature.

In the disc jacket of their album *Echoes of Borneo, Mystical music from the rainforest of Sarawak*, Sayu Ateng writes about their mission to revive traditional music as 'many master craftsmen and musicians are too old to continue their work and urban migration brings great change across the land. Sarawak's antique musical instruments are seldom heard nowadays except at cultural venues and they may be seen displayed, mute, in our museums.' The members compose original pieces using 'traditional Borneo brass gongs, a unique string instrument, the *sape*, and a series of traditional drums blended with contemporary string and percussion. Some African drums and rain-sticks from Chile have been included and no doubt more instruments will be added in time for after all, world music knows no barriers. Sayu Ateng's sound is new but the thread of Sarawak's fascinating story is beautifully woven throughout their music' (Sayu Ateng n.d.).

*Lagenda gunung mitos* (The legendary mountain of mitos) is based on the story of a legendary mountain at the heart of Borneo. Early literature about Sarawak mentions the sighting of this mountain but it was never found. Through the text, the song welcomes travelers who respect the

mountain's wealth, peace, and tranquility but warns those who seek the 'rare blue orchid' which grows there. The song begins with sounds of birds of the forest. This is followed by a short melodic motif played by the *engkeromong* (gong chime) before the *sape* (plucked lute), *ketebong* (long drum), electric guitar, and electric bass (which plays a variation of the *engkeromong* motif) enter.

*Rintihan suara sungai* (Cries of the river) laments the pollution of rivers. 'Rivers have always been the life-blood of Borneo. Pollution of the rivers cannot be tolerated by all creatures who are nurtured by them' (Sayu Ateng n.d.). The song begins with two *engkeromong* playing counter-melodies to portray running water. They are joined by electric guitars and drumming.

Other songs in the album include *Kuntau* (a type of martial arts of the Iban community); *Soraya* (a song about the arrival of Islam); *Ulat mulong* (a type of sago palm tree worm which is a delicacy among the Melanaus); *Gemilang* (a song regarding the splendour of the rainforest growing wild and free); and *Puteri Kayangan* (about the Mythical Princess, the guardian of Gunung Mitos who sings of the beauty and stillness of the virgin forest).

Besides providing the platform for new fusion music, the RWMF has also acted as a 'venue for local and indigenous musicians around the world, professionals and amateurs, to play together in a natural environment' (*NST*, 27 September 1999). The workshops, in particular, evoke an experience of communication, of exchange between musicians from Sarawak, Malaysia, and other parts of the world who have never met before. Yeoh Jun Lin, the festival's program director, says in an interview that the 'workshops are the soul' of the festival. 'We hope there will be a real exchange of musical ideas' with workshop themes like 'Of Buluh and Wood' (wooden and bamboo instruments from the rainforest), 'Drums in the Jungle' (different types of drums from all the groups), 'Highly Strung' (lutes and zithers of all shapes and sizes), 'Fiddlesticks' (bowed stringed instruments), 'Metallica' (gongs and gamelan), 'Rhythm and Not the Blues' (percussion workshop) and 'Hot Air' (the coming together of wind instruments).

As a consequence of jamming at the RWMF workshops in 2001, two musicians Rajery from Madagascar and Jerry Kamit from Sarawak went on to record a CD entitled *Valiha-Sape* (2001). Rajery plays the *valiha* (a bamboo zither with 18, 20 and 21 strings which is the national instrument of Madagascar). Jerry Kamit performs the *sape* (plucked lute with 2–4 strings of the Orang Ulu of Sarawak) which has been electrified. Jerry has

performed the electric *sape* at other international festivals and is known for his unorthodox style of playing such as standing up rather than sitting cross-legged on the floor and sometimes including antics such as playing the *sape* backwards on his shoulders.<sup>19</sup>

The two musicians from different parts of the world have attempted to create new music by mixing their own styles and instruments so as to promote inter-ethnic communication. Composed by Rajery, *Tsara be Sarawak* (Beautiful Sarawak) is inspired by Rajery's impression of beautiful Sarawak from the aeroplane. African-style singing and percussion is juxtaposed with *valiha* and *sape* improvisations and the words '*hijau*' meaning 'green' in the Malay language. *Datun Julud* is based on a traditional tune of the Orang Ulu played on the *sape* to accompany dances. Rajery and Jerry improvise *Datun Julud* in the pentatonic scale and harmonize the melody with African style singing.

It is interesting to note that Rajery and Jerry Kamit also performed together for the disabled at the Sarawak Cheshire Home. Rajery himself one-handed wanted to provide inspiration to the disabled and show that he can also become a good musician. Part of the profits from the sale of the CD goes to the charity for the disabled.

As in the case of other world music festivals, critics of the RWMF and world music have emphasized that the traditional performances of music and dance as well as the indigenous instruments and forms employed in new creations of Sarawak musicians are detached from the longhouse and divorced from their ritual contexts. The traditions have been re-created as spectacles for tourists. Furthermore, it is the international artists and urban musicians of Sarawak who are able to jam and blend to create new music. Most of the traditional musicians from the longhouses of Sarawak have never experimented with foreign musicians and often look bewildered when asked to blend with others. Although world music is given much prominence in the local media, it is only popular among the minority in the urban areas who still prefer mainstream pop. Nevertheless, for the past six years, the RWMF has been to able to introduce selected forms of indigenous music to local and foreign audiences in the cities, promote new fusion music based on indigenous sources, and provide a platform to bridge music from across the globe to this region. The RWMF has promoted a new interest in and excitement about indigenous music and its revitalization among some of the younger generation. As my

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<sup>19</sup> *Sape* musicians especially those in the cities are beginning to electrify their instruments so that the sound can be heard.

colleagues, friends, and students who attended the 2003 festival testify, 'participating in the workshops was enjoyable and educational. We could try out instruments from Sarawak and other parts of the world as well as try out dance steps and movements related to the music.' The teachers who attended the festival workshops were enthusiastic about showing their students what they learnt and what they recorded on video.

### *Conclusion*

In Malaysia, there are tensions between those who advocate that traditions must be preserved with minimal change and those who regard musical transformation as inevitable. The latter tries to modernize traditional music by adapting to global pop and new media to attract the interests of the younger generation. Both processes are important to keep the music scene alive.

As the culturescape of the indigenous people of Peninsular Malaysia and Sarawak change, it is inevitable that the musicscape will also have to change. The younger generation who wish to be modern often consider their own musical culture as 'backward' and belonging to the past. Bringing indigenous music to the concert stage and mixing the local music with global popular styles may be seen as efforts to transform local traditions so that they are in tune with the modern world. Synthesizing musical elements from indigenous and global sources help the younger generation to connect with modernity.

Through the new fusion music, the indigenous people are able to address and negotiate the tensions of change. They are able to express their concerns about the future. The indigenous people are not against development. However, they do not want their ancestral lands to be taken from them and their environment destroyed by logging and oil palm companies or for the construction of dams. They want to live with dignity and maintain their indigenous culture which is linked closely to the forests and rivers. The musicians are using the past (in their poetry and music) to assert their indigenous identity and to create an awareness of their survival. Recordings, concerts, and festivals such as the RWMF allow their voices to be heard and action to be taken. As a consequence, there seems to be a resurgence of interest in indigenous music and some young people are once again rediscovering the music and dance of their own community as well as other communities.

I am not suggesting that world music is the way to revive traditions but world music has the potential to create interest and pride in local cultures. It plays an active role in the formulation of modern identities and promotes inter-ethnic communication. The crossover aesthetic appeals to broader audiences and cuts across ethnic boundaries. Rajery and Jerry Kamit's CD is testimony of how music can bridge people from different countries and cultures. Sayu Ateng's songs about Sarawak's mountains, forests, and rivers using instruments from various indigenous groups have generated a renewed interest in diverse types of indigenous music among some of the younger generation. Even though CD sales are not high, Mak Minah's Temuan ceremonial songs sung to the accompaniment of bamboo stampers, guitars, and drums have reached some non-orang asli audiences. Mak Minah and the other Temuan singers who sang about their loss in view of the construction of the Selangor Dam as well as other songs were hits at the 1999 RWMF.

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