

## Rap in Indonesian Youth Music of the 1990s: “Globalization,” “Outlaw Genres,” and Social Protest<sup>1</sup>

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Throughout the 1990s, “alternative” musical genres such as rap, punk, and hard rock, derived from North American and European commercial cultures, captured the enthusiasm of large numbers of Indonesian youth, propelling the songs of local Indonesian rock/punk groups such as Slang and rapper Iwa-K to the top of the Indonesian pop charts. Rap music had become popular enough that by January 1995 the Indonesian government, in the person of then minister of research and technology and now former president B. J. Habibie, publicly denounced the genre as crude and alien to Indonesian culture and values (*Kompas* January 8, 10, and 15, 1995). Indeed, in a nation with an astonishingly rich variety of traditional musical forms, it may seem yet another lamentable instance of global commercial culture’s erasure of local variety that Indonesian youth were so powerfully attracted to these musical forms.

Yet, I will argue that the appropriation by Indonesian youth of genres like rap and punk actually reveals a far more complex story. It is a story in which particular aspects of global commercial culture, although certainly displacing elements of previous traditions, may also be seized upon and deployed in specifically local struggles. These genres serve as weapons of social protest and/or as expressions of a desire to create a new social space or even identity that flaunts its difference from or rejection of the kinds of social identities and behavior authorized by an authoritarian government and the dominant social groups in society. The possibilities of this deployment are particularly germane to situations, such as that in Indonesia, in which the regime in power seeks to engineer modern culture while also, in order to aid in its pursuit of comprehensive control over all aspects of society, endeavoring to monopolize authority to determine the practice and meaning of “traditional” culture.

## **Theoretical background**

In their introduction to *Articulating the Global and the Local: Globalization and Cultural Studies*, Ann Cvetkovich and Douglas Kellner assert that “global culture” (itself a contested term) is built on the development of consumption-oriented lifestyles and identities, realized through the promotion of particular products, and that this promotion is usually spearheaded by transnational corporations attempting to penetrate local markets. However, they recognize that such market interventions may also provide “new material to rework one’s identity . . . [which] can empower people to revolt against traditional forms and styles to create more emancipatory ones” (Cvetkovich and Kellner 1997, 10). This two-part argument coincides with Fredric Jameson’s attempt to pinpoint the source of two basic and opposed perceptions of “globalization” through the elaboration of a dialectical model suggesting that whether one sees globalization in a positive or negative light depends upon where one sees the most threatening and oppressive monopolization of power. If the nation state is perceived to be the most immediate site of such a threat, then markets, culture, or federalism may come to be seen as solutions, and “globalization” may offer liberation. Yet if the very system of transnational-led globalization is seen as a threat to differentiated identity, then the nation state may become a space of protection (Jameson 1998, 68–75).

My analysis of Indonesian rap and the brief public debate that flared around it in early 1995 substantiates Jameson’s characterization of globalization as offering a form of liberation or a cultural alternative to subjects living in the shadow of an oppressive national state. Further, this example from Indonesia also suggests that such struggles between local actors and a repressive state tend to take root in other processes, such as social conflicts involving class and age. Thus, in order to properly situate Indonesian rap as a locus of resistance against the Indonesian New Order state and its post-Suharto successor, I will begin with a brief description of the Indonesian nation state’s attempts to construct particular concepts of politics, society, family, and personal identity, the political system and regime of social organization in response to which rap and other “outlaw” genres of music have been appropriated by segments of middle-class Indonesian youth.

## **Description of New Order Cultural Dominants**

Beginning in the late 1950s, Indonesia’s first president, Sukarno, acting in concert with the military and attempting to present himself as preserving (through a process of reformatting) aspects of democracy, established the first stage of a

transition to authoritarianism called “guided democracy.” This system marked both the advent of a corporatization of much of Indonesian social, political, and cultural life and the “naturalization” of this change through reference to a set of ideas evoking notions of Indonesian tradition and a “national personality.” Thus, the beginnings of authoritarianism were justified through the construction of government institutions and ideology partially drawn from hybrid Dutch–Indonesian notions of traditional social relations, structures of hierarchy, rules of conduct, and patterns of leadership (Feith 1963, 358–72). Under General Suharto’s New Order Regime (1966–98), this corporatized “traditionalism” included organizations promulgating and enforcing particular concepts of proper familial conduct, organizations governing and regulating civil servants (and their wives), labor unions, and associations of journalists, businessmen, film-industry workers, students, middle peasants, Islamic religious scholars, and Islamic intellectuals.<sup>2</sup> The New Order also attempted to control public discourse and cultural production by various means, including press regulations, film censorship guidelines, and the banning of newspapers, books, and theatrical and musical performances.<sup>3</sup> Further, it endeavored to “guide” and develop traditional art forms and cultural practices both to support its program of economic development and to inculcate “national values.”<sup>4</sup>

These dynamics occurred in conjunction with the forced indoctrination in the national ideology, *Pancasila*, of students, civil servants, and members of various other social groups (Morfit 1986; Watson 1987), the mandatory acceptance by all social organizations of *Pancasila* as their sole ideological basis (Morfit 1986), and the simultaneous assertion of a specifically Javanese aristocratic ideology of orderliness, hierarchy, deference to social superiors, and paternalistic familial authority as the code which should govern social conduct.<sup>5</sup> In the second half of the 1980s, the New Order even made a concerted effort to install, as a key part of the official state ideology, a totalitarian, integralist notion of the state which viewed it as one large family with each member of society playing their proper role. This concept was then presented as fitting with the “national personality” (Bourchier 1997).

From this short summary of the New Order’s attempts to control society and even social discourse and thought, it should be clear that New Order Indonesia, although unable to eliminate dissent completely, as we shall see, was nonetheless an arena in which notions of control and order, and the sacredness of a particular idea of “Indonesian-ness” came to occupy pervasive and powerfully stifling positions. It was against this background that the appropriation of Western “outlaw” genres of music,<sup>6</sup> dress, and behavior by Indonesian youth, often from the middle classes, occurred.

While Indonesian music may be the least heavily “policed” of a number of

popular mass media (Sen and Hill 2000, 170), nevertheless a history clearly exists of the limitation of certain performers and official criticism of specific styles of music. In particular, the government has been consistent in attempting to limit and eventually co-opt performers like Rhoma Irama and Iwan Fals, whose populist styles, everyday language, and criticism of the government's corruption, human-rights abuses, and the growing social gap between the rich and poor have won them broad popular followings across classes.<sup>7</sup>

The Indonesian government also tried to ban "weepy" songs from television in the late 1980s following the enormous success of one such song, "Hati Yang Luka" (The Wounded heart), which addressed the issue of husbands' abusive behavior toward their wives. According to Minister of Information Harmoko, "weepy" songs appealed to low taste, weakened the spirit of the people, and sapped their commitment to the national effort for progress. Philip Yampolsky argues, however, that one of the reasons for the ban was "Hati Yang Luka"'s frank presentation of a sensitive social problem (Yampolsky 1989, 8–9; Lockhard 1998, 86–7).

### **Rap and the Habibie Incident**

Given the history of governmental intervention in popular music outlined above, it was not completely surprising when, as Minister of Research and Technology, B. J. Habibie launched his attack on rap music in early January 1995. Apparently, having viewed a television program featuring American rap music, Minister Habibie raised objections to a plan to organize an Indonesian national rap festival. Speaking to the media, Habibie blasted rap, claiming that there was no artistry in the genre and that it used disgusting and vulgar language without literary value. Then, as though speaking to an audience whom he feared had gone too far in its adulation of foreign culture, Habibie stated: "not all culture from the advanced countries is of high value. There is also that which brings negative effects" (Raharti and Baskoro 1995, 111).<sup>8</sup> Yudhistira A.N.M. Massardi, reporting for the weekly news magazine *Gatra*, quoted Habibie as remarking:

The younger generation shouldn't want to be enslaved by an aspect of foreign culture which isn't even liked in its own country. It's not even appropriate over there, much less in Indonesia, it's not suitable. . . . I don't agree with it because it's of no use whatsoever, especially for the young generation (Massardi 1995, 106).<sup>9</sup>

*Kompas*, Jakarta's highest circulation news daily, even reported that Habibie saw rap as something that ruined the nation's cultural values (*Kompas*, January 10, 1995, 16).

In these statements Habibie tried to present rap as inappropriate to Indonesian national culture, thus summoning “national culture and personality” discourses against the genre. His arguments against rap, however, also insisted that the genre is “not even appropriate” or liked in its country of origin, by which he was almost surely referring to criticism of rap surrounding alleged concert violence in the late 1980s and, especially, to vilification of Ice-T’s song “Cop Killer” during the 1992 election campaigns in the United States.<sup>10</sup> While Habibie was clearly trying to “police” Indonesian cultural production through his criticism and his efforts to prevent the national rap festival, he was not really arguing against “cultural imperialism” as such, but about being selective in what one allows in the doors. Habibie’s tirade sought to cast rap as an illegitimate, “outlaw” genre.

Although Habibie’s pronouncements attempted to focus attention on the genre’s “vulgar” language and “illegitimate” reputation internationally, a number of prominent members of the Indonesian music community came forward to defend the music. Their arguments portrayed rap as rhythmically dynamic, offering new possibilities to Indonesian pop music and containing lyrics that could explore a richer array of topics with a more diverse idiom (*Kompas*, January 10, 1995, 16; Raharti and Baskoro 1995, 111). Some musicians, including the rapper Denada, sought to explain, quite correctly in fact, that Indonesian rap was generally more polite than American rap and did not use vulgar language (Massardi 1995, 106; *Kompas*, January 8, 1995, 8; *Kompas*, February 8, 1995, 20; Raharti and Baskoro 1995, 111). Other commentators even explained that rather than vulgarity, most rap music contained elements of protest (Massardi 1995, 106), and that leading Indonesian rapper Iwa-K could appropriately be compared to Iwan Fals in this respect (Raharti and Baskoro 1995, 111). Most of those from the music community who were interviewed warned against resorting to censorship of musical creations, especially when the person making the accusations was a government minister who was not necessarily an expert in the field of music. Some members of the music community went so far as to suggest that rather than banning rap, the government should try to understand why youth were attracted to it (Massardi 1995, 106; Roesli 1995, 16; *Kompas*, January 10, 1995).

Eventually, in the face of the defense of rap by local commentators, Minister Habibie sought to moderate his criticism of the genre. The boldness of the music community in defending rap, and even in questioning Minister Habibie’s competence to judge it, suggests something of the difficulties the New Order government was having by the mid-1990s in its attempts to control dissent. References to rap’s protest elements and the critical lyrics of Iwa-K provide clues as to what other issues might have been at stake in this apparently minor skirmish.

Rap, punk, and heavy metal rose to prominence among Indonesian youth beginning in the late 1980s and early 1990s, a time when Indonesia's urban middle classes (business people, professionals, and even the families of the military-officer class) were becoming increasingly critical of, and vocal about, the shortcomings of the New Order (Heryanto 1995, 1996; Bourchier 1997). Circumstantial evidence suggests heavy participation of middle-class youth in creating, performing, and consuming these genres as they were being constituted in Indonesia. In typically middle-class fashion, it has been noted that some punk rockers in Bali end their concerts with trips to a McDonald's at the nearby mall (Baulch 1996, 24).

Reviewing the background of rap performers themselves suggests this connection as well. Iwa-K (Iwa Kusuma), whose breakthrough albums in the early 1990s helped create an explosion of rap and hip-hop culture in Indonesia, rose to fame while taking a degree in social and political sciences at Parahyangan University in Bandung (Raharti and Baskoro 1995). Denada, the best-known woman rapper and daughter of a commercially successful pop singer of the previous generation, recorded her first album while still in high school, and has since gone on to university studies in Australia and Indonesia. Similarly, Budi, of the rap duo Paper Clipp, began his rap career while studying architecture at a Jakarta university (Siagian 1997). A number of rap songs, moreover, feature the accoutrements, attitudes, and activities of life for middle- to upper middle-class youth in Indonesia: going to youth parties (Denada, "Jam Satu Lewat" [Past one A.M.], Neo, "Pesta" [Party]); possessing cell phones and pagers and avoiding going to the office (Sweet Martabak, "Ti Di Dit" [the title imitates the sound of a pager]); hanging out at the malls (Denada, "Hari Ini" [Today], Neo, "Borju" [Bourgeois]); visiting the supermarket (Iwa-K, "Cuma Ulat" [Just a worm]); and the boredom of youth (Neo, "Bosan" [Bored] and "Jalan-Jalan" [Going out for a stroll], Iwa-K, "Kramotak" [Brain cramp] and "Jum'at Malam" [Friday night]).

Anecdotally, university-educated middle-class youths I have gotten to know during my last few trips to Indonesia usually tend to prefer "creative pop," jazz, or the "outlaw" (underground, alternative) genres of Western-derived pop, while industrial workers involved in worker theatre groups generally favor *dangdut*, *keroncong*, or country-pop/folk à la Iwan Fals. Some alternative and outlaw types of music also seemed better able to hold their own in the market following the onset of the economic crisis in late 1997. The rock/punk band Slank, for example, was able to sell a remarkable 600,000 copies of its album *Mata Hati Reformasi* (Inner soul of reform) in mid-1998 (Harris 1998; Raharti 1999). This suggests that the audience for these kinds of music is relatively well off economically (Raharti, Pareanom, and Budi 1998).

Nonetheless, there are also indications that some of these genres of music have strong cross-class appeals, something which may also make the Indonesian government uneasy. For instance, a 1993 performance by the American band Metallica attracted both middle-class and elite fans able to afford expensive ticket prices, as well as lower class metal and punk fans who, unable to purchase tickets, eventually resorted to frustrated rioting. Tellingly, the New Order government attempted to explain the incident in terms of criminality and disorderliness, warning the public not to use the riot as material for polemics about the glaring social gaps measured in terms of wealth (Thompson 1993, 4–6). Jo Pickles also reports that the underground scene (encompassing punk and several subgenres of metal) aspires to be a community beyond class, one that “is open for all to join and participate in . . . money and education are not barriers” (Pickles 2000, 9).<sup>11</sup>

In light of the proven capacity of these genres to attract the attention of a sizeable number of youth from the increasingly critical and strategic middle-class, as well as their potential to appeal to cross-class audiences, to voice social protest, and possibly to provide occasions—as in Metallica’s 1993 concert—where social frustration may erupt in mass violence, it seems likely that the anxiety evident in Minister Habibie’s remarks may well have been occasioned by more than vulgar language. In what ways, however, were rap and the other “outlaw” genres specific responses to New Order Indonesia’s strict social, ideological, and political regimen?

### **Subcultures and Noise**

Here Dick Hebdige’s notion of “subculture” is useful. For Hebdige, the challenge to social hegemony represented by spectacular subcultures is expressed obliquely through styles that interrupt an ongoing process of the “normalization” of the dominant codes, thereby challenging the principles of unity and cohesion operating within society. Further, in the contemporary world the media have come to play a predominant role in defining our experience for us, in providing the most readily available categories for classifying our social world. Subcultures present a kind of “noise” that interferes with this orderly representation of reality in the media, and as such the media and other dominant forces seek either to recuperate them back into the “normal” by reducing them to “ordinary folks” who simply happen to have a different style (which can be commodified), or as deviants who are totally alien, even animals (Hebdige 1979, 13–18, 84–94).

The assertion that subcultures represent a kind of social “noise” disrupting the desired harmony of the normalization of social codes leads us to Jacques

Attali's work on the social history of music. Attali has argued that music, aside from its quality as entertainment or its ability to produce aural pleasure, is also a way of perceiving the world—it is essentially the “organization of noise”—and that both totalitarian and so-called democratic nations all attempt, in different manners, to monopolize the broadcast of messages, to control noise, and to institutionalize the silence of others in order to maintain power. Attali maintains that hegemonic social systems all endeavor to “ban subversive noise because it betokens demands for cultural autonomy, support for difference or marginality” (Attali 1985 [1977], 4–7). A case in point, and one relevant to discussions of “outlaw” genres in Indonesia, is the policing of rap music in the United States during the 1980s and the 1990s. Tricia Rose argues that rap, as a popular articulation of black cultural experience, was itself threatening to institutionalized control of black Americans' mobility, access to public space, and interpretation of their own public expressions. Rose asserts that in the dominant cultural media discourse rap was thus “linked to larger social constructions of black culture as an internal threat to dominant American culture and social order.” As such, black rap concerts were stigmatized, blocked, or rigidly policed by American political authorities, media, and music industry promoters (Rose 1996, 252–3).

Still, as Hebdige has observed, subcultures are also capable of recuperation by dominant forces within society, especially to the extent that their clothing styles or music can be commodified (Hebdige 1979, 94–9). Critics of Hebdige have even argued that the fashion and music industries and sympathetic entrepreneurs, as well as figures outside the actual subcultures, may sometimes help produce and shape the styles of those subcultures (see Cohen 1997 [1980]; and McRobbie 1997 [1989]). Thus, social reactions to subcultures are commonly bifurcated, and this seems to be precisely the case with Indonesian rap, punk, and hard rock. For in Indonesia, government concern and criticism mixes with negative stereotyping in the media, but these elements are mirrored by media fascination for the genre, as well as the desires of both the government and the recording industry to incorporate “underground” or “outlaw” groups as soon as they show signs of winning over large popular audiences. I now turn to an examination of these musics and the subcultures surrounding them.

### **“Outlaw,” “Alternative,” and “Underground” Subcultures**

The main focus of this discussion is rap music, probably the most commercially mainstream of the “outlaw,” “alternative,” or “underground” genres in Indonesia.<sup>12</sup> I will, however, also draw upon material relating to punk and heavy metal, since these genres and their subcultures share several features with those

of rap and all these genres have been grouped together by some commentators as “creative pop” or “alternative/underground,” collectively contrasted to the sweetly sentimental and melodious pop so pervasive in Indonesian public space (Siagian 1997).<sup>13</sup>

First, these genres seem to have arisen along with a distinct generational identity. Emma Baulch has asserted that familiarity with “alternative music” (punk, heavy metal, hard rock, and, I would add, rap) has become a crucial aspect of being a modern teen in Indonesia (Baulch 1996, 24). A *Kompas* article dating from January 15, 1995 attributes Habibie’s and other negative reactions to rap music to a “generational” difference in taste. An experimental film released in 1998 further underscores this affiliation. The film, *Kuldesak* (Cul-desac), not only portrays the frustrated ideals and tragically meaningless lives experienced by many Jakartan youth; it reinforces its themes and images with a soundtrack featuring music by rapper Iwa-K, hard rockers Oppie Andaresta and the group Slank, as well as the more mainstream rock/“creative pop” group Ahmad Band.

A number of themes found in the songs of rappers give additional evidence of the ways in which its youthful creators see the world, as well as how they cast their work to appeal to their peers. For example, Iwa-K’s 1996 album *Kramotak* (Brain cramp) features a song about the joy and excitement of playing basketball (“Nombok Dong!”). Even more specific to youth life is his song “Jum’at Malam” (Friday night) which portrays a singer/narrator/rapper who is extremely self-conscious and ashamed of his body, and who feels bored, frustrated, and trapped within his room. Eventually, this narrator leaves the house to meet friends and cruise the city streets. Similarly, Denada’s *Ini Album Gue!!!* (This is MY album!!!, 1996) features songs about going to youth parties, hanging out at the mall, and violating her parents’ curfew. Several of these same themes can be found in Neo’s 1999 release *Borju* (Bourgeois). The theme of “boredom,” a youth theme *par excellence*, is also frequently taken up by Indonesian rap artists (see, for example, Iwa-K, “Kramotak” [Brain cramp] and “Jum’at Malam” [Friday night], Neo, “Jalan-jalan” [Go out cruisin’], Blake, “Bosan” [Bored], and Paper Clipp, “Mati Lampu” [Blackout]).

When rap was attacked by then Minister Habibie in 1995, rapper Denada declared that rap was part of the expressive world of youth. Citing Denada, *Kompas* argued that rap provided its fans with a vehicle to channel their abundant energy. The daily quoted Denada: “What kind of music can make you run and jump? Rap can” (*Kompas*, January 15, 1995, 16).<sup>14</sup>

Denada’s expression of youthful exuberance not only highlights once again the youth orientation of this music but also suggests a second, more specifically political, impulse behind the emergence of “alternative music” or “out-

law genres.” Given the efforts of the Indonesian New Order government to control social organization, discourse, and behavior, Krishna Sen and David Hill (2000, 180–1) have argued that one of the main attractions of punk, heavy metal, and other such genres was primarily that these foreign musical styles themselves were “disorderly.” This point becomes much more cogent when such genres are compared to the traditional, highly structured, and frequently meditative Javanese court gamelan music so widely associated with Indonesia, or even the melodious and sweetly sentimental pop love songs that saturate Indonesian radio, television, and public space.

Denada’s “Jam Satu Lewat” (Past one A.M.) illustrates this point in a provocative and suggestive manner. Its lyrics reveal both the youth orientation of the music and an accompanying urgent desire to physically and mentally break free of social restraints, rules, and problems. In the song, Denada imagines a party she plans to attend that night, thinking it “will be crazy.” Anxious to get going, she can barely stand the wait. When finally she arrives, her language breaks down into breathless, *telegramstil* descriptions of what she sees: happy faces, people “hopping,” a riotous party scene. The pulse of the pounding music makes Denada forget herself and all the “orders” her parents gave her, until eventually she realizes that she has stayed out past her designated “curfew” time and must rush home in panic:

I can’t wait imagining the scene at the party  
 It’ll be crazy no doubt . . . !  
 Can’t stand it, want to get going  
 Almost time  
 Want to hurry thing is it’s gotta be way cool  
 Finally get there where the b-day is  
 Faces are happy everything’s hopping  
 Party, riot, happy  
 The music pounds hard heating up  
 Everyone’s into moving till you forget where you are  
 Forget to go home, forget your orders yatta yatta<sup>15</sup>

Most striking about the song is the way in which the lyrics are combined with a hard-driving “wall-of-sound” rap style backed by punk rhythms and punctuated by heavy metal flourishes. This style, in which Denada’s rap is divorced from a hip-hop beat and wedded instead to a punk rhythm, and in which her rap frequently seems to be pulled over into punk-style singing, is indicative of the potential for cross-fertilization among the “outlaw” genres in Indonesia. It also constructs a situation in which, although what is narrated is perhaps comical (if excited and panicky by turns), the resulting sound of the song leaves an impression of rage and explosive anger, something not normally condoned in

dominant Indonesian ideology and practice. The form and sound of the music, themselves, present another means for the “letting go” of emotion, a kind of “noise” that interferes with the “normalization” of “Indonesian” music typically identified with calmer, more melodious styles and genres.

In fact, the comments of musicians involved in these genres also support Sen and Hill’s argument. The drummer in a Balinese punk group, Superman is Dead, told Baulch:

Our punk is about an anti-establishment attitude that’s communicated musically with a letting go, anything goes kind of approach (Baulch 1996, 24).

In relation to the “hollers, screams, and growls” of “alternative music,” Pickles has cited the vocalist for a Bandung band as commenting:

When I’m fed up, this music lets me get out my emotions and become positive (Pickles 2000, 9).

The rhythm guitarist for a Balinese “death metal” band, Behead, further underlines the importance of the nature of the music itself when he told Baulch:

Most of us are not so much inspired by the themes of death metal lyrics. . . . The attraction is more the music itself, it gives us hope, it’s about freedom, it’s an expression of our soul (Baulch 1996, 24).

Leading rap singer Iwa-K has stated that what he likes most about rap music is its freedom of expression (Oki and Siagian 1996, 19). He also made this the explicit theme of his most famous song, “Bebas” (Free), from his best-selling and acclaimed second album, 1993’s *Topeng* (Mask).<sup>16</sup>

Let’s leave it all behind  
 Just leave all your problems behind  
 For a moment our time is ours for freeing our thoughts.  
 And let them go  
 Let them fly till they float up through the clouds.  
 For the time being leave behind all the rules  
 Which sometimes tie us down too tightly.  
 And without reason . . .<sup>17</sup>

The disorderliness of the music leads us to a third feature connected to these genres: subcultural characteristics such as clothing worn by the musicians and their fans. Performers and followers of “alternative” or “outlaw” genres have adopted unique, identifying, and socially “suspect” styles of dress from the already commodified, popular, and visible hip-hop style. These styles have ranged from short baggy pants and baggy shirts, backwards baseball caps, underwear visible above the waistline of the pants, and shaved heads for men—

the shaven-headed style of rappers like Iwa-K and Denada (shaven only on the sides) and Neo's Aldy elicited comments from the media—to spectacular punk styles, with studded jackets, “gravity defying hairstyles and pants patched with angry slogans” (Pickles 2000, 9). Pickles explains punk fashion in Indonesia, like punk in Britain, as “a visual stab at unappetizing social ‘norms’” (Pickles 2000, 9–10).

However, Sen and Hill's assertion that disorderliness is the main attraction of these musics<sup>18</sup> reveals only part of what is at work in the appropriation of rap and other “alternative” genres. When I asked the niece of a Jakartan friend why she liked rock, heavy metal, and rap, she replied that these kinds of music took her and her friends out of the boredom and routine of their lives and expressed things they were feeling. Her remarks bring us to a fourth aspect of such genres and the subcultures associated with them. Certainly the “disorderly” quality of the “outlaw genres” of “alternative music” and the subcultures forming around them, as a response to the “orderliness,” conformity, and even boredom of life for many Indonesian youth, is itself a powerful component of these youth subcultures. However, the message of much of this music, at least when written and composed by Indonesians themselves, is profoundly expressive, staking out a partial critique of New Order and now, post-New Order Indonesia.

One of the reasons rap music has been appropriated by Indonesian youth, I would argue, is precisely because of its history as a protest genre. Indonesian rappers are perfectly aware of rap's history and context. Eka, half of the rap duo Da' Ricuh, responding to a question about why she likes a genre associated with violence and vulgar lyrics, explains:

Rap, you know, is identical with social imbalances. Its lyrics contain criticism, but the constructive kind (Siagian 1997, 19).<sup>19</sup>

Denada has also commented on the social side of rap's history:

Of course the ones coming out with rap music in the past were the blacks. They were treated unequally by their government. So you see, what came out was heavily colored by a tone of protest (Massardi 1995, 107).<sup>20</sup>

These statements foreground the presence, to use Arjun Appadurai's term, of a particular globalized “mediascape” (Appadurai 1990) just as much as the condemnations of then Minister Habibie. Each refers to images and representations of rap and hip-hop generated in the United States, deploying those representations according to specific local needs and contexts. In line with Denada's and Eka's equation of rap with social protest, Iwa-K's comments exemplify the seriousness with which Indonesian rappers view the content of their songs:

Creating lyrics provides an opportunity to pour out my grudges, so I can't just do it any old way (Oki and Siagian 1996, 19).<sup>21</sup>

Analyzing the appeal of the most popular “alternative music” acts, rapper Iwa-K and rock group Slank (both of which had become best-sellers in the mainstream), a University of Indonesia student explained to me that he felt these groups were popular “because they created songs relevant to the daily experiences and thoughts of the younger generation — both with their protest and social issue songs, and with the images, language, and songs about boredom and other common youth experiences.” Indeed, Indonesian rappers consistently critique middle-class and elite life, as in songs like Sound Da Clan’s “Anak Gedongan” (Rich kid), Black Skin’s “Cewek Matre” (Material chick) and “Nyontek Lagi” (Cheating again), or Neo’s “Borju” (Bourgeois). In these songs, middle-class and elite subjects are represented as uncreative, always looking for the easy route to success, obsessed with gaining prestige and comfort through consumption, and unaware of vast gaps in social wealth while conspicuously displaying their consumption. A few songs also critique or document the culture of drug and alcohol use that has plagued many Indonesian youth in the past few years (Black Skin, “Sakaw” [Withdrawal], Sound Da Clan, “Anak Gedongan” [Rich kid], and 7 Kurcaci, “Junkeez”). Other themes have also appeared, such as laments about environmental degradation (Iwa-K, “Bumi Hari Ini” [The Earth today]) and condemnations of governmental corruption (Neo, “KKN” [Corruption, collusion, nepotism]).

Some of the most powerful and poetic protest rap songs have been created by Iwa-K. His “DMMT” (an abbreviation for “Dimana . . . Mata . . . Mulut . . . Telinga” or, in English, “Where are . . . your eyes . . . mouth . . . ears”) suggests that Indonesian middle-class youth’s desire to liberate itself is not simply about a stereotypical younger generation urge to escape from parental control and social rules. Rather, this desire embraces a more politically and socially stimulated liberation from a world in which parental control and social rules of conduct are parts of a system that destroys human feelings of concern for one’s fellow citizens. It is a world where human beings refuse to hear the suffering of their hungry compatriots; they go about their lives with empty, vacant eyes and utter lies in the service of greed and personal desire.

Why is it that today  
 Everything everywhere looks so different to me  
 I encountered lots of faces  
 Which didn’t seem to have souls  
 Maybe I was dreaming  
 Maybe I was hallucinating  
 And now I try slapping my cheeks  
 But it just hurts a lot,  
 Streets with potholes full of saliva

Bootlickers tongues sticking out  
 Licking feet licking pants licking everything  
 I'm shoved falling headlong  
 Into a space that's divided up  
 Subtly and invisibly  
 But it feels like it binds us so tightly  
 I see human beings with wide ears  
 But who never in the least  
 Hear the hoarse voices around them  
 Which are always screaming out their hunger,  
 All eyes gaze at you emptily,  
 All mouths speak lies—  
 Greedy like the worms who  
 Destroy the luxuriant foliage of the trees<sup>22</sup>

This is a social system peopled by grotesque bootlickers and ruled by subtle but binding barriers to full human association. Further, the song's rapper/narratorial voice claims that if a woman is raped, no one hears because the noise of the city is so loud he can't even hear his own conscience: everyone is screaming to sell their products, wearing blinders, simply focusing their gaze on what is directly in front of them—their own concerns. This apocalyptic view of a capitalist city in the developing world receives its proper sequel in "Bom Waktu" (Time bomb) from his 1997 album *Mesin Imajinasi* (Imagination Machine), in which the city is a place where emotions such as frustration, anger at the dangerous and cruel behavior of others, and concern for the poor, who are being evicted from their slum dwellings, become the "time bomb" of the song's title, threatening to explode in an eruption of social rage.

Iwa-K's concerns for the fate of poor and ordinary people highlight a major theme in much Indonesian rap. It appears in rap songs by Denada ("Hari Ini" [Today]), Black Kumuh ("Kaum Kumuh" [The Lower classes]), X-Crew ("Anak Jalanan" [Street kid]), Iwa-K ("Si Kecil Lili" [Little Lili], "DMMT," and "Bom Waktu" [Time bomb]), and Neo ("Borju"). Many rap songs also manifest their populist inclinations in their choice of language: variously, rap songs often combine formal Indonesian with street slang, youth code, regionally colored pronunciations, and even expressions from regional languages (typically Javanese, Sundanese, or Betawi). By diverging from the standard Indonesian so vigorously promoted by the New Order government (Hooker 1993), rap language again positions the genre as a "noise" disruptive of dominant representations of Indonesian culture, as well as giving it a more relaxed, flexible, and populist feel.

This populist bent links rap, and much other rock/punk and "alternative" pop, to earlier populist singers such as Rhoma Irama and Iwan Fals. It is likely

no coincidence that Iwa-K and the rock/punk group Slank rose to considerable popularity starting in the mid-1990s, when both earlier singers (and their genres) seemed to have passed the peaks of their creativity and were even being courted by the government. “Globalization” was already evident in both of these earlier Indonesian populist musics. Irama constructed his populist style through the appropriation of Middle Eastern and Indian musical elements combined with Western rock, modern electric instruments and stage effects, Islamic morality, and an exoticized Arabic style of dress. Fals, in turn, drew upon Western folk and country music along with the ethos of the Indonesian *ngamen* (itinerant street singer) tradition. In the 1990s, rap, punk, heavy metal, and hard rock seemed to represent a range of distinct yet connected attempts to create new populist musics that are politically and socially critical and, sometimes, even anti-commercial, announcing disruptively — with stylistic and musical noise — their opposition to the prevailing socio-political order.

The connection with notions of “globalization” is particularly fascinating in this respect, for in order to create disruptive musical and subcultural positions, all of the groups have adapted as their own genres of Western music which represent, in their original cultural location, moment, or subsequent development, parts of “Western” working and lower class or minority subcultures.<sup>23</sup> These types of music are usually viewed as highly suspect by the established authorities on both sides of the Pacific Ocean. Earlier attempts to condemn break-dancing in Indonesia, for example, revealed the Indonesian government’s hostility toward hip-hop culture (Dewanto 1995). However, to overestimate the subversive potential of genres such as rap would also be to ignore the specific matrix of Indonesian social, cultural, economic, and political forces with which these genres must contend.

### **Condemnation, Strategies of Evasion, and Commercial Cooptation**

Although socially critical, rappers in Indonesia work within a context in which censorship and other kinds of state pressure have been very real impediments, particularly prior to May 1998. As I have mentioned, rap is possibly the most commercially mainstream of the “alternative” or “outlaw” genres. This makes it more visible, more accessible to wider publics, and also a more likely target for government condemnation (precisely because of its visibility) than other musical forms. During the New Order era, such a position necessitated a number of strategies of evasion. Self-censorship by producers is one possible response. For instance, a song by Eka’s Da’ Ricuh duo, “Negara Mbeling” (Naughty country), which cited the incident on July 27, 1996, in which then head of the Indonesian Democratic Party and now ex-president Megawati Su-

karnoputri's supporters were violently ousted by government forces from her Indonesian Democratic Party headquarters in downtown Jakarta, was rejected by the producer, who did not want to take the risk of having a cassette banned (Siagian 1997, 19).

In response to Habibie's condemnatory remarks, a number of rappers and commentators pursued different arguments to fend off government opprobrium. Eka's comments cited above demonstrate one such strategy of evasion, an attempt to cast rap's social criticism as "constructive." Similarly, a number of commentators asserted that rap was not simply vulgar and that its social criticism was something to be valued.

Iwa-K pursued a second line of evasion that nonetheless managed to retain considerable defiance while at the same time displaying the "disorderly," "anything goes" attitude of many "alternative" genre musicians. In response to criticism that the lyrics of rap music were at times crude and frightening, he remarked:

I never think about whether my songs contain social criticism or love. If a lot of the songs are frightening, that's what I see. I don't intend to say this is good, that's bad, because I'm not the judge of that. What's important is that I write what I see and feel (Oki and Siagian 1996, 19; Raharti and Baskoro 1995, 111).<sup>24</sup>

Yet another approach was taken by Denada, who, while acknowledging, as noted previously, that it has been associated with social protest, also declared that Habibie was right to characterize American rap as vulgar. Invoking the notion of a discrete national culture and character, however, Denada went on to argue: "But . . . here you know we have our own culture, our own social life, which isn't the same as over there. So, yeah, it's nothing to be afraid of" (Massardi 1995, 107).<sup>25</sup> This opinion dovetails with the remarks of commentators who maintain that Indonesian rap is more "polite" than American rap. In fact, aside from the absence of expletives, the omission from Indonesian rap/hip-hop of several other features of North American rap lends credence to the suggestion that Indonesian rap is distinct. For example, Indonesian rap and hip-hop rarely use the "sampling" techniques or the boasting<sup>26</sup> so common to much North American rap and hip-hop.

Elsewhere, Denada also struck a chord that echoes Eka's characterization of rap as "constructive" criticism:

"Sure I like it. Dynamic chattering like that is really fun. We can complain freely, but nobody gets offended, rather they're happy," stated Denada, who admitted that with [rap music] she "channels her talent for complaining," without hurting anyone else, and for that reason it can be called a positive activity (*Kompas*, January 15, 1995, 16).<sup>27</sup>

Thus, as the remarks of Eka, Denada, and Iwa-K demonstrate, although Indonesian rappers have plenty to say in their songs about social problems, during the New Order they were reluctant to claim too openly that they were criticizing the government or social system, or that Indonesian rap was particularly similar to American rap. In this cautious approach we can detect the artists speaking to the perceived all-pervasive ear of the government security apparatus — as well as to more generally negative social perceptions of rap and hip-hop.

Denada's strategy also returns us to discussions of the relationship between "globalization" (understood as North American cultural domination or neo-imperialism) and "national identity." In so doing it broaches a fifth element in rap and other "alternative" genre subcultures. As is obvious by now, many of these groups have taken Western names. A fair number also include entirely or partly English-language songs on their albums. Certainly, much of this reflects the influence of the globalization of North American culture and would appear to confirm the fears of those who see globalization as a one-way process of cultural domination and subordination. In this there is certainly an element of social prestige quite clearly linked to class, wealth, and their attendant opportunities and privileges. Specifically, in this case, the Indonesian middle class is perhaps the group with the greatest access to North American culture through television, travels abroad, and the economic resources to purchase the requisite clothing, musical instruments, and other related accessories. In addition, members of the middle-to-upper classes are most likely to have access to English language lessons and to obtain English-language competence. Indonesian middle-class youth are undoubtedly coming more and more to resemble their counterparts in North America both in terms of style and attitudes.

Yet the appropriation of rap and other genres by such Indonesian youth, and their occasional use of English, as I have demonstrated, is not merely the result of a colonization of passive subjects leading to the production of exact duplicates of North American popular cultural artifacts. The context of rap's appropriation in Indonesia is radically different — here is a genre created chiefly in North America by a racial minority suffering great structural discrimination. Upon immigration to Indonesia, this same genre becomes a vehicle of populist expression and protest for a segment of the youth of a much more privileged social group experiencing no such racial discrimination, yet a group becoming increasingly dissatisfied with authoritarian rule and its own complicity with it.

Furthermore, given the government's promotion of English-language study and the large number of English-language serials and MTV music video clips on Indonesian television, knowledge of the English language, if with varying degrees of competence, has spread quite a bit further socially than might at

first be expected. Nor is Indonesian rap merely part of a two-way dialogue with North America. The inclusion of English-language lyrics in songs by Indonesian rappers (and others) is certainly in part an attempt to “go international,”<sup>28</sup> but going international does not always, perhaps not even in the majority of cases, mean going to North America.

The founding, for example, in Singapore in the early 1990s of an MTV-Asia station, whose language of broadcasting is English, suggested that not only would North American music increasingly be overwhelming Asian households, but that many Asian groups would also be performing for other Asian audiences, sometimes in English. One Indonesian magazine reported that Iwa-K hoped to market his second album (*Topeng*) not only in Indonesia but more widely throughout Asia, since he had a market in Japan, Singapore, and Malaysia (*Popular* Sept. 1994:30). Iwa-K’s appearances at the Fukuoka and Tokyo Asian culture and music festivals in late 1995, followed by the release of one of his albums in Japan, were seen as banner moments in the recognition of Indonesian music (and especially rap) on an international stage (Oki and Siagian 1996; Siagian 1997). This success in itself suggests other dimensions to “globalization,” other potential circuits of distribution, influence, and consumption.

In line with rap’s relatively commercialized status, efforts by producers to self-censor creators’ themes, as well as the attempts of music commentators to defend rap, presenting it in turn as acceptable criticism, a more polite Indonesian version of a foreign import, or simply a symptom of a generational difference, indicate not only bids by socially conscious Indonesians within the music industry to defend their right to criticize society, but also expression of the interests of the music industry itself to protect a lucrative subfield of its business. Such arguments allow us to identify attempts to normalize and even co-opt rap in response to regime criticism and pervasive negative social images of the genre.

Still, culture is never easy to control. If recent phenomena have included the co-optative use of rap music in theme songs for television boxing programs and martial arts serials, Denada’s increasing turn away from rap/punk toward a softer, more traditional style of pop, Iwa-K’s abandonment of the music business altogether, and the antiphonal incorporation of rap lines into the love songs of Indonesian R & B divas like Sania and Imaniar or the even more recent trio, Tofu, other developments suggest that rap-as-protest continues to evade complete social control. Several releases in 2000 announced the commercial mainstream arrival of a rap-metal fusion, tellingly referred to as “hip-metal.” Combining rap’s rhythmic spoken word delivery of lyrics with a hard-driving metal backing, “hip-metal” music by groups like Red, 7 Kurcaci,

and those on the compilation album *Smas Hip* embodied rap's longstanding appropriation into another "alternative" or "outlaw" genre, creating a harder, much more unruly sound than the works of Iwa-K, Neo, and the "Rap Party" albums of an earlier era. Stylistically and musically reminiscent of a number of Denada's earlier songs, "hip-metal" recordings nonetheless cling more tightly than Denada ever did to some of rap's favorite social themes—the drug problem, Indonesian urban society's perceived heartlessness, and concern for the urban poor. However, if anything, the driving metal backing music gives "hip-metal" an even angrier, more urgent sound than most earlier rap protest songs. That such angry "noise" has grown into an explosive rage, almost a cacophony, in a time when democratic reform has stalled in the face of an intransigent military and political elite, may well be no coincidence.

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup>I would like to thank Andy Sutton, Jeremy Wallach, Joe Moore, Sailaja Krishnamurti, Bryce Kushnier, Tina Chen, Adam Muller, Martin Roberts, Khoo Gaik-Cheng, and the participants in the October 2001 University of Manitoba Globalization and Popular Culture Conference for various valuable suggestions on how to improve this examination of Indonesian rap.

<sup>2</sup>For analyses of these various developments, see respectively Sullivan 1990, 62–9; Suryakusuma 1996; Hadiz 1994; Sen and Hill 2000, 54–6; MacIntyre 1990; Sen 1994, 55–6; King 1982, 115; and Hefner 1993).

<sup>3</sup>Hill 1987; Hill 1994, 41–51; Sen and Hill 2000; Sen 1994, 66–71; Bodden 1997; *Jakarta Post* 1990; and Pracooyo and Riza 1995 are the sources for this information.

<sup>4</sup>For a sense of the breadth of these efforts, see Bowen 1986; Hatley 1990, 333–5; Hough 1992; Hatley 1994, 229–38, 254–7; Pemberton 1994; Guinness 1994; Widodo 1995; Yampolsky 1995; Sears 1996, 233–65.

<sup>5</sup>See Koentjaraningrat 1985, 460–2; Mahasin 1990, 91–2; Anderson 1990, 125–46; Suryakusuma 1996, 96.

<sup>6</sup>What I am labeling "outlaw genres" in this paper are not known by that term in Indonesia, although the point of then Minister Habibie's remarks is precisely to stigmatize them as such. In Indonesian pop music circles they are known as "alternative/underground pop" (Sen and Hill 2000, 177) or "creative pop" (Siagian 1997, 19).

<sup>7</sup>Rhoma Irama, the figure most closely associated with the Arabic-Indian-Malay derived pop genre *dangdut*, was prohibited from performing on television during much of the 1980s for the criticism of New Order society contained in his lyrics, as well as for his campaign support for the Islamic opposition party, the PPP (Sen and Hill 200, 175). In addition, Irama's genre, *dangdut*, was long stigmatized by many elite and middle-class Indonesians as vulgar and crude (Lockhard 1998, 101). "Country-pop" super star Iwan Fals (a folk-pop singer à la Bob Dylan) was similarly the target of police interro-

gations because of his critical lyrics, and he also saw his concerts cancelled, possibly because his tour promoter attempted in 1989 to bypass the usual distributional channels for commercial music (Murray 1991, 12–14; Lockhard 1998, 108–12).

Yet equally, if not more important, was the fact that both Irama and Fals had acquired enormous followings through embracing a populist attitude (and in Fals's case, an entire ethos) manifested in both their language—drawn partially from the language of everyday discourse on the streets—and in their themes, which took the point of view of ordinary people left behind by New Order economic development. These features were combined in social protest songs that took up issues of poverty, human-rights abuses, and corruption, issues that were also important to many middle-class youth. Capturing popular disaffection with New Order society across classes, Iwan Fals's concerts occasionally became venues for fans to exhibit antagonism toward police and the wealthy: a concert in Senayan in 1989 designed to kick off Fals's ill-fated tour was followed by a riot. Subsequently, Fals was rarely allowed to perform in concert through much of the early 1990s (Sen and Hill 2000, 182–3).

Still, indicative of the bifurcation of the “system's” responses toward such music, neither performer's cassettes were banned, with Rhoma Irama and *dangdut* being credited by Frederick and Lockhard with playing a large role in creating a modern market for the mass media in Indonesia (Frederick 1982, 103–4; Lockhard 1998, 96). The *dangdut* genre even became the object of elite recuperation in the early 1990s at roughly the same time that the government was trying to more completely co-opt the Muslim community and when even Rhoma Irama himself was persuaded to campaign in national elections for the government party, Golkar. Similarly, although Fals is generally believed to have maintained his personal integrity, by the late 1980s his work had also become big business, and an entrepreneur close to the Suharto family often worked with him on promoting concerts and new albums, eventually leading to several government- and military-sponsored joint concerts (Lockhard 1998, 111–12). Many of his old songs were also repackaged in a number of variations at the beginning of the “reform” movement following Suharto's fall from the presidency.

<sup>8</sup>The passage I am citing reads as follows in Indonesian: Musik rap digugat Menristek BJ Habibie. “Musik rap itu tidak berseni,” kata Habibie, awal Januari ini. Menurut dia, yang kebetulan menonton pertunjukan rap di sebuah setasiun televisi swasta pada malam tahun baru lalu, kata-kata dalam lagu rap termasuk kategori jorok, menjijikkan, dan tak bernilai sastra . . . Bukan karena saya terkena kritik. Tapi, tidak semua budaya dari negara maju bernilai tinggi. Ada pula yang membawa dampak negatif.

<sup>9</sup>The Indonesian reads as follows: Generasi muda jangan mau diperbudak unsur budaya asing yang di negaranya sendiri tak disukai . . . di sana saja tidak patut, apalagi di Indonesia, tidak cocok . . . Saya tidak setuju karena tidak ada manfaatnya sama sekali, terutama bagi generasi muda. . . .

<sup>10</sup>Although it was due to be released by Ice-T's “speed metal” band as a metal song, “Cop Killer” was repeatedly labeled a rap song by the U.S. media (Rose 1996, 241).

<sup>11</sup>This would also appear to confirm Sarah Thornton's argument that youthful sub-cultural capital relies on the fantasy of classlessness to escape the trappings of the parental class (Thornton 1997[1995], 204).

<sup>12</sup>The bridge between the underground and the mainstream was, in the case of rap and several R & B artists like Sania, provided by an independent production studio, Guest Music Productions, founded by three young musicians turned producers. Guest Music Productions actually released Sania's first solo album (*Sania*, 1999) on its own independent label, but in the case of their productions of the *Iwa-K* and *Pesta Rap* (Rap party) albums, GMP's recordings were marketed under the more commercial, mainstream Musica label (Siagian 1997).

<sup>13</sup>A more detailed and specific differentiation of each genre or subculture is, although necessary and of great interest, unfortunately beyond the scope of this paper.

<sup>14</sup>Rap buat Denada—mungkin juga para penggemar lainnya—adalah musik yang memberi kesempatan buat tersalurkan energi besar yang mereka miliki. “Mana ada musik yang bisa dibuat lari-lari, lompat-lompat. Rap bisa.”

<sup>15</sup>Nggak sabar rasanya ngebayangin suasana pesta yang pasti bakal gila . . . ! Nggak kuat pengen berangkat Waktunya semakin dekat Pengen cepat-cepat soalnya pasti asyik berat Akhirnya sampai juga di tempat yang lagi ultah wajah-wajah ceria semua serba meriah Pesta hura-hura, gembira Musik menghentak keras pesta semakin panas Semua asyik bergoyang sampai lupa daratan Lupa pulang lupa pesan keterusan. . .

<sup>16</sup>*Topeng* sold 100,000 albums in cassette form within the first six months of its release and eventually reached sales of at least 250,000 (Massardi 1995, 107; Raharti and Baskoro 1995, 111), which are very successful sales figures for an Indonesian album.

<sup>17</sup>Sudah tinggalkan, tinggalkan saja semua persoalan, waktu kita sejenak tuk membebaskan pikiran. Dan biarkan, biarkan terbang sampai melayang jauh menembus awan. Sementara tinggalkan semua aturan yang kadang terlalu mengikat. Dan tak beralasan. . .

<sup>18</sup>And, it could be added, the clothing, attitudes, and scenes that go with them.

<sup>19</sup>Rap itu ‘kan identik dengan kesenjangan sosial. Liriknyanya berisi kritikan, tapi yang membangun.

<sup>20</sup>“Yang ngeluarin musik *rap* itu kan dulu orang kulit hitam. Mereka itu kan diperlakukan secara berbeda oleh pemerintahnya. makanya, yang keluar itu lebih banyak nada protesnya.”

<sup>21</sup>The original text reads, “Membuat lirik itu kesempatan buat menuangkan unek-unek, makanya tidak boleh asal-asalan.” Similarly, underground punk and skinhead bands fill their songs and album covers with social criticism and angry calls to eliminate injustice, oppression, and corruption (Pickles 2000, 10).

<sup>22</sup>Mengapa pada hari ini kulihat semua dimana mana begitu berbeda, banyak kuteemukan muka-muka, yang seakan tak memiliki jiwa, aku mungkin sedang bermimpi, aku mungkin berhalusinasi dna kini kucoba menampar pipi, namun terasa sakit sekali, jalanan becek tergenang air liur, lidah para penjilat yang selalu terjulur, jilat kaki jilat celana menjilat semuanya, ku terdorong jatuh terjerebab, ke dalam ruang yang bersekat-sekat, halus dan tak terlihat, namun terasa begitu mengikat, kulihat manusia bertelinga lebar, namun tak pernah sedikitpun mendengar suara-suara parau sekitar, yang selalu berteriak lapar, semua mata menatap kosong, semua mulut berkata bohong—rakus seperti ulat yang melumat, dedaunan di pohon yang lebat. . .

<sup>23</sup>Heavy metal forms a partial exception here. Straw argues that its audience was drawn from suburban and presumably middle-class males. However, during the 1970s and early 1980s, when not being negatively characterized as regressive and uninnovative, heavy metal received little attention from rock critics. By the early 1980s the heavy metal look had come to acquire the connotations of a low socio-economic position, while its audience generally speaking had not moved beyond secondary education and faced diminishing job prospects (Straw 1993).

<sup>24</sup>“Saya nggak pernah mikirin, lagu-lagu saya liriknya mengandung kritik sosial atau cinta. Kalau lagu-lagunya banyak yang seram, itulah yang saya lihat. Saya tidak bermaksud menyampaikan ini bagus, itu jelek, karena saya bukan penilai. Yang penting, saya menulis apa yang saya lihat dan saya rasakan,” jawabnya ketika diminta komentarnya soal lirik-lirik lagu rap yang terkadang kasar dan menyeramkan.

<sup>25</sup>“Tapi . . . di sini kan kita punya kebudayaan sendiri, kehidupan sosial sendiri, yang nggak sama dengan di sana. Jadi, ya, aman-aman saja.”

<sup>26</sup>This is perhaps a rather odd omission in Indonesia, since a strong element of traditional Malay and, more broadly, traditional Southeast Asian cultures is the verbal poetic jousting that is often, though not always, linked to courtship games. In one song, “Bungaku” (My flower), from Iwa-K’s 1997 *Mesin Imajinasi* album, I have noticed the return of some imagery that sounds suspiciously similar to the imagery used in a local, traditional verbal jousting genre, *pantun*. Yet this seems to be a link to tradition not yet explored in depth by Indonesian rap artists.

<sup>27</sup>“Suka aja. Dinamis, merepet-merepetnya itu asyik. Kita bisa ngomel dengan bebas, tapi orang nggak sakit hati malah senang,” ujar Denada, yang mengaku dengan itu “menyalurkan bakat mengomel” tanpa merugikan orang lain, dan karena itu boleh disebut kegiatan positif.

<sup>28</sup>In an article on the language and politics of the underground music scene in Indonesia, Jeremy Wallach (2003) argues that there are two main reasons why underground bands use English lyrics in their songs. The first is that English offers links with the outside world while having a certain amount of prestige within Indonesia. Secondly, these groups may use English in order to express strong emotions and political commentary that might be less easily voiced in Indonesian, the official national language. This was anecdotally confirmed in a conversation I had in July 2004 with one member of a Jakarta underground band.

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