
EXPLORING CLASS, NATION, AND XENOCENTRISM IN INDONESIAN CASSETTE RETAIL OUTLETS¹

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Like their fellow scholars in the humanities and social sciences, many ethnomusicologists over the last decade have grown preoccupied with the question of how expressive forms are used to construct national cultures. Their findings have been consistent for the most part with those of researchers in other fields: namely that social agents manufacture "national" musics by strategically domesticating signs of the global modern and selectively appropriating signs of the subnational local. These two simultaneous processes result in a more or less persuasive but always unstable synthesis, the meanings of which are always subject to contestation.² Indonesian popular music, of course, provides us with many examples of nationalized hybrid

¹ I am grateful to the Indonesian performers, producers, proprietors, music industry personnel, and fans who helped me with this project. I wish to thank in particular Ahmad Najib, Lala Hamid, Jan N. Djuhana, Edy Singh, Robin Malau, and Harry Roesli for their valuable input and assistance. I received helpful comments on earlier drafts of this essay from Matt Tomlinson, Webb Keane, Carol Muller, Greg Urban, Sandra Barnes, Sharon Wallach, and Benedict Anderson. Their suggestions have greatly improved the final result; the shortcomings that remain are entirely my own.

² Thomas Turino, "Signs of Imagination, Identity, and Experience: A Peircean Semiotic Theory for Music," *Ethnomusicology* 43,2 (1999): 221-255. See also in the same issue, Kenneth Bilby, "'Roots Explosion': Indigenization and Cosmopolitanism in Contemporary Surinamese Popular Music," *Ethnomusicology* 43,2 (1999): 256-296 and T. M. Scruggs, "Let's Enjoy as Nicaraguans: The Use of Music in the Construction of a Nicaraguan National Consciousness," *Ethnomusicology* 43,2 (1999): 297-321. For a somewhat different perspective on the relationship between global and local sounds in a self-consciously national genre, see Paul Greene, "Mixed Messages: Unsettled Cosmopolitanisms in Nepali Pop," *Popular Music* 20,2 (2001): 169-188.

formations forged through a creative process of dual appropriation, in which elements as diverse as Indian film music, Anglo-American hard rock, reggae, and disco are combined with the sounds of gamelan and other indigenous regional music traditions to create musical genres that aspire to be both “modern” and “Indonesian.”

Given their newfound interest in the musical construction of the nation, it is surprising that so few ethnomusicologists in Indonesia and elsewhere have thought to study record stores, where national musical genres are displayed, contrasted, and categorized. As I hope to demonstrate in this essay, recorded music retail outlets provide a unique vantage point from which to view the contradictions of class, nation, and modernity in the Indonesian metropole and beyond.

Ethnomusicologists who visit Indonesia do tend to spend a significant amount of time in local cassette stores, but they rarely write about them in much detail. Those that do describe a bewildering spectacle of diverse musics both strange and familiar.³ In this essay, I take a systematic approach to the cultural space of the cassette store in its various incarnations and examine the social and economic forces that shape it. Against the backdrop of current trends in the Indonesian music industry, I investigate shelf categories, store layouts, decorations, employee and customer behavior, and the ratios of imported to domestic product that characterize the various sites where music is purchased in Jakarta and other Indonesian cities. Several patterns emerge from this exploration. In particular, a survey of the different types of music retail outlets reveals signs of the social and economic bifurcation that has long characterized Indonesian society and which was exacerbated both by the New Order regime’s policies and the aftermath of the 1997–98 economic crisis. The hierarchical presentation of musical genres found in nearly every Indonesian cassette retail outlet provides an important example of how musical genre is linked to class-inflected notions of prestige and value that divide the Indonesian national public.

For the following analysis, I draw upon Pierre Bourdieu’s theories of social stratification and cultural consumption practices.⁴ In his analysis of French society, Bourdieu argues against a direct correlation between socioeconomic status and cultural preferences, instead asserting that certain embodied forms of knowledge become sources of “cultural capital,” a separate entity from economic capital. Thus, in Bourdieu’s view, cultural status and prestige do not follow directly from the relations of production, but are negotiated in a cultural field of aesthetic alternatives in which some choices are more highly valued than others.

Genre and *Gengsi*: Indonesian Versus Foreign Popular Music

Asking an Indonesian teenager why he or she likes a particular song, artist, or genre tends to elicit the response, “*Ya, suka aja*” (I just like it, that’s all). But when one digs

³ For example, Marc Perlman, “The Traditional Javanese Performing Arts in the Twilight of the New Order: Two Letters from Solo,” *Indonesia* 68 (October 1999): 1–37.

⁴ Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste*, trans. Richard Nice (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1984).

deeper, one discovers a complex moral economy in which musical genres are ranked *vis-à-vis* one another based on a largely implicit system of social distinction, which in Jakananese is summed up by the Hokkien Chinese-derived term *gengsi* (status consciousness, prestige). These relative rankings of social prestige and power in many cases determine which genres and artists Indonesians readily admit to liking, and which they do not.

In Indonesia, different popular music genres signify differing quantities of cultural capital, and the genres that signify the highest social status do not originate from Indonesia at all, but rather from the West, primarily Britain and the United States.⁵ Second in order of status is Indonesian music that strongly resembles Western popular music musically, if not always lyrically; this is usually classified as *pop Indonesia*. This variegated genre encompasses several subgenres; these include sophisticated, jazz and R&B-influenced *pop kelas atas* (upper-class pop) and youth-oriented *pop alternatif*, which draws inspiration from recent Western rock styles.

The other major category of Indonesian popular music is *dangdut*, that irrepressible, electrified hybrid of Middle Eastern, South Asian, Western, and indigenous musical elements that enjoys an enormous nationwide audience of ordinary Indonesians. Despite nearly two decades of recurrent, hyperbolic mass-media accounts of *dangdut's* "new" and growing acceptability to the Indonesian middle class, many middle-class and elite Indonesians still openly revile the genre, which has not lost its associations with lewd behavior, low-class "village" attitudes, and general aesthetic tackiness, and remains tied to performance and listening contexts defined by their proletarian, unruly character.⁶ The most prevalent and injurious epithet used to derogate *dangdut* music is *kampung*, a culturally loaded term which can be loosely translated as "vulgar, low-class, and repellently characteristic of backward village life," or in James Siegel's words, "hickish."⁷ Thus *dangdut* is always subordinate to the more Westernized and middle-class-oriented *pop Indonesia* and can never be a source of *gengsi*. Similarly, *musik daerah* (regional music), which appeals to a subnational,

⁵ Kuan-Hsing Chen questions the continued popularity of American cultural products in East Asia despite the presence of fully developed, robust national culture industries in most East Asian countries. He concludes that, "The key to the sway of this American imperialism has lain in its ability to insert itself in the geo-colonial space as the imaginary figure of modernity." While Western popular culture is indeed inextricably linked with modernity and development in Indonesia, it is certainly possible that Indonesians' enthusiasm for Western music may stem more from their enjoyment of its sensual qualities than from ideological brainwashing. Kuan-Hsing Chen, "America in East Asia: The Club 51 Syndrome," *New Left Review* 12 (2001): 73-87, p. 85.

⁶ For discussions of the emergence and popularization of *dangdut*, see William Frederick, "Rhoma Irama and the *Dangdut* Style: Aspects of Contemporary Indonesian Popular Culture," *Indonesia* 32 (1982): 103-130; and James Siegel, *Solo in the New Order: Language and Hierarchy in an Indonesia City* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986), pp. 215-18. For more contemporary accounts of *dangdut* performance at the grassroots level and the music's incomplete assimilation into the middle-class-defined mainstream see Susan Browne, *The Gender Implications of Dangdut Kampungan: Indonesian 'Low-Class' Popular Music* (Melbourne: Monash University Institute for Asian Studies Working Paper No. 109, 2000), and Jeremy Wallach, "Modern Noise and Ethnic Accents: Indonesian Popular Music in the Era of *Reformasi*" (PhD dissertation, University of Pennsylvania, 2002).

⁷ Siegel, *Solo in the New Order*, p. 215.

regional, or “ethnic” audience, cannot be a source of *gengsi* at the national level. Like *dangdut*, these musics (which range from highly idiosyncratic local traditions captured on tape to straightforward studio-produced Western-style pop sung in regional languages) tend to be popular among working-class and rural consumers but disavowed by middle-class city dwellers.

A final Indonesian genre to be considered here is “underground” or “indie” rock music.⁸ Associated primarily with male high school and university student audiences, bands in the Indonesian underground play loud, rebellious rock music that often contains explicitly political messages. While their music closely resembles that of Western groups and is often sung in English, the preferred method of producing, performing, and distributing Indonesian underground music is defiantly localist and grassroots-based, operating outside the channels of the commercial music industry. Therefore, underground music exists in an ambiguous relationship to the status hierarchy of popular music in Indonesia. Rather than signifying social status in society at large, underground rock indexes a body of specialized knowledge of value to a self-selecting minority of listeners; it can therefore be said to possess “subcultural capital.”⁹ But in its own way, the underground music movement is premised on the same assumption that animates the mainstream pop industry: namely, that Western music is superior to indigenous styles.

Music and “Xenocentrism”

When I was teaching a cultural anthropology course at Universitas Atma Jaya, a private university in Central Jakarta, an Indonesian colleague advised me to introduce my students to the term *xenosentrik* (xenocentric) in addition to *etnosentrik* (ethnocentric) on the first day of class. I knew that it was customary for anthropology instructors in the United States to introduce beginning students to the concept (and hazards) of ethnocentrism—the belief that one’s own culture is superior to all others—in order to contrast it to the relativistic approach of mainstream cultural anthropology toward cultural differences. Teaching students about the concept of xenocentrism—the belief, not uncommon in postcolonial societies, that a foreign culture (the West, for example) is superior to all others, including one’s own—was, however, a new experience for me. Yet it soon became clear to me why such a term was necessary in order to teach the idea of cultural relativism to Indonesian undergraduates: “xenocentric” described well the attitude my students, like so many other middle- and upper-class Indonesians, held about a range of cultural phenomena, including business, government, religion (among both Muslims, who look toward the Middle East, and Christians, who look toward the West), cinema, technology, and, not least, popular music. In relation to this last item, my research findings strongly suggest that the

⁸ For more information about the history and development of the underground music movement in Indonesia, see Jeremy Wallach, “‘Goodbye My Blind Majesty’: Music, Language, and Politics in the Indonesian Underground,” in *Global Pop Music and the Politics of Language Choice*, ed. Harris M. Berger and Michael T. Carroll. (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, forthcoming 2003).

⁹ For further elucidation of the concept of “subcultural capital,” see Sarah Thornton, *Club Cultures: Music, Media, and Subcultural Capital* (Hanover: University Press of New England, 1996).

strategies by which cassette stores display their wares tend to replicate and reinforce, if not create, a xenocentric status hierarchy which places Western (primarily British and American) music at the top, and ethnic and working-class-oriented Indonesian genres at the low end of the *gengsi* scale.

As Bourdieu would have predicted, belief in the artistic superiority of Western music is not purely a function of socioeconomic class position, though there is a certainly a correlation between such attitudes and middle- or upper-class standing. I spoke with many working-class music fans whose opinions of Indonesian popular music, especially *dangdut*, were as uncomplimentary as those held by members of the middle class, if not more so. For example, walking home from campus one day I was accosted by a middle-aged man hanging out on the corner of Jalan Sudirman and Jalan Teluk Betung in Central Jakarta. He seemed more than a little inebriated and was talking and joking with two women whom I had seen at local *dangdut* bars and whom an informant had told me worked as prostitutes. Speaking in broken but understandable English peppered with American slang expressions, he asked me what I was in doing in Indonesia. When I mentioned that I was interested in studying national popular music genres like *dangdut* and *jaipongan* (a nationalized dance music from West Java), he became surprised and indignant. The following is a partial reconstruction of his remarks from my 1997 field notes:

Oh, God! I can't believe you're studying *that*. *Dangdut* and *jaipong*—I don't know why the Indonesian people like this music. It is ah . . . [hesitation, as though searching for the right expression in English] . . . from the village. It is . . . [*"Kampungang?"* I asked him] . . . Yes! That's it. As for me, I like Grand Funk Railroad; Chicago; Deep Purple; Uriah Heep; [a name I could not identify]; Emerson, Lake, and Palmer; Jimi Hendrix; blues . . . [*"Flower Generation?"* I ask] . . . Yes, man! I'm forty—I was in that generation! When I was still in high school, twenty years ago, my friends and I were *proud* to have the posters: Janis Joplin; Emerson, Lake, and Palmer; the Beatles. But people in Indonesia—there is a problem with *apresiasi*—appreciation of good music. [. . .] Speaking for me—I don't think I'm *kebarat-baratan* [Westernized], more Western than Western guys, but I appreciate Western music: blues, *klasik* [classical music], rock. That is what I think. It's interesting talking to you . . .

This man's comments not only reveal the easy contempt some urban dwellers hold for Indonesian national popular music genres, but also illustrate the important connection between Western popular music—especially rock—and masculine generational identity, which is clearly a factor in the rise of the musical underground in the 1990s. Knowledge of a particular Western musical canon, in this case rock music from the 1960s and 1970s, associated in Indonesia with the "Flower Generation," was a source of cultural capital for the speaker. In contrast, he seemed almost embarrassed by the popularity of *dangdut* and *jaipongan*, which for him served as a reminder of the backwardness of his fellow citizens and their inability to appreciate "good music."

Some more thoughtful music fans expressed ambivalence about the musical prestige hierarchy in Indonesia while not denying the power it wields. The following is an excerpt from an e-mail I received from a highly educated Jakartan small businessman

and former student activist in response to a query concerning his favorite kind of music.

Hallo Jeremy,
Langsung aja nich . . .

Kalau ditanya soal musik, aku paling bingung ngejawabnya. Aku memang suka musik. But what kind of music do I like? This is really confused me. Aku mau jujur aja. Sebenarnya aku ini snobist! Snobist yang sok tahu, biar nggak dibilang ketinggalan jaman, gitu. Tapi akhirnya, ya suka juga. Awalnya memang snob. Kata Harry Roesly, apresiator musik di Indonesia umumnya berawal dari snob. Banyak juga musisi negri ini yang snobist duluan. Biar nggak dikatakan kampungan, lalu coba-coba musik barat, trus kebablasan jadi pemain. Itu biasa. Namanya juga anak muda. Coba tanya Pra, atau yang lainnya tentang latar belakang mereka bermain musik barat seperti fusion, rock, atau sekarang yang lagi trend di sini, ska. Selain itu, memainkan musik Barat tentu lebih praktis. Bayangkan, kalau main musik trad. yang instrumentnya seberat gajah sekarat, macam gong, saron [. . .] dll.

Lho, kok jadi ngelantur. Soal apa tadi? Oh...ya, soal musik yang aku suka. Jelas dong, yang kusuka kan jazz kuno, macam Louis Armstrong, Mile Davis, Herbie Hancock, Oscar Peterson dll. Yang jelas saya tidak membatasi diri hanya dengar aliran musik tertentu. Hanya lebih enjoy dengan yang saya sebut tadi. Itu saja. Masa' kalau lagi disco pake lagu gituan. Pokoknya lihat-lihat kesempatannya lah! [. . .]

Hello Jeremy,
I'll get directly to the point.

If asked about music, I get very confused how to answer. I certainly like music. *But what kind of music do I like? This really confused me.* I'll just be honest. Actually, I'm a snob [*snobist*]! A snob who's a know-it-all, just so it isn't said that he is behind the times, like that. But ultimately yeah, I like it that way. In the beginning, certainly a snob. Harry Roesli [a well-known composer and recording artist] says appreciators of music in Indonesia generally begin as snobs. There are also many musicians from this country who were snobs at first. So as not to be considered backward or low class [*kampungan*], they mess around amateurishly with Western music, then instantly think they've become players. That's what normally happens. You know, kids are like that. Try asking Pra [Budidharma, the bassist of ethnic jazz fusion group Krakatau] or others about their background playing Western music like fusion, rock, or the music currently in vogue here, ska. Aside from that, playing Western music is certainly more practical. Imagine, if you want to play traditional music, the instruments are as heavy as an elephant in its death throes, like *gong, saron* [. . .] etc.

Hmmm . . . I'm drifting here. What was I talking about just now? Oh . . . yeah, the matter of music I like. It's clear of course, what I like is old jazz, like Louis Armstrong, Mile Davis, Herbie Hancock, Oscar Peterson, etc. What's clear is that I don't limit myself by only listening to a particular stream of music. I only *enjoy* more the music I just mentioned. That's all. It would be impossible if I'm disco

dancing to use songs like that [old jazz]! The main thing is to look at the situation *lah!*

After expressing discomfort with the apparent elitism of his musical taste, the writer admits he likes one of the most prestigious categories of music, Western jazz. Moreover, he prefers *jazz kuno* (old jazz), not the watered down jazz/rock/pop fusion that dominates the Indonesian (and international) jazz market. By writing that musicians turn to Western music in order not to be considered *kampungan*, the writer implies that non-Western-sounding music in Indonesia, including traditional music with its impractical, heavy instruments, is backward and low class. Yet to subscribe to this view is to be a *snobist*, that is, to care too much about *gengsi*. So finally the writer disavows his elitism with the quite plausible claim that he listens to all kinds of music depending on the situation and that he just happens to enjoy traditional jazz best.

As an intellectual familiar with post-structuralism and postcolonial theory, the writer is uncomfortable with the argument that Western music truly is superior to indigenous Indonesian music. He even cites (somewhat unconvincingly) logistical problems with moving heavy instruments as a reason why musicians choose to play Western instead of traditional music, as though practicality was of greater concern to them than artistic value. Nevertheless, Indonesians from a variety of social and class backgrounds share the view he describes but does not quite endorse, according to which standards of musical excellence emanate from a Western elsewhere. This elsewhere is spatially and sometimes temporally distant, as in the case of 1950s jazz or 1970s hard rock. It is not difficult to associate this attitude with the brainwashing effects of globalized Western popular culture. I would argue, however, that in Indonesia such a view is also part of a local strategy for distinguishing oneself from "low class" and rural Indonesians through the self-conscious demonstration of cultural capital. Evidence for this interpretation can be found in the conspicuous class-based differences in musical consumption in Indonesia. The next section of the essay continues our investigation of the context of musical commerce in Indonesia, and investigates how middle-class *gengsi* concerns and a xenocentric view of artistic quality have an impact upon the culture and economics of popular music in Indonesia.

Genre, Class, and Status: A View of the Indonesian Music Industry

The music retail outlets discussed in this essay operate in the social and economic context of the Indonesian music industry, which is in the midst of an historic transition from a highly segmented to a more unified music market.¹⁰ Because Indonesia is a country in which class differences are obvious, frankly acknowledged, and pervasive in social life, music industry workers tend to view the Indonesian popular music market not as an entity composed of an undifferentiated mass of consumers, but as a ladder of different socioeconomic classes. According to the marketing director of the Indonesian Repertoire and Promotions Division of a major transnational record company with extensive operations in Indonesia, these levels were commonly labeled

¹⁰ For a useful survey of recent developments in the Indonesian music industry (both mainstream and underground), see Krishna Sen and David Hill, *Media, Culture, and Politics in Indonesia* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 2000), pp. 164-193.

A to F. She stated that A and B class consumers in large cities (Jakarta, Bandung, Surabaya, Medan) prefer Western music, while their counterparts in smaller cities prefer upmarket *pop Indonesia*. C and D consumers' tastes tended toward sentimental, melodramatic pop (*pop melankolis*, also known pejoratively as *pop cengeng*, "weepy pop"¹¹) and, of course, *dangdut*. She added dryly that the "D" virtually stood for *dangdut* when one was discussing the musical preferences of that market segment. Finally, the crowded E and F socioeconomic levels were composed of people too poor to buy music and did not factor into the industry's marketing strategies.

While most Indonesian music consumers do not employ these music industry labels, they tend explicitly to associate particular musical genres with either *menengah ke atas* ("middle to upper") or "*menengah ke bawah*" (middle to below) consumers. Only children's pop (*pop anak-anak*), which appeals to children at all levels, and underground music, which attracts a cross-class youth subcultural audience, constitute partial exceptions to this rule. For example, "AB"-oriented *pop kelas atas* (upper-class pop), exemplified by the work of singers Ruth Sahanaya, Titi DJ, Krisdayanti, and Rossa, is readily distinguishable from more working class-oriented pop music by its slicker, R&B-influenced production, jazzy arrangements, and upbeat lyrics, as well as significant differences in promotional strategies and artists' images.

The class-inflected status hierarchy of musical genres is reflected in the range of retail prices for different types of cassette. Legitimate (that is, nonpirated) cassette prices in Indonesia are generally *pas* (fixed; exact; not subject to bargaining) and thus are remarkably consistent regardless of the location of purchase, though at smaller stalls one is more likely to receive a slight discount for buying several cassettes at once. The following is a list of cassette prices by genre in Jakarta in late June 2000.¹²

Western: Rp. 20,000 (at the time, approximately \$2.50 US)

Pop Indonesia: Rp. 16,000 to Rp. 18,000 (\$2.00 to \$2.25)

Dangdut: Rp. 12,000 to Rp. 14,000 (\$1.50 to \$1.75)

Regional Music (*Musik Daerah*): Rp. 10,000 to Rp. 13,000 (\$1.25 to \$1.63)

Underground [independently produced and distributed]: Rp. 10,000 to Rp. 17,000 (\$1.25 to \$2.13)

Although the prices of Western cassettes are too high for many Indonesians to afford (twice as much as the cost of some *musik daerah* cassettes), they are nevertheless much lower than the retail prices of Western music in the West. The price differential is accomplished by manufacturing the cassettes domestically under license from multinational media corporations. Compact disks are also locally manufactured, but they are far more expensive than cassettes, which remain by far the best-selling format in Indonesia. In June 2000, locally produced Western compact disks could cost as much as Rp. 80,000 (at the time, approximately \$10.00 US), while compact disks by Indonesian artists cost approximately Rp. 50,000 (\$6.25). With prices like these,

¹¹ For a discussion of the *cengeng* qualities of certain *pop Indonesia* songs, see Philip Yampolsky, "Hati Yang Luka,' An Indonesian Hit," *Indonesia* 47 (April 1989): 1-17.

¹² Retail prices for recorded music increased steadily during the period of my dissertation fieldwork (1999-2000), a consequence of rising production costs and the weakness of Indonesia's currency.

compact disks are considered a format designated for "AB" consumers. Very few *dangdut* recordings are ever released on compact disk; a *dangdut* producer once told me such items would not sell well and would only be used as ideal masters for the production of pirated cassettes. Among new releases, only *pop Indonesia* albums that have first been commercially successful on cassette are released on compact disk.

Krismon and the Transformation of the Indonesian Music Market

For much of the 1980s and 1990s, the sheer numbers of consumers in the so-called C and D markets compensated for their relatively weak purchasing power, and in fact musical genres such as *dangdut* that targeted this audience, while low on the *gengsi* scale, were quite profitable for record companies. In the early and mid-1990s it was not unusual for a *dangdut* cassette containing a hit song to sell more than a million legitimate copies—an unheard-of amount for *pop* records at the time. This situation changed drastically in the aftermath of the 1997–98 economic catastrophe.

A comparison of music sales in the years before and after Indonesia's economic collapse provides a telling indication of the relative ability of Indonesians from different social classes to weather the crisis. The following table is sorted by foreign and local music, and by consumer format. Almost all music sold in Indonesia is in the form of prerecorded cassettes, but music is also available on compact disk, video compact disks (VCD), and laser disk (LD). The latter two formats, obscure or unknown in the West, contain images as well as sounds, and are used to accompany karaoke performance. They primarily feature Indonesian music.

Table 1: Recorded Music Sales Data for Indonesia (units sold), 1996-1999¹³

Type	1996	1997	1998	1999 (Oct.)
Indo. cassettes	65,396,589	49,794,676	27,635,739	30,100,077
Foreign cass.	11,374,089	14,005,340	9,637,200	11,395,590
Indo. CDs	265,475	778,370	315,910	532,900
Foreign CDs	474,980	2,053,840	2,732,410	2,086,290
Karaoke VCDs	19,500	701,870	1,335,390	4,196,590
LD Karaoke	21,375	21,975	2,205	1,050
TOTAL	77,552,008	67,356,071	41,658,674	48,312,497

¹³ Adapted from K. S. Theodore, "Industri Musik Indonesia di Ujung Abad Ke 20," Buletin ASIRI 5 (1999): 10-11.

During the economic crisis, the upper and middle classes, with their high rates of personal savings, suffered far less than the urban poor, who had little or no savings and could not cope with the steeply rising prices of consumer goods. A striking statistic from the above table is that sales of the highest-priced, most prestigious commodity, foreign compact disks, actually *increased 33 percent* between 1997 and 1998, during the height of the economic crisis. It is tempting to posit a perverse kind of *gengsi* logic behind this increase, and behind the fact that the number of foreign compact disks sold in Indonesia dips slightly the following year. According to such a logic, conspicuous consumption in the form of purchasing Western compact disks during the height of an economic crisis would powerfully demonstrate one's elite status and separation from the immiserated poor, many of whom were now unable to buy even the cheapest local cassettes.

In October 1999, the sale of cassettes by Indonesian artists over the previous eight months amounted to less than half of the total figure for 1996. Due to competition from the rapidly growing VCD medium (which is even more dominated by piracy than cassettes are), it is possible that Indonesian cassette sales will never rebound completely, even if the economic outlook of the country improves. This situation led some recently arrived multinational recording companies to conclude that the "middle to lower" market segment was no longer profitable, a result of those consumers' decreased spending power and habit of buying readily available pirated cassettes.

In post-crisis Indonesia many of the most successful new recordings have been by *pop alternatif* and ska groups like Sheila on 7 and Jun Fan Gung Foo (both artists for Sony Music Indonesia) that have crossed over to an economically diverse audience. This has often occurred against the expectations of record label personnel, who did not anticipate such high sales (Sheila on 7's eponymous first album has sold over one million copies; the second album by the stylistically similar band Padi has reportedly sold three times that amount). That *pop alternatif* artists associated with urban middle class youth have apparently become accepted in lower social strata is evidence for a claim I heard several people in the Indonesian music industry make: the current youth market in Indonesia is far more uniform across class boundaries than in previous generations, a situation attributed to the influence of MTV and other recently introduced outlets for global popular culture. If this claim is true, however, the phenomenon does not contradict or counteract widening social inequality in Indonesia in the face of both economic globalization and economic crisis. Indeed, three decades of the New Order's aggressive economic development policies may well have resulted in a more unified popular culture coupled with a more polarized society.

Music Consumption at the Ground Level: A Taxonomy of Jakarta's Music Retail Outlets

If we confine ourselves to the "legitimate" music market and ignore for the moment pirated merchandise, we find that the prices and products for sale in different kinds of retail outlets do not differ markedly. The manner in which recordings are displayed is also similar from one outlet to the next, but the *experiences* of shopping for cassettes in a large music store as opposed to a small cassette stall can differ widely. In the former, one usually finds that well over half of the music for sale is imported. By contrast,

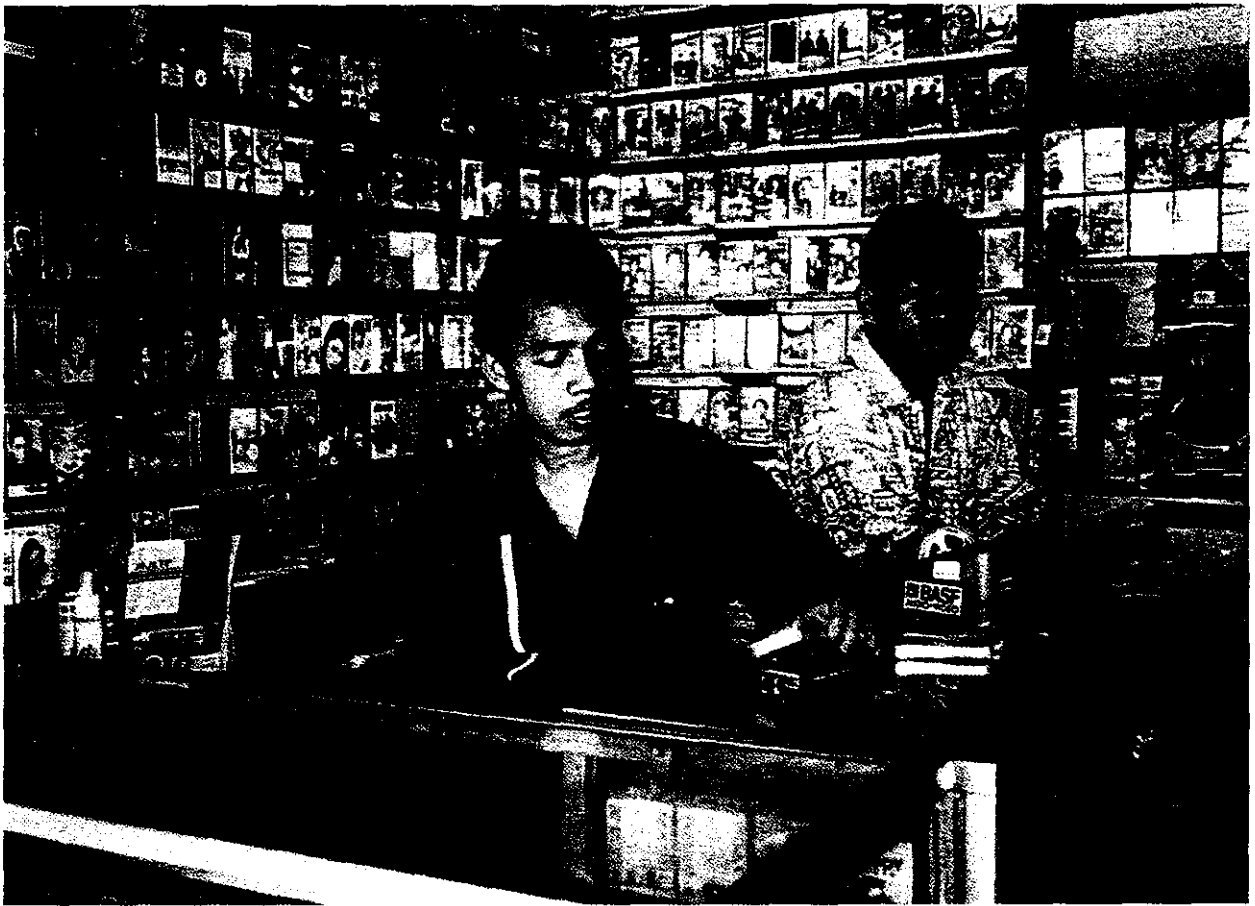
cassette stalls that operate in the informal, “bazaar” economy nearly always sell Western cassettes, but these usually account for less than 25 percent of total shelf space. The precise ratio of imported to Indonesian cassettes varies depending on the economic circumstances of the surrounding neighborhood. Cassette stalls in the poorest Jakarta *kampung*, for instance, generally offer very few Western cassettes for sale (and no compact disks of any sort), but feature a wide selection of *dangdut* cassettes.¹⁴

Warung Kaset

Warung kaset (cassette stalls) distinguish themselves sonically from the other stalls in a traditional market by the loud recorded music they broadcast to passersby. The type of music played depends on the sales clerk, though sentimental pop ballads, often in English, are a frequent choice. These establishments make do with spartan decoration, relying on the sound of the music and the colorful cassette packages on display to attract customers. Many sell a range of other non-perishable items in addition to cassettes: plastic toys, batteries, headphones, and the like. Cassettes for sale in the stall are not displayed alphabetically, but are usually separated into unlabeled categories. In Jakartan cassette stalls the most common of these implicit classifications, judging from the identity of the artists represented in each section, are Western pop, *pop Indonesia*, *dangdut*, Javanese, Sundanese, Islamic, and children’s music. The classification scheme does not usually distinguish between regional pop and traditional music recordings from the same region. In these *warungs*, Western music cassettes are usually placed on the highest shelves behind the counter, while Indonesian music is displayed on lower shelves and under the counter inside glass display cases. This practice appears to elevate foreign music to a higher status, though it may simply result from the desire to protect the stall’s most expensive items from theft. Nevertheless, after visiting innumerable Indonesian cassette stalls, I concluded that the spatial separation between Indonesian and foreign music was carefully maintained in a manner suggesting that more than security concerns might be at stake.

In nearly all *warung kaset*, the customer has the option of trying out a recording on the stall’s sound system before purchase, to test it for defects (which are rare, in my experience) and to determine if he or she likes the music. Usually the sales clerk opens the cassette’s shrink-wrap with a small knife blade (if it hasn’t already been opened) and then uses a small motorized device to fast-forward the tape a little to get past the leader (the blank space at the start of a tape). In Indonesia, leaders are rather lengthy—up to twenty seconds or so—a result of the local method of cassette duplication.

¹⁴ Franco Moretti notes a class-related effect in the differences between movie genre choices in video stores in New York City, where less overall genre variety (and thus more limited choices) is apparent in the offerings of stores located in lower-income areas compared to those in upper-income neighborhoods. In contrast, *warung kaset* generally contain a larger selection of certain types of indigenous genres (regional music, *jaipongan*, and *dangdut*, in particular) than do the import-dominated music boutiques in malls and therefore cannot be said to offer a more limited overall range of choices. See Franco Moretti, “Markets of the Mind,” *New Left Review* 5 (2000): 111-15.



A cassette stall in Pasar Santa, Kebayoran Baru, South Jakarta. Photo by J. Wallach.

The clerk then places the cassette in the stall's tape deck and plays a segment of the first song at a volume sufficient to fill the entire space of the stall. The cassette continues to play until the customer asks to hear another song or tells the salesclerk he or she has heard enough. The salesclerk will then immediately play the same cassette that had been playing previously until another customer makes a request. In this way, the musical background of the stall is never silenced for long.

Jakarta *warung kaset* proprietors buy their cassettes in small amounts wholesale from distributors located mostly in the Glodok area of North Jakarta. They make choices regarding which cassettes to stock based upon previous sales, and in most cases do not buy more than one or two copies of a single title. As a result, customers wishing to purchase an especially popular cassette are often cheerfully told that it has sold out (*habis*). Stall proprietors will not stock titles they do not believe will sell to a broad public, thus cassettes of local traditional musics from islands other than Java and works by socially conscious, avant-garde recording artists such as Sawung Jabo, Djaduk Ferianto, and Sujiwo Tedjo are rarely found in *warung kaset*.

Mall Stores

Jakarta's gigantic air-conditioned malls offer a cosmopolitan alternative to shopping in *pasar tradisional* (traditional markets). They are a place for the fashionable to see and be seen, and to experience a taste of global consumer culture. Like malls in the US, no Indonesian mall is complete without at least one store selling recorded music.

Targeted at middle-class and elite consumers, music stores in upscale malls are typically decorated with an eclectic, bewildering assortment of images from Western culture. A store window display in Jakarta's Plaza Senayan mall featured a portrait of Beethoven, a blown-up photograph of Kurt Cobain (the late singer of the American band Nirvana), a depiction of the Mona Lisa smoking a large marijuana cigarette, a poster of a Norwegian black metal band, and a Bob Marley album cover. One mall store, Tower Music, located in the fashionable Menteng shopping district, had a display of small flags on one of the shelves. The countries represented were Indonesia, the United States, Ireland, Japan, Germany, and Britain. There was no flag for Malaysia, Singapore, or any other neighboring Southeast Asian country, suggestive of a cosmopolitan music-scape based more on cultural power than geographical proximity. Even the name of the store evoked Tower Records, a transnational music retailer that had yet to reach Jakarta.

While all record stores in Indonesia sell some Indonesian recordings, music boutiques in upscale malls tend to carry mostly Western music. Moreover, in my explorations of music stores located in Jakarta's most exclusive malls—Plaza Indonesia, Pondok Indah Mall, Taman Anggrek, and Plaza Senayan—I found that compact disks actually outnumbered cassettes. Unlike *warung kaset*, mall stores generally sorted recordings alphabetically in labeled shelf categories. Imported music was divided according to genre (jazz, R&B, country, etc.), while locally produced recordings were frequently relegated, irrespective of their particular genre, to shelves labeled "Indonesia" that took up as little as 10 percent of total shelf space. *Dangdut* albums, if present at all, accounted for less than 5 percent of shelf space; regional (*daerah*) genres were largely absent. While in upscale mall stores music always played in the background, there were no facilities for testing recordings one wished to buy. Clerks were not permitted to open the shrink-wrap of cassettes and compact disks for customers.

In short, mall music stores present themselves as portals to an imaginary realm of global consumer culture. Signs of local specificity that would place the store in an Indonesian context, including the Indonesian language, are minimized or eliminated in their decor. Indonesian music is marginalized as a marked category, while Western music and culture are represented in a spectacular fashion. Thus music boutiques in upscale malls are paragons of the same elite, xenocentric logic that is merely hinted at by the spatial arrangements in *warung kaset*.

Large Music Stores

A third music retail alternative to cassette stalls and mall boutiques is made up of (the relatively few) large music stores located in major cities. These establishments, which offer far larger musical selections than either *warung kaset* or mall boutiques, are located in department stores such as Sarinah or the Pasaraya at Blok M, or are housed in stand-alone structures like Aquarius, a record store chain owned by one of Indonesia's largest national record companies. This section will investigate in detail the ways in which the Aquarius store in Jakarta displays its wares, which run the full gamut from Western classical music to traditional regional genres. In fact, the interiors of Aquarius and stores like it can be viewed as three-dimensional spatial representations of the entire Indonesian popular music field, which of course is not limited solely to musics that come from Indonesia.

The Aquarius music store located in the trendy Bulungan area of Blok M in South Jakarta consisted of two main rooms. The larger room held both Indonesian and Western compact disks (mostly the latter), Indonesian children's pop, and a large selection of Western cassettes, while a smaller one contained Indonesian cassettes. Interestingly, in the center of the "Indonesian" room there was an arrangement of tape players with headphones, with which customers could test cassettes. No such array was provided in the large room.¹⁵ These tape machines resembled those found in *warung kaset*, though the experience of trying a cassette was rendered somewhat more private by the headphones. I say "somewhat" because I often observed two or more customers trying to listen to a song through the same pair of headphones at the same time. The presence of this listening equipment appeared to be a concession to shoppers accustomed to the cassette-stall buying experience.

The Western music available in cassette format at Aquarius was divided into several specific subcategories, not all of which completely corresponded with conventional Western classifications. The shelf categories as they appeared in early 2000 are listed below in Table 2. The number in the far right column indicates the number of shelf units dedicated to each named category. Each shelf unit held about fifty different cassettes, depending on how they were arranged.

Displayed on a long, low, child-accessible shelf, Indonesian children's pop was the only indigenous musical category present in the large room. I suspect that the storeowners were concerned that middle- and upper-class consumers preoccupied with social prestige (*gengsi*) would not even want to enter the Indonesian music room. Such consumers often buy children's pop cassettes for their offspring; this practice is not a threat to *gengsi* because small children are not expected to have developed

¹⁵ In mid-2000, another playback device was installed near the entrance to the smaller room. This was a listening booth that played a limited assortment of new releases on compact disk, both Indonesian and Western, through an accompanying set of headphones. The listener was able to operate the controls in order to hear particular albums and tracks stored in the machine. Similar digital listening booths have become popular fixtures in large Western record stores, thus rather than constituting an extension of the Indonesian practice of trying out cassettes before purchasing, the presence of this particular playback device in the Aquarius store is better viewed as an example of transnational influences in record store commerce.