PART FOUR

MUSICAL NATIONALISMS

CHAPTER NINE

NOTES ON DANGDUT MUSIC, POPULAR NATIONALISM, AND INDONESIAN ISLAM

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I'd like to begin with a short anecdote from 'the field'.¹ One afternoon in early 2000, I was being driven to a distant East Jakarta recording studio by the chauffeur of a wealthy Indonesian music producer. During our long ride through Jakarta's famously congested streets, a cassette containing a single *dangdut* song (*Apa adanya* [Whatever comes] by Ine Sinthya, from her forthcoming cassette) played continuously on the car stereo system. After a while, I finally asked the driver, whose name was Syaiful, if he was growing tired of hearing the same tune repeated over and over. He smiled and said no. A while later, searching for something to talk about, I asked him why he thought the lyrics of *dangdut* songs were often so sad. In reply, he explained:

Because *dangdut* songs represent the innermost feelings of us all. Pop singers just sing for themselves, but *dangdut* singers represent us all, like we were the ones singing...*Dangdut* is broader, closer to society.²

I realized immediately that Syaiful's response contained a succinct summation of a pervasive genre ideology concerning *dangdut* music and its place in contemporary Indonesian society. In the course of my research,

¹ I am deeply grateful to the many *dangdut* producers, artists, critics, and fans who shared their experiences and opinions with me on this subject, especially Edy Singh, Pak Paku, Pak Hasanudin, Opie Sendewi, Lilis Karlina, Titiek Nur, Guntoro Utamadi, and Syaiful. I would also like to extend a special thanks to Donny Suryady and the members of OMEGA Group. I am greatly indebted to all the participants at the 2003 KITLV international workshop for their invaluable comments, criticisms and suggestions for this project; I especially thank workshop organizers Kees van Dijk and Bart Barendregt. I owe special thanks to Jeroen de Kloet for the thoughtful and incisive comments he provided as respondent to the workshop paper on which this chapter is based. I am also indebted to David Harnish, David J. Jackson, Michael Mooradian Lupro, and Sharon Wallach for their feedback on earlier drafts of this essay. Special thanks also to Esther Clinton for invaluable input at the final editing stage.

² *Karena lagu dangdut mewakili perasaan nurani kita semua. Penyanyi pop menyanyi untuk diri-sendiri, tapi penyanyi dangdut mewakili kita semua seperti kita yang menyanyi... Dangdut lebih luas, lebih bermasyarakat.*

I had found that an enduring notion of collective ownership by the ordinary people of Indonesia accompanies the sounds of *dangdut* wherever and whenever they materialize, strongly influencing the music's performance, recording, reception, and interpretation. The particular significance of the preceding ethnographic vignette is that, as an employee of a record producer, Syaiful knew full well how *dangdut* cassettes like the one he was playing are actually produced—namely through a professionalized, high-tech, capital-intensive, and not-especially-populist process developed for the purpose of reaping maximum commercial profits. Nevertheless, even members of the Indonesian elite who decry it as low class, immoral, and culturally inauthentic generally concede that *dangdut* music has a powerful connection with its vast nationwide audience that is quite unlike that of any other music genre (cf. Frederick 1982:124; Siegel 1986:215–8; Browne 2000; Wallach 2008; Weintraub 2010). Furthermore, particularly since the 1998 fall of the Soeharto dictatorship, growing numbers of middle-class Indonesians who had formerly shunned *dangdut* music as low class and 'from the village' have embraced *dangdut's* musical national populism and its implicit critique of the pro-Western cultural elitism of the Soeharto years.

In the following essay, I discuss the lived experiences that lie beneath the multi-faceted and contentious cultural politics of *dangdut* music in Indonesia. My remarks are based on long-term ethnographic fieldwork conducted between 1997 and 2000 on the contemporary meanings and practices of *dangdut* music among urban Indonesians of different social classes. From this research I have concluded that *dangdut's* ideological positioning as a distinctively 'Indonesian' music 'close to the people' evokes an inclusive social vision that constitutes a populist alternative to *both* the Soeharto era's hegemonic ideology of 'development' and the exclusivist, moralistic rhetoric of Indonesian radical Islamists. My chief aim here is to examine the discourses of popular nationalism surrounding *dangdut* music in Indonesia, and discuss some of the limits to their ethos of inclusivity, particularly when the salience of gender differences in *dangdut's* performance and reception is taken into account.

Sound, Lyrics, and Audience

Dangdut's inclusive, integrative eclecticism is exemplified by the diversity of its musical influences and its dense, layered sonic textures. While the genre has roots in the older *orkes Melayu* style (see Kartomi 1998; Weintraub 2010), contemporary *dangdut* music is perhaps best described

as an amalgam of various internationally circulating popular music styles – in particular Indian film song, Middle Eastern pop, Western hard rock, disco, and reggae – with the occasional regional Indonesian musical idiom mixed in. In other words, the music and the ensemble that plays it incorporate elements from globally hegemonic Western popular music, transnational popular Asian and Islamic musics, and local/regional archipelagic traditions (primarily Sumatran, Javanese and Sundanese) to forge a distinctive *national* popular music style. A basic *dangdut* ensemble includes two electronic keyboards, two electric guitars, electric bass, Western trap drum kit, a set of diatonically tuned bamboo flutes (*suling*), a tambourine, and a set of tabla-like hand drums called *gendang* (not to be confused with the double-headed cylindrical or barrel-shaped drums of the same name found in gamelan and other traditional Indonesian ensembles). Additional instruments found in larger ensembles and on recordings include electrified mandolins, saxophones, trumpets, and sitars. These instruments played together create a dense, interlocking musical texture to accompany *dangdut's* sensual, plaintive vocals, which express emotions ranging from heartbroken despondence to sly flirtatiousness depending on the particular song (see David, this volume).

On recordings, *dangdut* music saturates the entire sonic frequency spectrum, from the trebly shimmers of the tambourine and sharp attacks of clean electric guitar strums to the thick, midrange-heavy instrumental timbres of synthesized strings to the powerful bass thumps of the low *gendang* drum, the *dhang-DHUT* from which the genre derives its onomatopoeic name. As such, *dangdut* incorporates both the high and low sonic extremes of hard rock music and the 'sweet' midrange sounds of pop into an integrative, all-encompassing whole that seems to straddle the ideological sonic divide between oppositional and mainstream popular musics (cf. Wallach 2003:47–8). For all its noisy eclecticism, however, the standard *dangdut* sound has remained fairly unchanged in the four decades following its emergence as an exciting new electrified entertainment music in the 1970s, even as the production of *dangdut* recordings has become significantly more high-tech (Wallach 2005:140–2).³

³ Since the mid 1980s, a number of dance floor-friendly offshoots of *dangdut* music have arisen that do modify the standard *dangdut* sound and instrumentation by adding drum machines, studio effects, digital samples, and electronic dance music rhythms and subtracting most of the acoustic instruments (Lysloff 1997:215; see also Wallach 2004, 2005). *Dangdut* fans and producers with whom I spoke kept these styles, collectively known as *dangdut trendy* in the music industry, discursively separate from the 'original' or

In recent years, various types of regional (*daerah*) *dangdut* styles such as *dangdut Bugis* and *dangdut Jawa* have become popular in particular ethnolinguistic niche markets in Indonesia, yet these variants are usually understood as local appropriations of a pre-existing, irreducibly national form. *Dangdut* music produced for a nationwide market is almost always sung in the national language, Indonesian. Song narratives tend to be simple and straightforward, and discourses of feeling are emphasized more than details of storytelling. Song lyrics, while not exactly mirroring colloquial Indonesian speech patterns, are written in concise, direct language that frequently incorporates well-known sayings, proverbs, and clichés to poignant or humorous effect, not unlike the lyrics of many American country and western songs.⁴

9.1. *Dangdut* performance in Jakarta nightclub Cipulir Sentrum, 2000 [photo by author].

'pure' *dangdut* style (*dangdut asli/murni*). Original *dangdut* appeared to enjoy a wider audience, and it accounted for the majority (about two thirds) of new *dangdut* releases during the period my fieldwork was conducted, even though it was far more expensive to record than the largely computer-generated *dangdut trendy*. Younger, more innovative *dangdut* artists like Lilis Karlina sometimes added a trendy-style track or two to collections of songs with more conventional arrangements to provide some musical variety on their albums.

⁴ Two notable examples of this are the hit song performed by Meggi Z, *Lebih baik sakit gigi* (Better a toothache...), which is based on the common humorous expression, 'better a

Dangdut's linguistic accessibility and predictable musical and lyrical formulae contribute to its mass appeal: it is by far the most popular genre of popular music in the world's fourth most populous country, with a domestic audience numbering in the tens of millions.⁵ Indonesia's large demographic majority of nonaffluent, non-fundamentalist Muslims from diverse ethnolinguistic backgrounds has embraced *dangdut* music. In addition, unlike the more youth-oriented and Western-sounding Indonesian pop music known as *pop Indonesia*, *dangdut's* appeal bridges generations, from the youngest child to the oldest grandparent. I have observed children as young as two and elderly women in their seventies singing along at neighbourhood *dangdut* performances in Jakarta. One of my main research associates, a Betawi man from Lebak Bulus, described to me how his elderly grandmother objected when his cousins' band used her front porch as a rehearsal space for performing loud rock music, but when the same group of musicians played *dangdut* songs at a similarly deafening volume, 'she would just *joget* [dance]!'

On the other hand, despite more than two decades of hyperbolic mass-media accounts of *dangdut's* growing 'acceptability' to the Indonesian middle class (cf. Perlman 1999:3), many middle class and elite Indonesians still openly despise the genre, which has not lost its associations with lewd, unruly behaviour and low-class tackiness. While one trendy young Jakartan resorted to using the English word 'disgusting' to describe her

toothache than a heartache' (*lebih baik sakit gigi daripada sakit hati*), and *Cinta bukan sayur asem* (Love is not sour vegetables), a song popularized by the *dangdut* 'girl group' Manis Manja. Written by the prolific *dangdut* songwriter Muchtar B, *Cinta bukan sayur asem* was inspired by a humorous saying that admonishes a potential lover not to treat the quest for true love as casually as he would the sampling of plates of *sayur asem*, a Betawi vegetable dish. Interestingly, phrases that originate in *dangdut* songs can also become common expressions in everyday spoken Indonesian. One *dangdut* producer proudly told me of the time he saw an anti-Soeharto protestor with a sign depicting the former ruler's smiling face over the caption, 'Your smile, our sorrow' (*Senyummu duka kami*) – an obvious reference, he asserted, to the hit *dangdut* song 'Your party, my sorrow' (*Pestamu dukaku*) written by Asmin Cayder and recorded by a number of female *dangdut* artists in the 1990s.

⁵ *Dangdut* also enjoys a sizable international audience, primarily in neighboring Malaysia, where both imported and domestically produced *dangdut* music have become musics of choice for a large segment of the ethnic Malay working class (which includes a large number of recent and not-so-recent immigrants from Indonesia). *Dangdut* music has also found an audience in Singapore, Brunei, and Thailand among Malay-speaking peoples. As an Indonesian import appealing to a specific segment of the national population, *dangdut* has not been, to my knowledge, appropriated for projects of national identity formation in these places. Outside of the Malay world, *dangdut* has achieved rather modest success as a 'world music' genre among middle-class listeners in Europe, Japan, and North America.

feelings to me about *dangdut* music, the most prevalent and injurious epithet used to derogate *dangdut* is *kampungan*, from the word *kampung* (village or poor urban neighbourhood; see also the contribution by Baulch). *Kampungan* is a culturally loaded term which can be loosely translated as 'vulgar, low-class, and repellently characteristic of backward village/slum life,' or, in James Siegel's words, 'hickish' (1986:215). *Dangdut's* middle class detractors claim that *dangdut* music and its performers are indeed disgusting and vulgar, and for them *dangdut* appears to be an abject form, neither 'traditional' (that is, associated with indigenous performance traditions such as *gamelan* or *tembang Sunda*) nor truly 'modern' (which in Indonesia invariably means originating from the West). But *dangdut's* lowbrow status in Indonesia's hierarchy of musical distinction does not necessarily mean that status-conscious Indonesians truly dislike it: if *dangdut* is an abjected Other to middle-class Indonesians, it is – consequently – also a site of repressed desire.

During an interview with Melly Goeslaw, one of the top-selling *pop Indonesia* artists of 2000, she surprised me by baldly stating that Indonesians who claimed that they disliked *dangdut* music only did so out of concern for *gengsi*, appearances and status, and that when they actually heard *dangdut* they '*pasti goyang*' – were sure to sway to the music.⁶ While I had not expected to hear such an assertion from one of Indonesia's hippest pop stars, Melly was certainly not alone in this sentiment, which I heard echoed and amplified in my conversations with numerous *dangdut* producers, performers and fans. I was told repeatedly that even though many middle-class people denied liking *dangdut* music, when *dangdut* was audibly present one could always observe *some* part of their body wiggling to the seductive beat of the music, even if it was just a single finger! Such statements imply a notion of a 'natural' susceptibility to the sensuous attractions of *dangdut* music among all Indonesians, regardless of their individual class positions or status preoccupations (see the contribution by David in this volume). Interestingly, foreigners were not expected to react to *dangdut* music in the same way.⁷

How can we account for these widespread claims regarding the power of *dangdut*? What purposes do they serve *vis à vis* the music and Indonesian

⁶ For a more detailed discussion of *gengsi* and its role in Indonesian musical taste hierarchies (which place Western popular music at the top and *dangdut* near the bottom), see Wallach 2002.

⁷ Both *dangdut* fans and detractors expressed surprise when I revealed that I, an American researcher, enjoyed listening to *dangdut* music. The former tended to be pleased, the latter appalled.

national consciousness? Anthropologist Greg Urban has emphasized the crucial role that *metaculture* (culture about culture) plays in the reception and circulation of cultural forms: 'The interpretation of culture that is intrinsic to metaculture, immaterial as it is, focuses attention on the cultural thing, helps to make it an object of interest, and, hence, facilitates its circulation' (Urban 2001:4). I would add that not only do the metacultural constructs associated with *dangdut* facilitate its circulation in Indonesia, but also that *dangdut's* sensory qualities conversely make those constructs attractive, thus contributing to *their* circulation. Among these constructs is a particular type of popular, everyday, grassroots nationalism, which exists apart from what Benedict Anderson (1991) famously termed 'official nationalism' – nationalisms constructed and sanctioned by hegemonic state institutions. *Dangdut's* popular nationalism resembles the 'banal nationalism' found in the popular cultures of other countries (Billig 1995), though I would argue that, beyond its sheer ubiquity, *dangdut's* popular nationalism offers a compelling moral vision to its audience, one with roots in the early Indonesian nationalist movement.

The People's Music

Many *dangdut* fans, including the chauffeur in the anecdote that began this essay, use the Indonesian verb *merakyat*, 'to be close to the people,' or *memasyarakat*, 'to be close to society', to characterize *dangdut* music and explain its extraordinary appeal to ordinary Indonesians. Statements such as these are metacultural claims that facilitate the constitution of the *dangdut* audience and the development of affective attachment to 'the people', which in the Indonesian political imaginary is synonymous with the masses of ordinary men and women called upon to work together toward building the great modern nation of Indonesia. *Rakyat* ('the people' or 'the folk') is thus a rather loaded term in Indonesian history. James Siegel (1998) has argued that the *rakyat* were the revolutionary force that animated the nation in the rhetoric of Indonesia's charismatic first president, Soekarno. However, during the repressive 32-year rule of Soekarno's successor, the decidedly uncharismatic President Soeharto, 'the people' was abandoned as the central rhetorical construct of Indonesian nationalism in favour of an authoritarian, paternalistic developmentalism. The Soeharto regime's commitment to 'progress' was fueled by foreign investment and the importation of consumerist desires for the benefit of an emerging middle class which sought to *differentiate itself* from the impoverished, 'backward'

masses. All the while, throughout the Soeharto era and the political upheavals which followed its abrupt demise in 1998, those 'impoverished masses' have held on to the dream of a self-sufficient, inclusive, egalitarian, and multiethnic Indonesia propagated by Soekarno and other nationalist leaders at the time of Indonesia's independence. These very same 'masses' were also quick to embrace *dangdut* as an 'authentically Indonesian music' (*musik asli Indonesia*) when it first emerged as a recognizable style in the early 1970s (Frederick 1982).

But how does a music genre become emblematic of a nation? Ethnomusicologist Thomas Turino's essay, 'Signs of imagination, identity, and experience: A Peircean semiotic theory for music' (1999), argues that 'national' popular musics are forged through a principle of double indexicality (1999:244–6). Drawing on conceptions of the sign formulated by American philosopher Charles S. Peirce, Turino argues that national musics are hybrid forms that combine 'local' musical elements, which index community and cultural uniqueness, with Western elements that index the modernity to which all nations aspire (1999:244–6). Not only does this strategic hybridization result in a national cultural form that mediates between the local and the global, but it also reconciles the dual yearnings of the citizenry for the cosmopolitan modern on the one hand and the preservation of cultural distinctiveness on the other. Put another way, national musics aspire to achieve a compelling synthesis of power and solidarity. I would argue, however, that such a formalistic definition is insufficient. Can we assume from the unquestionably hybrid nature of *dangdut* music that it necessarily serves nationalist agendas? As Webb Keane (2003:516) reminds us, when assessing national-culture-building projects in Indonesia and elsewhere, 'we should be wary of taking the attempt for the result.' Therefore, it is necessary to investigate critically the specific metacultural mechanisms by which, I contend, *dangdut* music has become a vehicle for popular nationalism in Indonesia, and how these interact with various constructions of intranational difference, including gender, religion, and most of all, class.

The prevailing metacultural discourse on *dangdut* music in Indonesia tends to emphasize both its irresistible, euphoria-inducing sensual pleasures and its powerful social leveling effects. Listeners within earshot of *dangdut* music, especially live *dangdut* concerts, are thought to experience the temporary dissipation of social distance and feel a sense of solidarity with other audience members – a state that brings to mind Benedict Anderson's characterization of nationalist sentiment as 'a deep, horizontal comradeship' (1991:7). According to many of its fans, *dangdut* music's

presence diminishes social differences: generational, ethnic, even occupational. When I asked a companion why most of the patrons at one particular *dangdut* bar were older or middle-aged, he smiled broadly and said, 'Young, old, it's just the same!' (*Muda tua sama saja*). A particularly striking example of the reported tendency of *dangdut* music to erase social boundaries can be found in a 2001 online news article about a *dangdut* concert held in a courtyard at Salemba Prison in Jakarta in an attempt entertain the prison's inmates on a national holiday. The article describes the audience as follows:

The heat of the sun's rays went unheeded by them. The spectators seemed to enjoy themselves very much[...] One thing was interesting: this entertainment did not just draw in the attention of the jail's inmates, but also the staff members of the prison.

It looked as though there was no distance between the staff and the prison inmates. They all were carried away in a spirit of togetherness (*Ratusan napi Salemba joget dangdut 2001*).⁸

The image of prison guards and inmates dancing together, temporarily oblivious to the divisions between them, brings to mind much anthropological writing, from Durkheim onwards, on the social effects of communal ritual. The state of consciousness described in the article and in numerous similar accounts I encountered during my fieldwork resembles anthropologist Victor Turner's classic formulation of *communitas* produced by ritual participation, which he defines as the experience of 'global community transcending all internal divisions' (1969:84). Indeed, the observer is struck by the ebullient, euphoric atmosphere among male dancers at outdoor neighbourhood *dangdut* concerts and in indoor night-clubs in Jakarta as they blissfully dance in pairs to the beat of the *gendang* drum, seemingly unconcerned with differences in age, social status, or ethnicity that exist between them.

A somewhat less successful instance of *dangdut* music bridging the gap between social groups occurred in October 2001 at a demonstration by students from Sunan Kalijaga State Institute of Islamic Studies (IAIN), a prestigious Islamic university, at the Yogyakarta Regional Military headquarters. According to *The Jakarta Post*,

⁸ The original reads: 'Panasnya sinar matahari tak mereka hiraukan. Para penonton nampak sangat menikmati... Satu hal yang menarik, hiburan ini pun tak cuma menyedot perhatian para penghuni penjara, tapi juga para petugas Rutan. Tak terlihat adanya jarak antara petugas dan penghuni penjara. Mereka hanyut dalam kebersamaan.'

The story began when the students, who were demanding the abolition of the military role in politics, found the main gate of the headquarters locked. They started making their speeches in very vigorous style, with their shouts getting louder and louder. Suddenly, the sound of *dangdut* music was heard, and started getting louder and louder also. Seconds later scores of soldiers started to dance in front of the students. The show lasted only about fifteen minutes until the protesters left. 'This is harassment of students and democracy!' one of the protesters, Zainu Rosyid, said. 'This also shows how arrogant they (the soldiers) are' (Hasani 2001).

According to the article, the soldiers declined to explain to reporters why they deployed *dangdut* music in this manner, but whatever their initial rationale, they did succeed in quickly dispersing the crowd of protesters without incident. One is left asking the question: how could *dangdut* music and dancing constitute 'harassment', and why would their use be considered a demonstration of 'arrogance'?

While the information provided in the article is limited, there are a number of possible interpretations of this incident. The students may have become angered and dispersed simply because the sheer volume of the music drowned out their rally. This seems somewhat unlikely, and does not explain why the demonstrators chose to disband peacefully (Why, for example, did they not target the dancing soldiers in front of them?). I suspect that the students were unable to continue their rally because, whether they liked *dangdut* music or not (and many, being middle-class, observant Muslim students, probably did not), when faced with the sight and sounds of men dancing to *dangdut* music, the culturally appropriate response would be to join them, just as the prisoners in Salemba prison danced with their captors. The soldiers presumably knew this, and arrogantly (but correctly) assumed that their performance would sow confusion and temporarily nullify the undoubtedly legitimate grievances of the demonstrators. I conclude from this incident that even when *dangdut* music does not succeed in uniting the audience in *communitas*, its pull toward unity and the obfuscation of social distinctions (at least among *men*) can be difficult to ignore.

Gendering the Nation

The community of *dangdut* enthusiasts supposedly transcends divisions between men based on class, ethnicity, age, and region. But does this imagined collective include women? This is difficult to answer. *Dangdut* performances are linked to a long history of Indonesian female singer-dancer

traditions, such as the Javanese *tayuban*, the Balinese *joged*, and the Sundanese *kliningan*, in which a woman performer interacts flirtatiously with members of an enthralled all-male audience (see Spiller 2010). Performances of this sort, which tend to be accompanied by the drinking of alcoholic beverages and other transgressive behaviours, have historically acted as instruments of carnivalesque male bonding across divisions of rank and status in many Indonesian groups. *Dangdut* performances have similarly been analyzed as events that both exploit female sexuality and celebrate women's performative power (e.g., Browne 2000; Pioquinto 1995). The question I want to pose is, what ramifications does this gendered division in performance and reception have for *dangdut* as a 'national' music?

Suad Joseph and Susan Slyomovics, drawing on the writings of feminist author Carol Pateman, argue that the Western nation-state, which became, in their words, the 'compulsory political form for the rest of the world' (2001:8), is predicated on a model of male fraternity, an association of unfettered, sovereign individuals who can form voluntary contracts with one another. They add that in much of the Muslim world this conceptualization tends to exclude women, whose contact with the nation-state is mediated by community and kin-based social structures – therefore they generally do not confront the national apparatus *as* individuals (2001:9–14). This certainly seems to be the case for Indonesian women, particularly members of the country's nonaffluent majority. In a sense, then, *dangdut's* incomplete, gendered *communitas* effectively reinforces the nationalist overtones of *dangdut* fandom, since, according to the globally accepted model, the nation resembles the *dangdut* audience in that both are idealized fraternities of males who enjoy social equality as either fans or citizens.

Dangdut performances in the public sphere do appear to exclude women on several levels. For example, while large outdoor *dangdut* concerts often attract sizable crowds of mostly middle-aged women, they usually stand in a semicircle behind the crowd of all-male dancers who congregate directly in front of the stage. Similarly, the widespread informal streetside performances of *dangdut* music found all over Indonesia are mostly by and for men (cf. Wallach 2008:161). On the other hand, it is crucial to recall that *dangdut* is *not* just a performed music, but also exists on recordings that can be used in private listening encounters. In my research I found that ordinary Indonesian women frequently listened to *dangdut* albums, and, in fact, probably make up a majority of the consumers who purchase such recordings, and many identified strongly with *dangdut* singers and song texts. Indeed, the most popular *dangdut* songs

typically portrays of the specific agonies and heartbreaks of working-class Indonesian women: husbands remarrying, husbands' infidelity, and abandonment by deceitful lovers (see David, this volume). Given the gendered limitations of the dominant discourses of nationalism, it is still an open question whether the private enjoyment of *dangdut* recordings by Indonesian women constitutes an example of inculcating national consciousness. More likely is the possibility that the gendered division between private enjoyment and public dancing found in *dangdut* music culture reinscribes the patriarchal public/private split in modern nationalist thought.

Dangdut and Indonesian Islam(s)

With its nasal, melismatic vocal style and propulsive hand drum rhythms, *dangdut* is in many ways a music of the Islamic world, although this does not mean it is generally considered a form of Islamic music. While pioneering *dangdut* star Rhoma Irama became famous for spreading a populist form of Muslim piety through his music (Frederick 1982), his performance persona remains the exception rather than the rule. Most *dangdut* songs deal with non-religious, sentimental themes, and the genre is frequently denounced as sinful and morally corrupting by strict Muslims in Indonesia.

Compared to Islam in many Middle Eastern countries, Indonesian Islam is far less opposed to music *per se* (Rasmussen 2001:36; Harnish and Rasmussen 2011). But *dangdut*, with its associations of sexual licentiousness and alcohol consumption, is a frequent target of moral crusades. A serious form of violence at outdoor *dangdut* concert events became increasingly common in Jakarta during the Wahid administration (1999–2001). Long before they made international headlines by threatening foreigners residing in Indonesia (not to mention American pop star Lady Gaga), members of Muslim extremist groups like the now-disbanded *Laskar Jihad* (Troops of the Holy War) and *Front Pembela Islam* (Islamic Defenders Front) clad in white prayer robes began to attack participants at *dangdut* concerts, assaulting audience members, musicians, even the bride and groom at wedding celebrations.

I heard several eyewitness accounts of such incidents. One *dangdut* singer reported that she tried to reason with her would-be assailants, reminding them that *dangdut* artists like Rhoma Irama and Elvy Sukaesih had completed the *hajj* to Mecca and were pious Muslims, but to no avail. Emboldened by the general breakdown of law and order in post-Soeharto

Indonesia and by a Muslim scholar president (though Wahid would certainly not have endorsed their violent actions), Muslim fundamentalists became determined to wipe out sinful behaviour in the *umat*, the community of the faithful.

The modernist religious extremist ideologies that motivate groups like the *Laskar Jihad* were imported fairly recently from outside Indonesia. I would suggest that regardless of their popularity for a minority of Indonesian Muslims, the doctrines of fundamentalist Islam contradict a central feature of *dangdut* and cultural life in general in Indonesia—the tolerance of difference and the drive for inclusivity and incorporation. *Dangdut* performance expresses the will to create a noisy, heterogeneous, all-encompassing social body, a ‘primordial oneness’. Such a desire threatens the fundamentalist preoccupation with purifying and homogenizing the behaviour of the *umat* as well as maintaining an impermeable boundary between Islam and its non-believing Others.

Nonetheless, the popularity of violent fundamentalist Islam also illustrates another characteristic of contemporary Indonesia, the enthusiasm with which some foreign ideologies are adopted. This is evident not only in the sphere of Indonesian Islam; evangelical Christianity, Western technocratic developmentalism, and even punk rock all have their devotees. These ideologies attempt to draw sharp lines between self and other and eliminate ambiguity and hybridity, yet ironically the very fact of their ongoing coexistence in the Indonesian national context is *constitutive* of the polyvalency and diversity of contemporary Indonesian society.

In the contemporary world geopolitical climate, the success of a secular, inclusive, multiethnic Indonesian nationalism has taken on a new urgency. If *dangdut* music helped keep grassroots, Soekarnoist nationalism alive in Indonesia during the Soeharto dictatorship, perhaps it may yet play a role in the defence of an inclusive, nationalist ethos against the transnational forms of religious extremism that have taken hold in Indonesia and other parts of the world. Such movements seek to eradicate heterogeneity, and to replace the perhaps implicitly patriarchal values of inclusive nationalist discourse with a religious ideology of overt male dominance and social control.

Dangdut and the Inul Daratista Phenomenon

In 2002, a single *dangdut* singer arose in Indonesia to challenge the exclusivist, patriarchal orthodoxy of fundamentalist Islam. Inul Daratista, a humble East Javanese village girl turned superstar, has arguably become

the most internationally recognized Indonesian recording artist since the late 1980s when stories about rock legend Iwan Fals periodically surfaced in the global mass media. The story of Inul's rise from utter obscurity to national notoriety has appeared in a variety of international publications, and within Indonesia itself she became one of the country's hugest celebrities.

Numerous journalists and social scientists, both Indonesian and foreign, have related the Inul controversy to ongoing debates in Indonesia over freedom of expression and separation of mosque and state, as well as to current geopolitical realities in Indonesia and the world, especially the global political fallout from the terrorist bombings by Muslim extremists in Kuta Beach, Bali (2002) and Central Jakarta (2004), which have caused many Indonesian Muslims to question the extremist ideology of global jihadism.⁹ While Indonesian politicians have for the most part been hesitant to confront Islamic fundamentalists directly, Inul Daratista has become an unlikely spokesperson of both democracy and moderate Islam in contemporary Indonesia. One example of Inul's outspokenness should suffice here. According to a 2003 article in *Time Asia*, when asked by a reporter about her much-publicized censure by the Indonesian Ulema Council (MUI), a conservative Muslim organization, Inul replied, 'Write this down...The MUI should realize that Indonesia is not a Muslim country, it's a democratic country.' The article continues:

Inul, who says she prays daily, insists that her art doesn't clash with her Islamic beliefs and suspects the religious hierarchy castigates her because the real threats to Indonesia's fragile morality, particularly corrupt officials, are too dangerous to attack. 'Why should they care about me when there are pornographic VCDs and prostitutes in the street? They choose me because I am an easy target' (quoted in Walsh 2003).

How could this situation have come about, in which a popular entertainer in a majority-Muslim nation is unafraid to question the authority of religious officials?

While Inul's fame derived initially from her unique and highly sexualized dance moves, her subsequent career as an entertainment superstar suggests that she has since transcended the role of sexual object. Such

⁹ See Faruk and Aprinus Salam (2003); Gunawan (2003); and Mulligan (2005). For articles about Inul Daratista in the Western media see, among many others, BBC News (2003); Lipscombe (2003); Mapes (2003); and Wilde (2003). The Inul Daratista Fans Club (IDFC) maintained an extensive Indonesian-language webpage devoted to the singer; a multilingual Google search of her name conducted on 5 February 2013 resulted in 1,120,000 hits.

power, I would argue, stems from the intimate link between *dangdut* music and Indonesian national identity that I have attempted to outline in this essay, and from the customary role of the female singer-dancer to envoice this link before an audience, thereby generating a sense of communal belonging for all those within earshot. I bring Inul up here to emphasize the extent to which she owes her celebrity status to the central role *dangdut* music historically has played in Indonesian national consciousness. In the words of 'Eri from Surabaya' (n.d.) the author of an essay in English praising Inul (which contains language from Walsh 2003) on a website called MyHero.com:

As many people know, Inul is recognized as a great Indonesian artist, who some say reminds them of American rap artist, Eminem. Why? Because she has made many differences in Indonesian music by adding some sexuality and sizzle into '*dangdut*'...Indonesian people really like *dangdut* music. In fact, they consider it their national anthem.

It is further possible that Inul's unique fame (which has surpassed that of more established and [many would say] far more talented *dangdut* performers such as Iis Dahlia, Ikke Nurjanah, and Evie Tamala) may stem from the forthright challenge her performances mount against the patriarchal leanings of both *dangdut* music and Indonesian nationalism. During one segment of her July 2003 comeback variety TV special *Rindu Inul*, Inul returned to her rock roots with a performance of Iwan Fals's classic anti-New Order protest song *Bento* – an anthem of popular nationalist sentiment (cf. Lockard 1998:110–11). As the camera panned across the faces of the batik-clad VIP audience members in the front rows singing along with Inul's spirited rendition of the tune, it was clear that the powerful links between popular music, social protest, Indonesian nationalism, and masculinity forged by Fals's music (see the contribution by Gjelstad, this volume) had been decisively denaturalized, perhaps irrevocably.

Conclusion

The phenomenon known as *dangdut* music in Indonesia is a product of the complex interrelations between constructs of gender, class, religion, nation, and modernity. These constructs intersect in *dangdut*'s genre ideology, a crucial metacultural facilitator of its circulation. Perhaps the ideal outcome of this association between '*dangdut*' and 'Indonesia' is a *grand tautology* of music and nation, in which the music becomes an object of a metacultural ideology of belonging, while the idea of the nation acquires

an emotionally salient sensible, material form that allows (male) citizens the ability to feel that they are part of a larger whole experienced as 'national'.¹⁰

Dangdut music, as manifested in the practices of album producers, the multigenerational collective effervescence of concerts, and informal roadside performances, erases social boundaries and creates an inclusive—if often ephemeral—community in which identity is reduced to the inclusive ideological category of 'Indonesian-ness', with gender as the sole remaining divide. Just as Soekarno tried to encompass the contradictory streams of communism, nationalism, and political Islamism into a larger, integrated whole, *dangdut* music attempts to encompass the entire gamut of popular sounds: the polished production techniques and sweet timbres of pop; the expressive, ornamented singing of the Islamic world; the tantalizing folk-derived dance rhythms of Indian film music; the energy and power of Western hard rock; and the ethnic nuances of Indonesia's regional musical traditions. Indeed, there is very little in the contemporary Indonesian popular music scene that has *not* been introduced and incorporated into the *dangdut* sound. Even hip hop and electronic dance music have found their way into a subgenre dubbed *dangdut trendy*, as has an unprecedented array of traditional 'ethnic' instruments and sonic textures recreated through digital samples (cf. Lysloff 1997:215; Wallach 2004, 2005).

Like Soekarnoism, however, *dangdut* fails in its totalizing mission, unable to fully engulf the individualistic, xenocentric orientation and cosmopolitan longings of the elite and middle classes within its stylistic boundaries (see Wallach 2002). The developmentalist ideologies internalized by members of the Indonesian middle class justify the persistence of the social gap as a function of the perceived cultural backwardness of the

¹⁰ I have been accused of exaggerating *dangdut*'s contemporary significance as a quintessentially Indonesian music. Brent Luvaas (2009:177) writes, 'In fact, Wallach displays throughout [his 2008] book a clear preference for *dangdut*, as if it were uniquely equipped to the task of reconciling Indonesia's discursive struggles.' On the other hand, there is the runaway hit song by Indonesia's Pop Project released in 2003, *Dangdut is the music of my country* (English in the original), that proclaims, 'Ada orang Batak, ada orang Jawa, ada orang Ambon, ada juga orang Padang... Apakah yang dapat menyatukan kita? Salah satunya dengan musik! [There are Bataks, there are Javanese, there are Ambonese, also people from Padang...What can unite us all? Only music!]' *Dangdut is the music of my country!*' The song is essentially the genre ideology of *dangdut* outlined herein expressed in musical form. For a detailed English-language examination of *Dangdut is the music...* and its accompanying video clip by an astute Malaysian blogger, see Mahdzan (2003).

poor. This mentality ensures that *dangdut* music, a cultural form that exemplifies this backwardness, will never lose its associations with the 'village', that imagined site of ignorance, stasis, and resistance to national modernity. The fact that even the urban poor are considered 'villagers' (*orang kampung*) reinforces the stereotype and conflates the traditional/modern dichotomy of modernization theory with the persistent economic inequalities produced by uneven and corrupted patterns of national development. *Dangdut's* obvious deviations from the sound and style of global pop music genres make it an abject form, neither traditional nor modern, that to its critics expresses nothing more than the nonaffluent majority's cultural inauthenticity and lack of cultivation. As an achieved rather than inherent state, the modern must be defined by what it is not – this holds as true for followers of modernist Islam as for developmentalist technocrats – but *dangdut* music does not exclude any possibilities. Instead, it incorporates them all into an unruly and impure hybrid formation that elicits disgust and disavowal from modernists and moralists, but whose democratic, participatory potential is embraced by its primary audience.

In 2001, to commemorate the centennial of President Soekarno's birth, Benedict Anderson composed an essay in Indonesian that was published in pamphlet form and distributed widely throughout the country. In its conclusion, he writes:

The 'Indonesian' imagined by [Soekarno's] National Movement was a human being who stood up straight, didn't grovel to, and didn't trample on, anyone, and was open-minded, dynamic, inclusive, steadfast in adversity, and with sympathy for all mankind. A human being of this kind is not a creature who appears in the world 'naturally,' but needs to be trained, day in and day out, both by him- or herself, and by his or her fellow human beings. This, I think, is the most important of those 'lessons' from Bung Karno that are still fresh and relevant for his countrymen (English translation from Anderson 2002:19).

I want to conclude by suggesting that this ethical being into which, according to Anderson, Soekarno sought to fashion his countrymen could not be 'trained' through words alone, but through embodied practices and affectively powerful experiences as well. Despite its tawdry commercialism and questionable gender politics—or perhaps even because of them—few cultural forms have matched *dangdut* music's role in shaping an Indonesian national consciousness among the humblest citizens of the nation, training them to be 'Indonesians.' Ultimately, the sensual grooves of *dangdut* music, like those of all great popular musics, seep

through the ideological and social boundaries that seek to contain them. Inul Daratista thus not only symbolizes resistance against the hypocritical prudishness of conservative Muslim clerics; she also provides a point of contact between elites and non-elites, who, carried away by the irresistible sensual pull of her music, can at last relate to one another as fellow countrymen.

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