

Modern Noise, Fluid Genres: Popular Music in Indonesia, 1997–2001

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Jeremy Wallach's *Modern Noise, Fluid Genres* investigates how Indonesian popular music (in particular, three broadly construed genres: *dangdut*, Westernized *pop Indonesia*, and underground rock) contributes to ongoing dialogues of conflicting modernities in Indonesia. This well-conceived book is unusual among popular-music studies in its resolutely ethnographic approach. Taking issue with the conventional scholarly tendency to analyze popular music solely as a mediated commodity, Wallach explores "the cultural spaces, the social relationships, and the shared experiences of participants" to reveal "how musical objects and performances acquire particular meanings through specific activities and interactions, from shopping in a record store to hanging out with friends to performing onstage" (p. 251). The richness of the ethnographic detail is one of this book's many compelling features.

Wallach develops a nuanced taxonomy of Indonesian popular music genres not by describing them in isolation but, rather, through an exploration of spaces wherein people engage in music-related activities. Sites include cassette retail outlets, recording studios, on-location video shoots, and places where people "hang out" as well as what Wallach describes as "formal" contexts (in the sense that there is a demarcation between audience and performers), including *acara* (large-scale events organized by ad hoc committees) and performances by *pengamen* (street musicians).

For the most part, Wallach's field sites are located in and around Indonesia's eminently diverse capital, Jakarta. He characterizes Jakarta as "two cities"—one focused on reciprocal economy, the other on high-technology consumerism—that epitomize competing Indonesian approaches to modernity. Wallach sets up these two approaches as a binary that his ethnographic subjects negotiate daily, exemplified as shopping malls versus traditional markets, restaurants versus food stalls, Indonesian versus local languages, English versus Indonesian, and nostalgia for the Sukarno era versus a preference for Soeharto's New Order policies. Through their choices, Wallach argues, individuals situate themselves within complex discourses of local, regional, national, and global identities.

Such stark binaries rarely survive scrutiny, of course, and Wallach uses them only as a springboard for investigating the subtle distinctions among the varieties of music that confront Indonesians. He uses four principal theoretical approaches to make sense of the proliferation of genres and subgenres of Indonesian popular music at the turn of the 21st century.

The first probes the articulation between local, national, and cosmopolitan identities. Popular music, Wallach asserts, helps in "negotiating between local, global, and national appeals to affective allegiance in the lives of Indonesian" and establishing each imagined community's "phenomenological realness" (p. 250).

His second approach pays homage to a long anthropological tradition of investigating the heightened "sociality" of Indonesian cultures. Wallach makes a case that sociality inflects all popular-music activities in uniquely Indonesian ways. He argues that imported practices such as moshing, stage diving, and violence in videos reinforce Indonesian values of collectivity. "Dance moves thought to signify violent individualism and alienation in the West are communalized in the Indonesian context and appear to index intense collective sentiment more than individual angst" (p. 236), he writes.

Wallach's third approach looks at the construction and maintenance of class divisions and engagement with ideologies of Indonesian nationhood through the symbolic manipulation of popular music genres (in particular *dangdut*, underground, *pop Indonesia*, and various subgenres). He marshals his data to create a nuanced analysis of this process, the gist (if not the subtlety) of which he encapsulates as "the inclusive Sukarnoist collectivism of *dangdut*, the oppositional consciousness of underground music, and the cosmopolitanism of Indonesian pop" (p. 264).

Finally, Wallach examines the hybridity of Indonesian popular musics. The complexity of modern Indonesian identities clearly mirrors the complexity of the Indonesian popular music scene, shoring up his argument that Indonesians cannily create popular music hybrids by strategically juxtaposing disparate musical elements to comment on larger social issues and effect "alternative ways to be global cosmopolitan subjects" (p. 258).

Wallach's *Modern Noise, Fluid Genres* is a welcome addition to the sparse literature on Indonesian popular music. Through perceptive ethnographic description and astute theoretical analysis, the book ably demonstrates both that an ethnographic approach can enrich the study of popular music and that the social interactions around popular music are a fertile site for anthropological studies of modernity. Wallach substantiates his conclusion that popular music, in Indonesia at least, represents a quest for "a truly modern, culturally authentic community—national or otherwise—that grants recognition to all its members" (p. 257). Along the way, he treats readers to a compassionate, sympathetic, and, at times, very entertaining glimpse into the lives of ordinary modern Indonesians.