

interested in the social fabric of contemporary South Africa, for anyone committed to gender justice around AIDS.'

Merrill Singer

Department of Anthropology,
University of Connecticut

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

J. Wallach.

Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 2008. xvi + 264 pp., tables, illustr., appendices, glossary, bibliog., index, CD with notes. ISBN 978-0299229009. USD \$50.00 (Hc.); ISBN 978-0299229047. USD \$24.95 (Pb.)

Prior to the publication of *Modern Noise*, most texts concerning Indonesian popular music stuck to an explanation of the standard genres known outside of Indonesia. Among these genres are the ubiquitous Hindi film-inflected *dangdut*, the weepy colonial-era *keroncong*, regional music used to accompany dance, such as Sundanese *jaipongan*, and *pop Indonesia* that might sound generic but is nonetheless fairly localised in its sound. Each of these genres is characterised by its adherence to a particular set of mediated rules and major players, among them both the musicians and the producers. In contrast, *Modern Noise* encompasses several genres to make larger points, rather than focusing narrowly on one esoteric genre. It is explicitly contemporary and it is primarily about the 'scene' rather than about the music itself. For these reasons, it is a compelling read and a particularly useful document of a troubling time in Indonesia's—especially Jakarta's—history.

In the introduction, Wallach outlines his plan to engage in what he refers to as a 'street-level' ethnography, adopting a micro (rather than a macro, globalised) approach to illuminate the relationships between performers, producers, audience members and identity. He seeks to 'reinsert human agency into our understandings of processes of cultural production and reception' (p. 5). In realising this goal, his work is quite credible. Wallach has a lively, informative

writing style; his descriptions are vivid and accurate. The overall tone of the book brings the reader directly into the recording studio, onto the streets of Jakarta, and well into the intimate conversations that he records. The photographs offer solid evidence of what Wallach discusses and allow the readers a closer look at the individuals and contexts of performance.

It is important that Wallach is explicit about the period in which he conducted research; instead of offering vague generalisations about 'Indonesian popular music,' he focuses his attention on a time of upheaval and adjustment to a new social reality in both popular music and national consciousness. In addition, his work on gender issues in the context of performance and economic difficulties during an economic crisis highlights the ways in which somewhat more traditional attitudes toward men and women are adapted for a contemporary context. His discussion of class issues is also quite good in that he avoids a simplistic view; any attempts to understand class in Jakarta are going to be at least as complicated and diverse as its citizens.

Wallach goes further than most ethnomusicologists in exploring the issue of the media. His chapters on the cassette industry, the recording studio and the shoots for music videos are a particular strength of this book, and are not duplicated elsewhere. In addition, Wallach's notes are so good and such an important addition to the text that it is regrettable that they appear at the end of the book. These additions and asides and clarifications are written in 'normal' language—rather than obscure academese—and add so much to the book's overall quality that perhaps they should have been included in the central text. Readers are urged not to miss them.

The CD that accompanies the book is of high quality and makes an excellent case for the vitality of the popular music scene. It also makes available a half dozen music tracks that are not readily available otherwise. It is unfortunate that the number of tracks wasn't doubled in number and that Wallach doesn't

include some of the street music that blends so seamlessly with the other sounds one hears when walking through the districts he frequented in Jakarta and elsewhere. It would have supported his discussion of live music in chapter 7, 'Onstage,' for example. However, including Balinese gamelan-influenced death metal in a CD of this type does nothing less than insist upon its being taken seriously along with the other, better-established genres such as *dangdut*.

The Indonesian proverb *tak ada gading yang tak retak* ('there is no ivory without a crack') applies here. Wallach's title (*Modern Noise, Fluid Genres*) conveys no information at all to a potential reader, and the subtitle (*Popular Music in Indonesia, 1997–2001*) does not indicate that the essential focus of the text is Jakarta. 'Popular' does not necessarily equal 'urban,' and to present it as such does a

disservice to the presentation and attitudes of non-urbanites in Indonesia. In addition, there appears to be an expectation that the readers will know all the different subgenres of popular music (death metal, thrash, ska, hardcore, house, and so on); fortunately, these are easily discovered outside the book.

Modern Noise, Fluid Genres is highly recommended to scholars of popular music and culture, Southeast Asianists who will find much to think about in terms of urban studies, and Indonesianists in general. Between the coverage of gender and class, the accompanying CD, and the writer's strong skills in conveying complicated information well, the book is a useful addition to the growing body of work on Indonesian music.

Sean Williams
Department of Expressive Arts,
Evergreen State College

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