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## **The recording industry and 'regional' culture in Indonesia : the case of Minangkabau**

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## POST-DISC ERA AND THE EMERGENCE OF THE WEST SUMATRAN RECORDING INDUSTRY

Compared with other electronic media, innovations in recording technology occurred rapidly. In just one century, many innovations were designed, with inventions originating in Asian as well as Western countries. After surviving for about 70 years, by the late 1960s gramophone disc technology was largely obsolete and had been replaced by cassette technology, which triumphed for some two decades. Although old gramophone discs remained in use by certain people and to a limited extent by radio stations until the mid-1970s, new gramophone discs were rarely produced anymore, while most American and European companies that produced gramophone players and discs were in their twilight years. In the early 1980s the compact disc (CD) was invented. Soon after that, less than one decade later, new sophisticated inventions came into view: the video compact disc (VCD) and the digital versatile disc (DVD). Today these two latest inventions are widely used by the music industry worldwide.

Such rapid innovation has had significant cultural implications for local societies. Gramophone disc technology spanned seven decades (1880s–1960s) influencing world culture, but its successors have been around just four decades (1970s–2000s), and have had far-reaching socio-cultural implications. Along with the vast dissemination of cassette technology, followed by other more sophisticated recording technologies, there has been immense mediation of local culture worldwide. In Indonesia, the post-gramophone era saw the rapid and extensive mediation of a variety of genres of local culture of ethnic groups. The extensive use of new recording technology in the last twenty years, especially cassette and VCD, has even altered the features of local genres. Garrett Kam (1987) and Andrew Noah Weintraub (2004), for example, have shown that the mediation of Javanese traditional dance and Sundanese *wayang* in commercial recordings has caused a significant adjustment of their present repertoires. New generations of performers of these genres have also used commercial recordings for learning, partly replacing conventional teachers. With the rise of the new media, star performers have emerged that have become very popular and therefore marginalize and cause jealousy in other performers. This has also happened in Minangkabau cultural genres (see e.g. Phillips 1991). The profound penetration of new recording technology into Indonesia's ethnic cultures has also engendered new cultural genres. As mediation essentially stands for representation, we may assume that the extensive recording of local culture has consequently changed every ethnic community's image of their own culture as well as changed other ethnic communities' images of them.

In this chapter I discuss how post-gramophone-disc recording technology was introduced to Indonesian society, increasingly accelerating the mediation of Indonesian local cultures,

and engendering Indonesian regional recording industries, including in West Sumatra. So, in this chapter, I will look at Indonesians' experience with post-gramophone technologies since the early 1970s. My focus will be on cassette and VCD because those technologies are particularly popular in Indonesia. This chapter, thus, sketches the development of recording technology in Indonesia, helping to comprehend the distinctions between the gramophone era and the more recent era dominated by cassette and VCD.

Unlike in colonial times, the penetration of foreign technologies in Indonesia after it gained independence and became a sovereign nation-state has been strongly affected by state policies. As a consequence, the national and local socio-political ambiance might have influenced the dissemination and public acceptance of the products of Indonesian recording industries, national as well as regional, that use various forms of recording technology. I look at the national and regional socio-political factors that allowed extensive dissemination of cassette and VCD technology in Indonesia and the factors that influenced the formation of the West Sumatra regional recording industry in the early 1970s. I argue that the cassette, because of its larger capacity for storing data (compared to the gramophone), stimulated the mediating of a wider range of local genres and generated new genres that were dependent on such this medium. I want to look at this phenomenon in the context of cassette and VCD consumption in West Sumatra. Though cassette and VCD culture in Indonesia exhibits many affinities with its counterparts elsewhere in Asia, Indonesian people's response to these technologies shows particular patterns due to the domestication of media technology that was influenced by the socio-political and religious environment and other unique cultural characteristics.

#### ARRIVAL OF THE CASSETTE IN INDONESIA

Like the phonograph (see Chapter 1), cassette technology arrived in Indonesia not so long after it was invented in Europe and the United States. In 1962 the Philips Company of the Netherlands invented the first compact audio cassette that soon reached Indonesia. This continued the tradition of Indonesian adoption of the Netherlands' technological inventions. Since colonial times, the general public in the Dutch East Indies were familiar with electronic products of the Netherlands' well-known Philips Company, like *radio Philips* and *lampu Philips*, which brought a wave of modernity to the colony (see Maier 1997).<sup>200</sup> The first compact audio cassette manufactured by Philips used high-quality polyester 1/8-inch tape produced by BASF.<sup>201</sup> Recording and playback was at a speed of 1 7/8 inch per second. The next year (1963) sales began in the United States of the Norelco Carry-Corder dictation machine that used the new cassette tape. The ensuing high consumer demand for blank tape used for personal music recording had not been not anticipated by Philips.<sup>202</sup>

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200 On the influence of other European modern technologies in the Netherlands East Indies in colonial times, see Mrázek 2002.

201 Headquartered in Ludwigshafen am Rhein, BASF (the acronym stands for Badische Anilin- & Soda-Fabrik) is one of the largest multinational chemical companies, founded in 1865 by Friedrich Engelhorn. For the history of BASF, see Schlenk 1965.

202 See <http://inventors.about.com/library/inventors/blsoundrecording.htm> (accessed 26-11-2004).

In the early 1970s radio-cassette tape and cassette technology reached Indonesia, and soon had dramatic effects on national and regional pop music. Indonesia, the most populous country in Southeast Asia, was certainly a large potential market for this and other products of recording technology. Unlike gramophone discs, which were only accessible to the upper class, cassettes reached the lower classes widely. Cassette technology facilitated the spread of recorded 'sonic modernities' – to borrow the title of Bart Barendregt's new edited volume (2013) – among the common people, even in Indonesia's rural areas. Peter Manuel (1993:xiv) remarks that 'the lower costs of [cassette] production enabled small-scale producers to emerge around the world, recording and marketing music aimed at specialized, local, grassroots audiences rather than at a homogeneous mass market.'

According to Yampolsky (1987:2), the cassette entered Indonesia in the late 1960s, soon followed by the emergence of amateur private recording companies that produced recordings on cassette for commercial purposes. Almost all of them were pirate companies, meaning that they copied and reissued recordings which existed previously on gramophone discs without acknowledging the copyright. This was the time when pirated recordings first appeared in Indonesia, which suggests that the 'pirate culture' has a long history in the Indonesian recording industry. The pirates illegally reproduced discs in cassette format and the price of such pirated cassettes was far cheaper than the price of gramophone records. It would seem that it was cassette technology that generated the pirate culture in Indonesia. Pirating had not been known in the gramophone disc era. Low price was an important factor in Indonesians' enthusiasm for the cassette: the majority of people were very weak economically, and the cassette was a medium that was financially accessible at the grassroots level.

As had been the case with the introduction of the gramophone (Chapter 1), Java was the first Indonesian island to encounter cassette technology before it spread to other islands. The following paragraphs discuss Indonesian recording companies that pioneered the use of the cassette in Java. I confine myself to those that contributed to promoting Minangkabau music and the role played by Minangkabau migrants in this cultural episode.

The use of cassettes in the Indonesian recording industry was pioneered by two early recording companies in Java: the state-owned Lokananta and the privately owned Irama Record. Both companies were set up in the late 1950s, when gramophone and disc technologies were at their peak before becoming defunct a decade later due to the introduction of the cassette. Java's two pioneer recording companies produced music recordings in Indonesian as well as local languages. One of the regional languages was Minangkabau.

Lokananta was established in 1956,<sup>203</sup> located in Surakarta, Central Java. In the early stages, it functioned as a recording stockpile for Indonesian National Broadcasting, Radio Republik Indonesia (RRI, 'Radio of the Republic of Indonesia'). Master recordings were

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203 Lokananta means 'gamelan of heaven (*kayangan*) producing sound without drummers' (Theodore KS 2013:28). Darmanto 2009 mentions that Lokananta was initially tried out in 1950, led by the head of RRI Surakarta branch station, R. Oetoyo Soemowidjojo, assisted by technical head R. Ngabehi Soegoto Soerjodipoero. The company was officially announced by the Minister of Information R. Soedibjo on 29 October 1956.

produced by RRI stations all over the country, and then sent to Lokananta's studios in Surakarta to be made into gramophone discs. Next the recordings were sent back to RRI stations throughout Indonesia to be used in their broadcasting programs. The early Lokananta recordings used discs with the label Indravox; these were not available for purchase by the general public. Discs with a different label, Lokananta, started appearing in 1958 or 1959. Discs with this new label were offered for sale through radio stations (Yampolsky 1987:2). Lokananta manufactured discs until 1973.

In 1961 Lokananta was detached from RRI and became a state company (*perusahaan negara*), subordinate to the General Directorate of Radio, Television and Film (Direktorat Jenderal Radio-Televisi-Film) under the Department of Information (Departemen Penerangan). Lokananta bore three responsibilities: 'to encourage, establish, and disseminate national arts that are considered to belong to the nation of Indonesia, although they contain elements of the culture of particular ethnic groups; to produce income for the state; to cooperate with other government agencies in programs involving sound recording' (Yampolsky 1987:2). In the late 1960s, with the prestige of the phonograph waning, Lokananta began to produce recordings in cassette format.

Irama Record, established in 1954, was a private recording company with a commercial orientation since its inception. It was Indonesia's first independent record label. Founded by Budi Chen, Nick Mamahit (the pioneer of Indonesian jazz), and an air force commander named Suyoso Karsono (well known as Mas Yos), Irama was originally just a small two-track recording studio in the garage of a house in Menteng, Central Jakarta, before a permanent studio was built in the Cikini district of Jakarta (Munir 1998; Leo 2000). In the late 1950s and the 1960s, Irama released many albums on vinyl, before it switched to cassette. Irama was noted as the first Indonesian private recording company to produce long-playing (12-inch) discs. Its first recording on this type of disc was instrumental music played by Nick Mamahit, which was released in 1957. During that decade pop music began to rise in Indonesia: pop songs occupied the front line alongside other genres like *keroncong*, *seriosa*, *gambus*, and *Hawaiian*<sup>204</sup> that had been popular for many decades. The *Hawaiian* genre was also called *Irama Lautan Teduh* ('Pacific Ocean Rhythm') in a music program broadcast by RRI in the 1950s. Irama can also be credited with contributing strongly to the popularizing of an earlier generation of Indonesian national artists in the 1960s, like Bing Slamet, Lilis Suryani, and Titiek Puspa. As in the disc era, Irama's commercial cassettes included songs in the Indonesian national language as well as in regional languages, including Minangkabau.

In 1956 Lokananta for its own purposes recorded songs by Gumarang, a Minangkabau orchestra based in Jakarta. Since coming under Alidir's leadership in 1954, Gumarang frequently appeared on RRI's 'Panggung Gembira' music program and soon successfully captured listeners' attention. This caused Gumarang to become very popular in Indonesia. In this popularity of the Gumarang music group, Irama Record saw a business opportunity.

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204 *Hawaiian* first became popular in Indonesia in the 1930s, thanks to Tjoh Shinsu and Emil Shinsu, who founded the first *Hawaiian* music group in Batavia (present-day Jakarta) named *Synkopators* (Pasaribu 1986:72).

Mas Yos, the founder of the company, became interested in recording Gumarang's songs (Theodore KS 2013:41). In 1964 Gumarang's first commercial disc was released by Irama, called *Ayam den Lapeh* ('My hen has run away'). The disc became a hit, which was a significant factor bringing about Gumarang's popularity in all of Indonesia and neighbouring countries. The success of Gumarang's first disc prompted Irama to release several more Gumarang albums.

The spread of the cassette encouraged the emergence of other private recording companies. By the early 1970s another recording company named Dinita Record was established in Jakarta. Headed by Dick Tamimi, it was located in Bandengan Selatan, Central Jakarta. Like Irama, Dinita contributed significantly to developing the Indonesian pop-song genre. Dinita also produced several albums by Minangkabau pop singers. This suggests that Minangkabau music, thanks to Gumarang, was one of the regional musics most popular nationally in the 1950s. Using simple recording equipment, Dinita remained active until 1975.

There were two other private companies in Jakarta in Indonesia's early cassette period that produced Minangkabau albums: Metropolitan Record and Remaco Record. Like Dinita Record, they produced recordings by Minangkabau singers like Ernie Djohan, Elly Kasim, and Oslan Husein. Remaco promoted music groups like Bimbo, D'Lloyds and The Mercy so that they became well-known nationally (Leo 2000). Remaco Record was noted as the largest private recording company in the early cassette period, but it collapsed in the 1980s. Metropolitan Record changed its name to Musica Studio, and under this new name, along with other companies like Perindu Record and Suryaman Musica, it continued to produce Minangkabau albums. Metropolitan Record (Musica Studio) thus came to dominate Indonesia's commercial recording market.

The late 1970s and the first half of the 1980s were the peak of success for the commercial cassette in Indonesia. This means that in one single decade Indonesia adopted a 'cassette culture', and this widely influenced the country's musical life. As in India (see Manuel 1993:xiv), the low cost of cassettes rendered the medium accessible to rural and lower-income groups in Indonesia. Therefore, recording companies, many of them with only a small capital,<sup>205</sup> flourished significantly, and used mainly the cassette medium to produce commercial recordings. Even international recording companies like Sony Music, EMI and Warner Music entered Indonesia, competing to make money in Indonesia's music industry. Initially, they were required to affiliate with local counterparts. EMI, for example, had Aquarius Record as its local counterpart in Indonesia starting in the early 1980s, while Warner Music had entered Indonesia earlier – in the 1970s – through its affiliated firm Atlantic Record, which invited some local recording companies to join them, among them Log Zhelebour. The reason Warner Music used this arrangement was because at that time Indonesian regulations did not allow foreign companies to invest directly in Indonesia. They were required to affiliate with local companies. But in 1996 the Indonesian government issued new regulations, which

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205 See Chapter 5 for further description of the status of regional recording companies in terms of capital.



enabled foreign recording companies to freely set up business in Indonesia (Sopiann 2002). As a consequence, competition in the market of recording industry products in Indonesia was increasingly cut-throat, which led to the creation of more diversified market segments of domestic commercial recordings, nationally and regionally.

#### EMERGENCE OF THE WEST SUMATRAN RECORDING INDUSTRY

Though the pioneer recording companies such as Lokananta, Irama, and Dimita that were located in Java did produce some Minangkabau albums, it cannot be said that the West Sumatran recording industry started at that time. That is because these Java-based companies did not focus exclusively on producing recordings of Minangkabau repertoires. The historical course of Indonesia's regional recording companies shows that they developed in the provinces, not in the Indonesian capital of Jakarta. Unlike Indonesia's national recording industry, whose beginnings were in the late years of the gramophone era in the 1950s (as pioneered for example by Lokananta, Irama Record and Dimita Record), its regional counterparts, including the West Sumatran recording industry, only emerged following the arrival of the cassette in the early 1970s.

Initially developed in Java and Bali (see Toth 1980; Sutton 1985; Williams 1989/1990; Putra 2005), regional recording industries then spread to other ethnic groups in the outer islands. Java and Bali were exceptionally lucky because the towns of Jakarta and Denpasar were the two main gates for foreign technology entering Indonesia. One reason for this was the popularity of these cities among foreigners. Hence, recording technology like the cassette was introduced there earlier than in other parts of Indonesia.

In other parts of Indonesia, outside Java and Bali, regional recording industries emerged among certain ethnic groups before the 1980s.<sup>206</sup> In the western part of Indonesia, the Minangkabau in West Sumatra was the first, followed by the Batak of North Sumatra, making Padang (capital of West Sumatra) and Medan (capital of North Sumatra) the leading Sumatran cities in the development of regional recording companies. In other provinces, such as Aceh, Riau, Kepulauan Riau, Jambi, South Sumatra, Bengkulu, and Lampung, we find far fewer regional recording companies. I conjecture that the Minangkabau took advantage of the mediation of their music earlier than other ethnic groups thanks to the musical activities of Minangkabau migrants in *rantau*, triggering the establishment of the West Sumatran recording industry soon after the introduction of the cassette in Indonesia. Considering the cumulative effects of recorded sound, I conjecture that the earlier recording technology reached an ethnic group, the more extensively it influenced local culture.

The year 1971 can be seen as the beginning of the West Sumatran recording industry. In that year an amateur company of unknown name released a recording of 'Kaba Hasan Surabaya' ('The story of Hasan of Surabaya') (5 cassettes) from the Minangkabau oral literature genre of *rabab Pesisir Selatan* with the singer Syamsuddin (see Chapter 6) (Junus

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206 See, for example, Sutton 2002, describing the history of the regional recording industry in South Sulawesi.



1994a:109; 1994b:410). This was an innovation, because previous commercial recordings of Minangkabau songs, especially during the gramophone disc era, had mostly been made in Jakarta by non-Minangkabau recording entrepreneurs who also produced recordings of other ethnic musics or of songs sung in the Indonesian language. This 1971 recording in West Sumatra was followed by the release of other recordings of Minangkabau repertoires. The PT. Semen Padang music group Lime Stone appeared on commercial cassettes presenting the Minangkabau music genre of *gamad* (see Chapter 5 on this genre) with the legendary singer Yan Juneid. These cassettes were produced by Tanama Record, which had established its headquarters in Padang in 1975. Initially Tanama was a small company established by Alimar Ahmad's family in Jakarta. Later, other recording companies were established in West Sumatra that competed with Tanama Record, including Sinar Padang Record, Edo Record, and Ganto Minang Record.<sup>207</sup>

The emergence of the West Sumatran recording industry in the early 1970s seems to have been conditioned by the improved political atmosphere in the region at the time the cassette was first introduced in Indonesia. At that time, Central Sumatra, the homeland of the Minangkabau people, was no longer suffering from the political turmoil of the PRRI (Pemerintahan Revolusioner Republik Indonesia) civil war (1958–1961). Under the leadership of Governor Harun Zain, who replaced Kaharoeddin Dt. Rangkayo Basa (Chaniago and Jasmi 1998), Minangkabau society which had been tragically torn by the civil war began the process of rebuilding. Many Minangkabau of the old generation remember Harun Zain, who reigned for eleven years (1966–1977), as a charismatic leader. He successfully restored Minangkabau people's self-confidence, which had declined drastically after they were defeated in the PRRI revolt. Harun Zain called on the many Minangkabau intellectuals who had fled to Java and other places during the PRRI uprising to come back home and help rebuild West Sumatra from the ruins of war (Yusra 1997). Harun Zain's administration improved West Sumatra's economy and social order, and successfully attracted many Minangkabau migrants to return home.

Compared with other Asian countries, the cassette entered Indonesia far earlier. Peter Manuel (2012:224) says: 'The cassette revolution had commenced in the 1970s in [...] Indonesia, but had been delayed in India due to restrictive import regulations.' The rapid Indonesian acceptance of the cassette was certainly influenced by the contemporary Indonesian political atmosphere. This was in the early years of the New Order, when the Soeharto administration was in the process of consolidating political power. Unlike the preceding Old Order, during which Soekarno's government aligned itself with world communist powers led by Peking and Moscow and was strongly anti-Western, the New Order under Soeharto was strongly pro-Western, and ended its relations with communist countries. The New Order was supported by the West, and Indonesia was opened to Western technological and cultural products. As a result, there were no obstacles to the import of cassette technology to Indonesia, and other Western cultural products like Hollywood film and pop music

207 <http://www.padangkini.com/index.php?mod=mozaik&id=6810> (accessed 12-10-2011). Among those recording companies that commenced in the 1970s, Tanama Record and Sinar Padang Record still survive today. Minangkabau cassette producers are discussed further in Chapter 4.

genres. The New Order regime opened Indonesia to Western culture in order to reduce the influence of the communist ideology of the Eastern/Soviet Bloc. The cultural activists who were affiliated with Manikebu (Manifes Kebudayaan, 'Cultural Manifesto') under New Order patronage successfully destroyed their chief socialist-oriented rivals who were affiliated with Lekra (Lembaga Kebudayaan Rakyat, 'Institute of People's Culture'), which had supported former president Soekarno.<sup>208</sup> So, the emergence of the West Sumatran recording industry was concomitantly driven by the spread of cassette technology worldwide and by national and regional political factors in Indonesia early in the rule of the New Order.

By the 1980s West Sumatra had become the main hub of the recording industry in western Indonesia, and it promoted the life of regional culture, music in particular, in surrounding areas. More and more local artists from neighbouring provinces, such as Riau, Jambi, and South Sumatra, produced their own albums by using rented studio facilities in West Sumatra. In cassette shops and sidewalk cassette stalls of neighbouring provincial and regency towns like Pekanbaru, Bangkinang, Palembang, Muara Enim, Jambi, and Lubuk Linggau one can easily find local pop cassettes with the labels of West Sumatran recording company names on their covers. By holding this central position, the West Sumatran regional recording industry influences regional cultural dynamics, especially in music. For example, Malay sub-communities, such as Kampar and Melayu Deli, have been stimulated to produce their own cultural expressions, music in particular, on commercial recordings. Using the West Sumatran studio facilities located in Padang and Bukittinggi, they have each produced their own local pop albums for commercial purposes. These albums have been distributed in their own communities and have become new icons of cultural prestige and cultural distinction. Besides that, the West Sumatran recording industry also attracted non-Minangkabau pop singers to join in producing Minangkabau pop song albums (see Chapter 4). In local daily newspapers published in West Sumatra like *Singgalang*, *Haluan*, and *Padang Ekspres* we often find advertisements of new Minangkabau commercial recordings, suggesting that the West Sumatran recording industry continues to evolve, stimulated by political decentralization in Indonesia's cultural policies as a consequence of the political reform (Reformasi) following the fall of Soeharto's authoritarian New Order regime in 1998.

## CD AND VCD

In 1979 the prototype of compact disc (CD) technology was demonstrated in Japan. Sony and Philips moved quickly to develop this technology, releasing it in 1980.<sup>209</sup> The technology was introduced into the United States in 1983,<sup>210</sup> but it was adopted rather late by the Indonesian recording industry: in the late 1980s. This new invention soon competed internationally with the cassette. But the CD itself very soon had to compete with the even newer inventions of video

208 For more on cultural life in Indonesia during the later period of Soekarno's Old Order (1950s and 1960s) see Lindsay and Liem 2012.

209 See <http://pages.emerson.edu/courses/faloo/in115a/DC.site/Digital%20Culture%20Fileshistory.htm>; accessed 6-1-2005).

210 In this year, it is reported that some 30,000 CD players and 800,000 CDs were sold in the USA (see <http://pages.emerson.edu/courses/faloo/in115a/DC.site/Digital%20Culture%20Fileshistory.htm> ; accessed 6-1-2005).

compact disc (VCD) and digital versatile disc (DVD). The VCD format, which accommodates moving pictures and sound, was created in 1987 and introduced onto the market in 1993 by JVC, Philips, and Matsushita, whereas the DVD format was released in 1997 and quickly hit the consumer market (Pohlmann 1992). These two recording technologies rapidly changed the face of electronic entertainment.

But the world's acceptance of these new inventions is not everywhere the same. In Indonesia the CD never became popular and never successfully replaced the cassette. Producers in the national and regional recording industries preferred to make commercial recordings using cassette rather than CD because the production cost for making recordings on cassette is cheaper than on CD. Cassette-tape players also have a lower price than CD players. This is the reason why CDs are not so popular in Indonesia, a country where most of the population have limited financial resources. The European product of DVD is also not so popular in Indonesia, as its price is quite expensive for most Indonesian people. Conversely, the VCD is very well liked, both nationally and regionally. The key to the VCD's phenomenal growth is the low cost of VCDs and the VCD player. This is certainly appropriate for a developing country like Indonesia: many people with low incomes can afford to buy VCDs. In his article on the VCD market in Asia, Darrel William Davis (2003:170) mentions that 'the "cheapness" of VCD – easy to produce, to reproduce, to consume, to swap, to keep or to throw away – make it a favourite format in Asia, the Subcontinent and Latin America.'<sup>211</sup> In Indonesia, the majority of VCDs and VCD players used are imported from Japan, China and Taiwan, and they are sold at lower prices than DVD players made in Europe or the United States. This seems to be the main reason why the DVD has not become so popular in Indonesia or in developing countries in general.

Since the early 2000s the VCD has significantly influenced the development of Indonesian national and regional musics. Its popularity now surpasses that of all other recording technologies. According to Chandra Ghazali, chief editor of *Audio Video* magazine, the VCD is preferred by middle- and lower-class families, while the upper classes seldom use it. The upper classes prefer to use a 'CD Compo' that is equipped with both VCD and DVD players (*Kompas*, 9-8-1999). These days the VCD is an entertainment device commonly found in Indonesian rural as well as urban areas. VCD technology has enabled the Indonesian lower classes to enjoy various kinds of pop music. Pirated recordings in VCD format, sold by sidewalk cassette vendors in many Indonesian towns at low prices, can be obtained easily. Jeremy Wallach (2008:88) notes that not all Indonesian musicians he interviewed were opposed to piracy. If one's work was pirated, it was a sign that one's music had achieved a measure of mass acceptance. So, some artists are actually proud if their songs have been frequently pirated. VCD rental shops (*tempat penyewaan VCD*) have spread to towns and smaller settlements all over Indonesia. Offering a variety of genres, from imported to domestic films, from porn to religious films, VCD rental shops can even be found in the small weekly sub-district markets far from provincial towns.

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211 On the VCD in Latin America, see Stobart 2010.

Because of having both audio and visual facilities, VCD technology has changed the nature and the image of regional music. The 'war of images' in local culture borne by modern media such as VCDs certainly gives rise to questions about identity. Regional VCD clips and covers are a means through which aspects of global culture are transmitted to audiences in Indonesia's regions. As Yampolsky (2003) has noted, clips of Indonesian regional VCDs represent a wide variety of scenes and backgrounds, ranging from local to overseas. The singers wear traditional dress as well as sexy clothes that give a seductive effect, which gives rise to fierce debate in local society (see Naafs 2010). The visual elements used on regional VCDs form a medium through which common people all over Indonesia receive impressions of foreign peoples and foreign cultures. In contrast, the audio track is mostly local regional sound. This has an impact on people's thinking about their identity, as reflected in public discourse about the pros and cons of being exposed to foreign influences. Some groups regard regional VCDs as a useful way of increasing their awareness of their traditional culture and perpetuating local identity, while other groups believe such VCDs are a threat to local values.

When I travelled to several cities in Indonesia, as far as Bau-Bau in Southeast Sulawesi and Bima in West Nusa Tenggara, I got the impression that almost every ethnic group now has its own local pop music, which is produced by local recording companies in VCD format. It also seems there are more and more verbal arts genres and traditional performers appearing on regional VCDs (see Chapter 6). In the province of Southeast Sulawesi, for example, one can find pop Buton VCDs, pop Muna VCDs, and pop Tolaki VCDs, representing the three largest ethnic groups that inhabit the province. Likewise, in South Sulawesi province, one can find pop Toraja VCDs, pop Makassar VCDs, pop Mandar VCDs, and pop Bugis VCDs, representing that province's main ethnic groups. This example can be extended to all parts of Indonesia, such as pop Sasak VCDs, pop Manado VCDs, pop Bali VCDs (see Putra 2004), and pop Sunda VCDs. Undoubtedly, the VCD culture has changed the contours of Indonesia's regional music landscapes.

#### THE WEST SUMATRAN RECORDING INDUSTRY ENTERS THE 'VCD CULTURE'

By the time VCD technology was introduced to the Indonesian people in the early 2000s, this 'developing' country had advanced. The New Order legacy left a relatively good infrastructure in most of Indonesia's major regions. As a result, the spread of VCD technology to provincial towns, including West Sumatra's capital of Padang, did not take long once it had reached the major cities of Java. The VCD spread enormously and much faster than the cassette had done. Not long after it was introduced in Indonesia in the early 2000s, the country, like other Asian countries, had entered the 'VCD culture' – to borrow Peter Manuel's phrase (2012:226-7) – which, much more so than the 'cassette culture', has 'its own characteristic genres, content conventions, distribution locales, and consumption practices.' VCD technology, which is commonly associated with Asia (Kelly 2005), has radically transformed the features and social aspects of Indonesia's national and regional musics.

As in India, the introduction of VCD technology in Indonesia soon affected both national and regional recording industries. Though since the 1990s Indonesia's regional

recording industries had shown significant growth (Bangun *et al.* 1999; Bangun 2001), their development accelerated following the extensive use of VCDs in the early 2000s (Barendregt and Van Zanten 2002). Since then, commercial VCDs released by various regional recording companies containing local repertoires from different ethnic groups can be found in many provincial towns, from the westernmost Indonesian town of Banda Aceh to the town of Jayapura in Papua (Yampolsky 2003). Today most Indonesian ethnic groups have their own commercial pop music produced in VCD format. Even relatively small ethnic groups like the Toraja in Central Sulawesi and the Nagi in Flores have pop music albums recorded on both cassette and VCD (Hicken 2009; Bos 2005:152-55).

The West Sumatran recording industry soon adopted the VCD and it rapidly replaced the cassette. In contrast, the CD was never used widely in the West Sumatran recording industry. The first Minangkabau commercial VCDs appeared in 2001, produced by Tanama Record. In subsequent years many other companies switched to VCDs. VCD technology, which contains audio and visual elements, provides a greater opportunity for regional performers to carry out experiments with local music genres. After the introduction of the VCD, recording companies produced recordings in both VCD and cassette formats. But more than cassette, VCD has stimulated new forms of local pop song genres and has introduced modern elements in traditional verbal arts, as can be seen in the clips of commercial VCDs of Minangkabau oral literature (see Chapter 6). Likewise, newly created Minangkabau pop music on VCD has emerged that emphasizes humour and joking in hilarious lyrics as well as comical video clips which, of course, are impossible to present on cassette. So, VCD technology has generated a diversification of regional musical styles. As elsewhere, most recent commercial recordings from Minangkabau have produced VCDs in karaoke format. This enables consumers to orally mimic the songs while they play them. This means that innovations in regional music, resulting from the widespread use of VCD technology, have also changed the ways in which consumers appreciate the recent products of regional recording companies.

#### PROLIFERATING MEDIATION OF LOCAL GENRES

Cassette technology, which is far more versatile than the gramophone disc, allowed people to record a variety of genres other than music. Similarly, VCD technology has served to stimulate saleable production of various local genres that were never previously marketed in such fashion. These technologies have been used to record a variety of cultural and religious repertoires, in national as well as regional contexts, such as poetry accompanied by music (*musikalisasi puisi*), traditional literature of particular ethnic cultures, and religious sermons which now appear in regional as well as national languages.<sup>212</sup> It is possibly unique to Indonesia that cassettes are also used in the cultivation of swallow's nests, which are sold commercially to China and elsewhere. People even invest money to construct buildings (sometimes old buildings are

212 For more about the use of cassettes in religious sermons and Quranic recitations in a national context see Gade 2004 and Rasmussen 2010, and Watson 2005 on the *ulema* Abdullah Gymnastiar and his religious sermons. For more on such phenomena dealing with religious genres and other genres in an Indonesian regional context, see Bowen 1993:284, 289 on the context of Islamic rituals in Aceh and Arps 1994 on Javanese literature on audio cassette.

used) to cultivate swallow's nests (*merumahkan walet*). The buildings are provided with only small holes in their walls to allow entry only to birds. A recording of swallow sounds, which can be bought at bird markets, is played inside the building to encourage wild swallows to make a nest inside the building. In European countries recordings of bird songs are used for psychological therapy, while in Indonesia people use them to cultivate swallow's nests. These are just a few examples of using cassettes and VCDs beyond the field of music.

It is interesting to look at such phenomena in the context of the West Sumatran recording industry. These days, Minangkabau genres other than Minangkabau pop music, the main product of the West Sumatran recording industry, have been appearing on commercial cassettes and VCDs, such as various kinds of Minangkabau traditional theatre and verbal arts. Many producers offer their recordings in both cassette and VCD formats (see Chapter 6). Another genre is religious sermons using the Minangkabau language. Although in the gramophone era Islamic Quranic recitations (in Arabic) and religious sermons (in the Malay language) had been recorded on gramophone discs, there were no such recordings using the Minangkabau language.

Cassettes and VCDs have extended the mediation and representation of Minangkabau repertoires. As a consequence, the (re)production of Minangkabau pop music has proliferated. Recording companies compete to release albums that offer something distinctive, if not to say new, in terms of music and lyrics, in order to capture consumers' attention. In this way, cassette and VCD technology have stimulated innovation and experimentation in regional pop music. As has occurred in other ethnic cultures, the introduction of cassette and VCD technologies has transformed the reception of many genres in the Minangkabau cultural repertoire: mediated forms of many Minangkabau genres are now widely available.

Cassettes and VCDs have also generated 'media-bound' genres, genres that are closely linked with the media on which they are recorded, and whose existence depends on those media. One example is *drama Minang moderen* ('modern Minangkabau drama'). This genre was created as a result of the Minangkabau encounter with cassette technology. It did not exist previously in Minangkabau culture before the cassette era. The word 'modern' in the title indicates that it is considered a new genre. These modern Minangkabau dramas reflect socio-cultural problems in contemporary Minangkabau society. They were very popular in the 1980s, especially among Minangkabau living outside their homeland. Another new Minangkabau media-bound genre is Minangkabau children's pop music. Unlike modern Minangkabau drama, which was produced in cassette format only, Minangkabau children's pop music is produced in both cassette and VCD formats. It started appearing in the early 2000s. This media-bound genre is discussed further in Chapter 7.

## CONCLUSION

In the late 1960s, the audio cassette started to replace the gramophone record, which was first exhibited in Java around 1882. After being introduced in the late 1960s, cassette technology was soon consumed throughout Indonesia. Its early arrival and vast distribution in



the country was facilitated by the contemporary political atmosphere, as Soeharto's Western-oriented New Order took over Indonesian politics, terminating Soekarno's Old Order regime that had a political policy of anti-capitalism. Thanks to cassette technology, Indonesia's modern national and regional recording industries developed, and, after the technology had spread throughout Indonesia, the number of national as well as regional recording companies increased significantly. The use of the audio cassette by national recording companies in Jakarta was soon followed by their regional counterparts in the outer islands, including the island of Sumatra.

In West Sumatra, it was in the early 1970s that the audio cassette was first used to record Minangkabau repertoires. This can be considered the birth of the West Sumatran recording industry, followed by the establishment of other recording companies in Padang. This occurred after West Sumatra had recovered socio-politically and economically from the bloody PRRI civil war (1958–1961). It is true that prior to that, during the last decade of the gramophone disc era, some recording companies situated in Jakarta had produced commercial albums of innovative Minangkabau music. But this cannot be considered as part of the West Sumatran recording industry because those Jakarta-based recording companies also produced recordings of national pop and songs of some other ethnic groups. So their market segment was far larger than one particular ethnicity.

For some three decades cassette technology dominated Indonesia's recording industry, until it was superseded in the 1990s by the newer and more sophisticated recording technologies of CD, VCD, and DVD. In Indonesia, cassettes and VCDs have been used more than just for the music business. Cassettes and VCDs are also used for matters dealing with politics, religion, and other aspects of Indonesian society. Indonesia's national and regional recording industries have burgeoned following the spread throughout the country of these recording technologies. The VCD has been accepted widely in Indonesia and has surpassed the cassette in popularity. VCDs are accessible to the majority of the public in Indonesia, from urban to rural areas. However, unlike the gramophone record, which was totally replaced by the audio cassette, CD and VCD, although widely consumed starting in the 1980s, did not completely wipe out cassette technology. The cassette is still used in Indonesia today, alongside the CD and the VCD, although the numbers are declining. The VCD is becoming more and more popular and seems to be gradually replacing the consumption and use of the cassette.

In the cassette and VCD era, Indonesia's regional cultures have undergone vast mediation and representation. Cassette and VCD technologies have facilitated the production of recordings of a variety of local genres other than music. They have also driven musical innovation and aesthetic experiments in regional pop music, and encouraged the creation of new genres that are closely tied to these technologies. This also happened in Minangkabau culture, where the West Sumatran recording industry used both technologies to produce commercial recordings of Minangkabau repertoires.



Since its emergence in the early 1970s, the West Sumatran recording industry is continuing to survive. Like other businesses, it is driven by a particular system that involves a number of elements linked with each other. The following chapter explores the organization of the West Sumatran recording industry, so that we can comprehend the configuration and internal workings of this regional media business.