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

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ACTORS AND VENTURES IN THE WEST SUMATRAN RECORDING INDUSTRY

The features of the West Sumatran recording industry, and Indonesia's regional recording industries more generally, are distinctive but under-studied. Barendregt (2002) has investigated some aspects of Minangkabau pop songs, the main product of the West Sumatran recording industry, but does not pay much attention to its other products, such as recordings of Minangkabau oral literature and the cassettes and VCDs of Minangkabau children's pop music (see Chapters 6 and 7) and who and what is involved in their production and circulation.

Diana Crane (1992:4) notes that it is impossible to understand the nature and role of recorded culture in contemporary society without examining the characteristics and conditions in which it is produced and disseminated. Put another way, cultural products, including musical recordings, take the shapes they do in part because of the nature of the system that produces them (Peterson 1976:10). In this chapter I look at what local socio-cultural and political circumstances have influenced the West Sumatran recording industry. I will focus primarily on the elements involved in the production end of this business and not its consumption and consumers. In Indonesia the production of recorded media is part of a system involving many parties and individuals that are connected with each other in an intricate relationship that is influenced by local conditions. I explore this complex process in the context of the Indonesian regional recording industry. My conclusion is that the West Sumatran recording industry is rather different from other Indonesian regional recording industries, and that Indonesia's regional recording industries are very different from their national counterpart, in terms of features and business patterns.

To provide evidence for these assertions, this chapter delves into the West Sumatran recording industry. It aims to describe the structure and socio-cultural landscape of the industry. I seek to demonstrate how this business has successfully generated and converted the cultural and social capital of Minangkabau ethnicity. I want to know what type of business a regional recording company is, and where it can be situated in the media business in Indonesia. To do this, I describe the parties, government as well as private, and individuals involved in the West Sumatran recording industry and the patterns in producing, distributing and circulating its products. I also look at economic aspects, especially issues of royalties for local artists, in order to comprehend the complex relationships among the parties involved.

THE PRODUCTS

Since its emergence in the 1970s the West Sumatran recording industry has produced recordings of Minangkabau music genres, popular as well as traditional ones. In recent years, its

products have shown significant diversification in terms of genre and musical style, while the number of recordings has greatly increased.

The products of the West Sumatran recording industry can be categorized into three types. First, Minangkabau pop music which is called *pop Minang*. Second, traditional genres associated with Minangkabau oral literature or traditional verbal arts. Third, genres that have been shaped by the use of recording technology itself, whose existence firmly depends on the media: media-bound genres.

Pop Minang is noticeable as the largest corpus of the West Sumatran recording industry's products. It is a flexible genre, constantly changing in terms of its music, lyrics, and aesthetics, which has developed primarily through the media of cassettes and VCDs. Many new albums are produced every year and many new local artists have appeared over the last twenty years. Most are newcomers to the scene, though some are old favourites who appear again and again. The development of *pop Minang* inevitably involves other contributors – musicians, composers and talent hunters as well, all of Minangkabau descent.

Minangkabau oral literature or verbal arts consists of many genres (Amir, Zuriati and Anwar 2006). But not all genres have been recorded on commercial cassettes or VCDs. Some genres had even appeared on recordings during the gramophone disc era. Some genres were produced at one time in commercial recordings but if sales were not high, they were no longer reproduced, while other genres are often reproduced. Producers' decisions whether to reproduce certain genres or not are strongly determined by market demand.

Media-bound genres, those that are closely linked with recording media (cassette and VCD in this case), are limited. Two such prominent genres are modern Minangkabau cassette dramas and Minangkabau children's pop music. The former is available only in cassette format, while the latter is available in both cassette and VCD formats.

Three categories of West Sumatran recording industry products will be discussed further in the following chapters: *pop Minang* in Chapter 5, Minangkabau oral literature or verbal arts in Chapter 6, and one media-bound genre, namely Minangkabau children's pop music, in Chapter 7.

THE PRODUCERS

As the hub of the regional recording industries in western Indonesia, West Sumatra is the province with the largest number of recording companies. In the early 2000s there were some 50 recording companies situated in West Sumatra (Barendregt 2002:324) and the number has increased significantly since then. Since the emergence of this sector in the early 1970s, many new companies have been established, while some earlier competitors still survive. The producer and song composer Agus Taher (Fig. 4.1)²¹³ states that there were 65 producers in

213 Dr. Agus Taher or Agusli Taher owns the recording company named Pitunang Record and the production house

West Sumatra in 2008. In addition there were 33 recording studios, 16 production houses, and hundreds of *orgen tunggal*²¹⁴ music businesses, making West Sumatra one of Indonesia's main centres of the music industry after Jakarta (Taher 2008:5). Appendix 1 lists the producers of Minangkabau commercial cassettes in West Sumatra as of 2008, based on data registered with the West Sumatra branch of ASIRINDO (Asosiasi Industri Rekaman Indonesia, 'Association of the Indonesian Recording Industry'), and additional data I found while conducting fieldwork in West Sumatra. According to local media reports, still other new producers have been established since 2008.

The majority of West Sumatran recording companies are situated in Padang, the capital of the province. Other companies are in Bukittinggi, the main city of the Minangkabau highlands (*darek*), Padang Panjang, Pariaman, Payakumbuh, Sawahlunto, and Solok (see Appendix 1). The ASIRINDO data used for Appendix 1 understate the real number of recording companies in West Sumatra, because not all companies become members of ASIRINDO since it is not the only organization of recording companies in Indonesia. Some recording companies that initially became ASIRINDO members later left the organization.²¹⁵ A comparison of the ASIRINDO data displayed in Appendixes 1 and 2, and Table 4.1 indicates that other new recording companies became ASIRINDO members after 2006. I found names of new recording companies written on the covers of Minangkabau commercial cassettes and VCDs that I purchased every summer after 2006.

Institutionally, the businesses of the West Sumatran recording industry can be categorized into five types:

- 1) Recording companies that directly act as producers. They have their own recording studios (see Appendix 2) that are primarily used to produce their own albums, but they also rent their recording studios to producers who do not have their own studios (the fourth type).
- 2) Recording companies that have recording studios in addition to production houses which provide video shooting and editing services for commercial purposes (see Appendix 3). Some of them use the same name for both the producer company and the production house, as in the case of Tanama Record and Sinar Padang Record, while others distinguish the two, as in the case of Agus Tahe's Pitunang Record (which also

named My Own Productions. He is a leading Minangkabau pop-song composer of the second generation, first appearing in the 1980s. He has composed pop Minang song lyrics for adults as well as for children (see Chapters 5 and 7). He is a former general secretary of ASIRINDO (Asosiasi Industri Rekaman Indonesia, Association of the Indonesian Recording Industry), West Sumatra branch.

²¹⁴ For more on *orgen tunggal* music in West Sumatra, see Aulia 2010.

²¹⁵ The ASIRINDO West Sumatra branch was established in Bukittinggi on 6 May 2004 by the recording industry practitioners of this province. It has two secretariat offices: in Bukittinggi and in Padang. ASIRINDO has its own statutes and its own regulatory organization. The association aims to work for the benefit of its members, for example, combating piracy and promoting artists' rights. Every two years, the head of ASIRINDO is elected by vote by the owners of West Sumatran recording companies registered as members of the association. These companies pay an annual fee to the association.

has its own recording studio; see Fig. 4.2) and his production house named My Own Productions.

- 3) Production house companies that provide video shooting and editing services only for individuals or other parties that might need their services, such as for the making of videos for wedding parties and other festivities (see Appendix 3). They do not produce or sell albums.
- 4) Producers that do not have their own recording studios, such as Ghita Record, Planet Record, Sentral Record, and Scorpion Record. To release their albums, such producers have to rent a recording studio of the first type or of the fifth type.
- 5) Companies that only operate recording studios with no intention of acting as producers of music albums, such as Nover Studio and Sony Studio. These companies tend to rent their studios to producers that do not have their own recording studios (the fourth type).

The majority of West Sumatran recording companies with their own studios are situated in Padang. The rest are dispersed over Bukittinggi, Padang Panjang, Pariaman, and Solok (see Appendix 2). Likewise the production houses (see Appendix 3). The main products of these companies are commercial cassettes and VCDs of *pop Minang*, whose characteristics will be discussed further in Chapter 5. Before the 1980s, recording companies and production houses were all located in Padang. But since the 1980s, recording companies, with or without their own recording studios, as well as production houses, have also been established in other towns of West Sumatra.

Most recording studios are quite basic. Figure 4.2 shows images of Pitunang Record's recording studio in Tabing, Padang, owned by Agus Taher. It was built in a room adjoining Agus Taher's main house. The room is partitioned into two parts: one part is used to store



Figure 4.1: Dr. Agus Taher, owner of Pitunang Record (photo by Suryadi, 2005)

musical instruments and computer equipment, while the other part, which is soundproof, is used for recording singers. Those in both parts can see each other, since the wall in between is made of glass. The musical instrument used is a digital keyboard, which has a software program that produces rhythms and chords by means of MIDI²¹⁶ electronic commands. Other important devices are an instrument to control the singer's voice and a set of computers used to make the master recording of the voice. Cotok Production House in Bukittinggi has a similar type of studio: the studio is also situated in part of the owner's house. The old competitors Tanama Record and Sinar Padang Record have bigger recording studios.

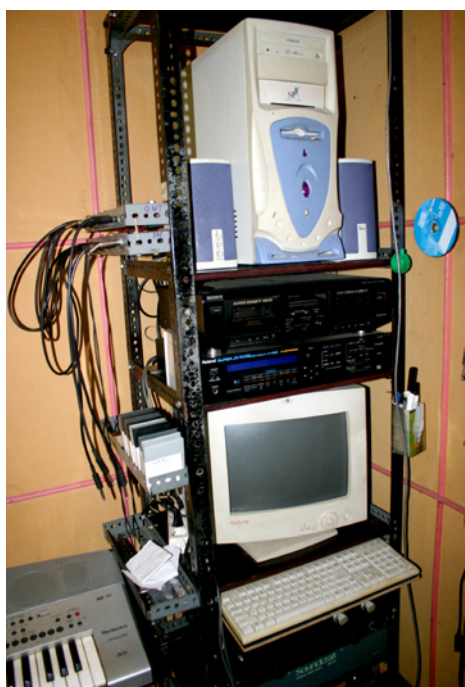
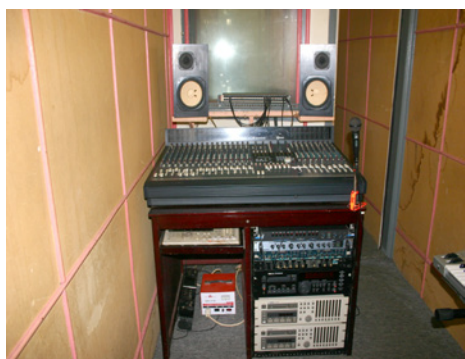


Figure 4.2: Pitunang Record's recording studio and its recording equipment (photographs by Suryadi, 2005)

²¹⁶ MIDI (abbreviation of Musical Instrument Digital Interface) is an industry-standard electronic communications protocol that enables electronic musical instruments, computers and other equipment to communicate, control and synchronize with each other in real time.

Pitunang Record not only produces its own albums but also rents its recording studio to producers who do not have their own studios (type 4 above). Agus Taher told me that his recording studio was rented not only by producers located in West Sumatra, but also some located in neighbouring provinces such as Riau, Jambi and Bengkulu. He also said that some people came to him to make their albums by renting not only Pitunang's recording studio but also the name of his company. These are people who want to try their luck and fortune in the world of the regional music industry, often with a mediocre ability to sing. Influenced by global popular music trends, such as the television program *Idol*, the occupation of artist has increasingly attracted young people in Indonesia, nationally and regionally, and is regarded as an way to become instantly famous and rich, and feel modern. But Agus Taher is very selective in taking on such clients, since he does not want Pitunang Record's reputation to suffer. He said that he must maintain the quality of the albums produced by Pitunang Record, including those that rent its name (pers. comm., 5-8-2005).

The growing number of West Sumatran recording companies indicates that the regional recording industry continues to be an attractive business, even since the economic crisis that hit Indonesia in 1998. Entrepreneurs of the West Sumatran recording industry remain confident in investing their money in the West Sumatran cassette industry, though, like all Indonesian music practitioners, they are anxious about the damage caused by piracy and the economic recession. Pioneers in this business, Tanama Record and Sinar Padang Record, still exist right up to the present. They succeeded in surviving through economic fluctuations and have been able to compete with many new competitors, many of whom have produced pop Minang albums in new musical styles (see Chapter 5). Some of these new competitors, such as Anjungan Record and Minang Record (situated in Bukittinggi), produce recordings with new aesthetic styles. So, it appears that the regional recording business generates profit, and offers sturdy resistance to economic crisis. The owner and managing director of Tanama Record, Alimar Ahmad, when I interviewed him (8-6-2005), acknowledged this. Tanama has always been the foremost player in the regional recording business of West Sumatra. Its leading position has never been displaced by newcomers. Data from ASIRINDO show that in the period 2005-2006 Tanama Record released 35 titles in cassette format and 33 titles in VCD format (with some titles appearing in both formats), making it the most productive company among ASIRINDO members (Table 4.1).

The data in Table 4.1, presenting the numbers of commercial cassettes and VCDs produced by recording companies that are members of ASIRINDO, allows us to formulate several observations. Evidently, until 2006 at least, West Sumatran recording companies still produced more cassettes than VCDs. Based on my interviews with producers, the factors behind this phenomenon are as follows. First, the cost of making cassettes is cheaper than the cost of making VCDs. Second, the producer tends to produce a recording in cassette format initially in order to test market demand. If consumer demand is high, then the producer will produce the recording in VCD format. Third, strong producers whose brands are already well known to consumers, such as Tanama Record, Sinar Padang Record, Planet Record, and Minang Record, dare to produce large quantities of VCDs. Some new competitors tend to

Table 4.1

Number of albums (in cassette and VCD formats) produced from June 2005 to December 2006 by recording companies that were ASIRINDO members

No	Company name	Product format	
		Cassette	VCD
1	Ananda Record	1	1
2	Antero Musik Record	1	-
3	Arta Record	1	-
4	Balatif Record	29	2
5	Danau Kembar Record	1	-
7	Deras Record	2	-
8	Fadilla Record	5	1
9	FH Entertainment	5	3
10	Gemini Record	2	-
11	Ghita Virma Record	24	6
13	Klas Manang Record	1	1
14	Kreatif Musik Record	4	3
15	Marina Musik Sentral	3	-
16	Mianti Arta Record	3	-
17	Minang Record	24	13
18	Nada Musik Record	4	3
19	Pasaman Wulan Record	1	-
20	Pitunang Record	8	7
21	Planet Record	48	14
23	Sentral Musik	7	7
24	Sinar Padang Record	15	12
25	Talao Record	6	-
26	Tanama Record	35	33
27	Utama Mandiri	1	-
28	Venoni Musik Record	1	-
29	Wahana Musik Persada	1	-
	Total	234	106

Source: ASIRINDO (2006)

produce just one or two cassettes or VCDs, but most of them do not produce VCDs, because they do not want to take the risk of suffering a loss.

Following the introduction of VCDs by the West Sumatran regional recording industry in the early 2000s, producers have generally produced the same recordings in cassette as well as VCD format, usually making the cassette version first. It was rare for a company to produce a recording in VCD format initially. Table 4.1 also suggests that some companies, which are generally new competitors, do not regularly produce cassettes and VCDs every year.

The West Sumatran recording industry is more than a matter of business enterprise alone; it also relates to ethnic consciousness. This is indicated among other things by the fact that West Sumatran recording companies are mostly in the hands of Minangkabau entrepreneurs, and the other parties involved in this business (song composers and artists, for example) also mostly belong to the Minangkabau ethnic group. They belong to a Minangkabau generation born in West Sumatra, who grew up with familiarity with their ethnic cultural environment; they were not born in *rantau*, outside the region. In my interviews with producers and artists, they told me time and again that their involvement in the regional recording business is driven not only by economic motives but also by cultural sentiments, a wish to continue the existence of Minangkabau music. At the same time, the West Sumatran recording industry expresses enthusiasm for entering the new world of electronic society. To borrow H. Yuskal's words, his involvement in the West Sumatran recording industry is a 'cultural mission', without denying a concurrent economic motivation (pers. comm., 23-8-2007).

Thus ethnicity is both maintained and represented in the West Sumatran recording business. A survey of Industri Rekaman Bahasa Nusantara (recording industries in local languages) conducted by the Indonesian Academy of Science and the Ford Foundation (see Pasaribu 1999) in the majority of Indonesian provinces – but not in West Sumatra – shows that ethnicity continues to be a matter of significance for most regional recording entrepreneurs.²¹⁷ The survey shows that regional recording industry entrepreneurs tend to be closely associated with their ethnic group. Generally speaking, producers affiliated with a particular ethnicity are not eager to produce regional recordings of other ethnic groups. It is rare, for example, for those from the Riau Malay sub-ethnic group to be involved in the Minangkabau recording industry in West Sumatra, or for producers from Aceh to engage with the Batak recording industry in North Sumatra. I suspect such patterns apply in all the regional recording industries in Indonesia's various provinces. An apparent exception is Chinese (Indonesians of Chinese descent) entrepreneurs, who seem to have been involved since colonial times in the business of regional recording industries in Central Java associated with Javanese music (Sutton 1985:28) and in West Java with Sundanese music (Jurriëns 2004:71), but this can be understood because *peranakan* Chinese were native speakers of Javanese and Sundanese, and largely assimilated to the Javanese and Sundanese cultures. Local cultural factors also influenced Chinese capitalists' relative lack of involvement in the recording business in West Sumatra. As Minangkabau traders commonly remark, the Minangkabau and the Chinese have a similar talent for business. Both are well known as *bangsa pedagang* ('trader folk'). In West Sumatra, *peranakan* Chinese businessmen always face strong competition from their Minangkabau competitors.

Another example of how ethnicity strongly influences the West Sumatran recording industry is that producers tend to produce almost exclusively Minangkabau genres. They have

²¹⁷ An exception seems to be ethnic groups who have embraced Christianity. As Andy Hicken 2009 notes, producers of Torajan music cassettes and VCDs come not only from the Torajan ethnic group but also from the Batak ethnic group of North Sumatra. Both produce Christian spiritual music (*lagu-lagu rohani*) because both ethnic groups have embraced Christianity. Recordings of such music are also produced in Jakarta. Christianity seems to be a larger factor than ethnicity for this genre.

recorded a wide variety of Minangkabau genres – popular and traditional-folk – as well as creating some new cassette genres. Recently one or two albums produced by West Sumatran recording companies have appeared in the Indonesian language, but this is not strange, considering that most Minangkabau are bilingual (speaking their mother tongue as well as Indonesian) and considering the historical fact that Minangkabau were important proponents of adopting modern standard Malay as the national language of Indonesia (Anwar 1976).

Some surrounding Malay subgroups have put their own pop music on the market under the label of a leading West Sumatran recording company. But these initiatives did not come from the Minangkabau producers. Rather, it came from the neighbouring Malay artists. For example, some albums in cassette or VCD format in the North Sumatran Deli Malay dialect, which has a cultural affinity with Minangkabau, such as *Bunga Tanjung*, *Melayu Deli Memandang Bulan*, and *The Best of Melayu Deli*, were produced in Padang by Tanama Record (Pasaribu 1999:32-33). Likewise, some albums by local pop singers from neighbouring provincial towns in Riau, Jambi, South Sumatra, and Bengkulu provinces, which have a cultural affinity and religious similarity with Minangkabau people. In this case it seems the neighbouring singers preferred their albums to be produced by a leading West Sumatran recording company in order to attract customers' interest. Tanama Record, Minang Record and Sinar Padang Record, for example, have recorded pop song albums sung in several Malay subgroup dialects in Sumatra – Palembang, Jambi (Fig. 4.3), Kerinci, Deli, and Kampar Malay.

Cultural and religious similarity seems to have been an important consideration in this case: people of these regions have a cultural closeness with the Minangkabau. Besides that, there are historical connections, as the Muslim Malays of Riau (Kato 1997), Jambi, South Sumatra and Bengkulu (Navis 1984) have enjoyed close cultural relations with Minangkabau in contrast to poor relations between Minangkabau and the predominantly Christian Batak of



Figure 4.3: Two non-Minangkabau pop albums in cassette format from Jambi and Palembang, produced by Tanama Record

North Sumatra and other ethnic groups in the regions (as reflected in works of scholars from these regions; see Parlindungan 1964; Harahap 2007).

Perhaps technological and economic factors are also involved: compared with other provinces of Sumatra, recording companies in West Sumatra are quite advanced in terms of technology and, due to the bulk of their production, are more competitive in terms of cost. Moreover, the West Sumatran towns of Padang and Bukittinggi, where most of these recording companies are situated, are not too far from neighbouring provincial centres like Pekanbaru and Bangkinang (Riau), Kerinci and Jambi (Jambi), Muara Enim and Palembang (South Sumatra), Muko-Muko and Bengkulu (Bengkulu). People in these neighbouring provinces are familiar with products of the West Sumatran recording industry because many Minangkabau migrants live in the urban areas of these provinces. Apparently, this is also the marketing strategy: affiliating with a leading West Sumatran recording company name like Tanama or Sinar Padang Record will be an advantage for local artists of neighbouring provinces rather than releasing an album under a new unknown label which perhaps will not appeal to local consumers. Conversely, the Minangkabau migrants, who normally can speak the local Malay dialect of the neighbouring province they live in, will also be interested in buying such commercial recordings.

THE SINGERS

Like the producers, the local artists involved in the West Sumatran recording industry are predominantly Minangkabau. Most of them were born in West Sumatra (their homeland), not in *rantau*. This differs from the national recording industry, which involves performers and practitioners from various ethnic backgrounds across the country.

Generally speaking, the history of *pop Minang* singers has passed through three generations: the 1950s–1980s generation, the 1980s–1990s generation, and the current 1990s–2000s generation. This categorization is not airtight. Some artists have survived beyond the limits of their generation. The following paragraphs describe representatives of the three generations.

The prominent Minangkabau *pop* singer Elly Kasim (Fig. 4.4) is an extraordinary example of the first generation, most of whom emerged in *rantau*. Born 27 September 1943 in Tikau, Agam Regency, West Sumatra, her debut as a Minangkabau *pop* singer was in 1958, after winning three times the student star song competition organized by the RRI Pekanbaru branch in the region to which she and her parents had migrated. Two years later, in 1960, she won the trophy of the singing contest organized by RRI Jakarta headquarters. She then joined forces with the Kumbang Tjari band led by Nuskan Sjarif in Jakarta and become the well-known female guest star of the legendary Gumarang band (see Chapter 5). After that, many recording companies invited her to make albums. In 1969, Philips Co. from Singapore, which produced her albums, sent her for recording to Hong Kong, making her the first Indonesian singer to do that (Sardono *et al.* 1983:174). She went on to become a female *pop Minang* legend, unequalled to this day, and a symbol of *pop Minang* itself.



Figure 4.4: Singer Elly Kasim (Source: Yurnaldi 2001a)

Elly Kasim's pseudonym is *kutilang Minang* ('Minangkabau bulbul'), a bird that has a sweet sound and loves singing (Yurnaldi 2001a). She continued to release albums until 2007 and has produced some 103 albums during her career as the most legendary singer of Minang pop music.²¹⁸ She was first recorded on gramophone disc in 1961, and her albums have always been favourites of all Minangkabau generations. Between 1961 and 1969 she produced 21 LP albums. Her classic albums have been produced by national recording companies situated in Jakarta, such as Irama Record, Indah Record, Dimita Record, Mesra Record, JSP Record, and Fontana Record.²¹⁹

Besides releasing solo albums, Elly Kasim also released albums in which she paired in duets with male artists such as Yuni Amir, Syamsi Hasan, Yan Bastian, Tiar Ramon, and Nuskan Sjarif, especially the latter two, who are well known as the leading male singers of the first generation of pop Minang artists. Tiar Ramon (born in Pariaman in 1941, died in Pekanbaru, 21 October 2000; Fig. 4.5) had a baritone voice. He started his career as *tukang dendang* (vocalist) of traditional sung poetry *bagurau* (see Chapter 6). His albums were mostly characterized by sorrow and lamentation;²²⁰ most of them tell of the destiny of Minangkabau men the *rantau*. His pop Minang albums and *lagu-lagu Melayu Deli* ('Deli Malay songs') albums released in duet with Elly Kasim are well known as far as neighbouring Malaysia. Nuskan

218 See newspaper report 'Elly Kasim: dari Tiku ke Ibukota', *Singgalang*, 5 June 2014; 'Peluncuran biografi Elly Kasim meriah: pengobat rindu, bintang sepanjang masa', *Singgalang*, 16 June 2014. For more on the life and musical career of Elly Kasim, see Basir (2014).

219 See <http://mazef.multiply.com> (accessed 31-1-2008).

220 Hearing the news of his death, a Minangkabau migrant named Sjamsir Sjarif living in the United States wrote a comment on the global Minangkabau mailing list *rantau-net@rantaunet.com* dated 22 October 2000 (accessed 2-10-2003): 'Ambo indak panah basuo jo baliau doh, tapi lagu-lagu baliau dalam kaset-kaset nan sampai acok bana ambo danga sahinggo alah sabagian dari mangana kampuang jo halaman' ('I never met him, but I frequently listen to his cassette albums here [in the United States], through which I can partly imagine my homeland [West Sumatra]').

Sjarif (born in Tebing Tinggi, North Sumatra, 4 January 1935, of Minangkabau parents from Pesisir Selatan, died in Jakarta, 12 February 2007) was well known as a singer as well as a composer. He composed more than 200 pop Minang songs, some of which are very famous up to the present, such as ‘Pasan Buruang’ (‘Birds’ messages’), ‘Ginyang Mak Taci’ (‘Aunt Taci’s caprice’), and ‘Si Nona’ (‘Lass’) – just to mention a few titles. He used his ability to mimic many voices to become the first pop Minang singer to introduce humour or joking into Minangkabau music, as can be seen in his album in duet with Elly Kasim entitled *Duo Legend: Kamari Pentang, Bakucantang, Basiginyang*²²¹ (Tanama Record 1996) (Fig. 4.6). Together with Zaenal Arifin, who formed the Taruna Ria band in the 1950s, he was known as the first local musician to adapt the Western rock ‘n’ roll musical genre in Indonesian music. He was also the leading figure in the legendary Minangkabau music group Kumbang Cari.²²²



Figure 4.5: Singer Tiar Ramon (Source: <http://www.last.fm/music/Tiar+Ramon/+images/70384528>; accessed 10-9-2012)

Many of Elly Kasim’s albums have been reproduced or pirated by unidentified producers. Never out of print, her albums in gramophone-disc format were reproduced on cassettes and CDs in the 1980s and the 1990s, then more recently on VCDs. In June 2007 Elly Kasim launched her album number 100, produced by Anastra Record.²²³ In this album, Elly Kasim presents a duet with the male singer Ian Anas. Thus, Elly Kasim is one Minangkabau artist who has experienced the peak days of the gramophone, cassette, CD, and VCD eras. Some pop Minang songs she popularized, like ‘Bareh Solok’ (‘Solok’s rice’), ‘Ayam den Lapeh’ (literally ‘My hen has run away’, meaning ‘My honey left me’), ‘Sala Lauak’ (‘Fried fish’), ‘Lansek Manih’ (‘Sweet yellow fruit’), ‘Main Kim’ (‘Playing kim’²²⁴), and ‘Mudiak Arau’ (‘Arau river’s

221 In this context the Minangkabau words *kamari pentang*, *bakucantang*, and *basiginyang* are used in a joking manner, with the respective meanings ‘in a dilemma [in relation to love]’, ‘quarrel [with spouse]’ and ‘sulking’. This humorous content matches the image on the cover of this album, as seen in Fig. 4.6, which presents Elly Kasim and Nuskan Sjarif in an exaggerated style of make-up and hair styles.

222 Theodore KS 2005; ‘Sang Maestro Nuskan Syarif telah tiada’, *Padang Ekspres*, 14 February 2007.

223 ‘Album ke-100 Elly Kasim Diluncurkan Senin Ini’, *Singgalang*, 4 June 2007.

224 Kim is a genre combining songs which have lyrics in *pantun* form and a kind of game with prizes. See Chapter 5.



Figure 4.6: Cover image of Nuskan Sjarif and Elly Kasim's cassette Duo Legend: Kamari Pentang, Bakucantang, Basiginyang, Tanama Record, 1996

upstream') are frequently reproduced and retain an audience right up to the present. These songs have been frequently and eagerly sung again by the young generation of pop Minang artists. Some of Elly Kasim's albums released in the Malay language find an audience as far away as Malaysia.

Since 1960 Elly Kasim has lived in Jakarta, where she established a dance studio named Sangrina²²⁵ Bunda, which promotes Indonesian culture and Minangkabau culture in particular, internationally (Yurnaldi 2001a). She and her husband, Nazif Basir, are exemplary entrepreneurs involved in the business of Minangkabau weddings for Minangkabau perantau (migrants) in Jakarta and other cities in Java (Fraser 2011). They have had this business since the late 1970s (Basir and Kasim 1997:ix).

Elly Kasim has been honoured with various awards for her significant contributions to the development of Minangkabau pop music. For example, in 2007 she was honoured with an award by the Malaysian government as a legendary singer (*penyanyi legendaris*), and in 2008 she received the *Tuah Sakato* award from the West Sumatra provincial government, the highest award for the sons and daughters of Minangkabau for career achievements that bring fame to Minangkabau on the national and international stage. Elly Kasim is an outstanding

225 Sangrina is the abbreviation of *Sanggar tari nasional* (national dance studio).

example of an Indonesian local artist from West Sumatra who achieved a stellar career as a regional pop singer.

As the first generation of pop Minang singers, Elly Kasim and her comrades like Tiar Ramon, Nurseha, Nuskan Sjarif, Syamsi Hasan, Lily Sjarif, Asbon, Yan Juneid, Feddy Ferdian, and Anas Yusuf constitute the symbols of standard pop Minang or *lagu Minang asli*. Their songs draw heavily on traditional Minangkabau verbal arts. Accompanied by music dominated by traditional Minangkabau musical instruments like the *saluang* (long bamboo flute) and *talempong* (small kettle gong), the lyrics of the songs sung by Elly Kasim, such as those mentioned above, are mostly composed in the form of *pantun*, a traditional genre of poetry that uses a lot of allegory and metaphor. Elly Kasim and other pop Minang artists of her generation had a tremendous impact on the development of pop Minang, and were responsible for the introduction of pop Minang at the national level. Some of these artists migrated to Jakarta in the late 1950s, established bands, and became popular among Minangkabau migrants dwelling in the capital.

In the early 1980s a new generation of pop Minang artists sprang up. They came onto the scene as the use of cassette technology became common in Indonesia, which gave a significant boost to regional recording industries, including that of West Sumatra. The leading persons of this generation are Asbon, Fetty, Efrinon, Rosnida YS, and Zalmon. Their albums are still regarded as standard pop Minang because their lyrics are still dominated by *pantun* verse, which is full of allegory and metaphor. Zalmon (Fig. 4.7), who has a baritone voice, is probably the most successful singer among them. He started his career as an amateur regional singer in the mid 1970s. Zalmon's first album was released in 1974, and afterward he released many albums, which were mainly produced by Sinar Padang Record and Pitunang Record. Zalmon's albums made him a favourite singer in the 1990s. One of his most famous and best-selling albums is *Kasiak Tujuh Muaro* ('Sand from seven estuaries'; see Fig. 4.7), for which he received the HDX Award²²⁶ (*Kompas*, 7-4-2002). The album, produced by Pitunang Record in 1993, caused Zalmon's name to soar in the world of Minangkabau pop music. Circulating mainly in West Sumatra and in *rantau* communities, Zalmon's songs are characterized by sorrowful lyrics depicting the despondency of a Minangkabau man who has left his beloved mother and relatives back in his home village to go try his luck in *rantau*, or else the theme is pain caused by betrayal in love when a poor man has to watch his sweetheart falling for someone more successful. Other songs sung by Zalmon, such as 'Nan tido Manahan hati' ('Irritated heart'), 'Aia mato Mande' ('Mother's tears'), and 'Ameh jo Timbago' ('Gold and copper'), also became popular hit pop Minang songs in the 1990s.

Zalmon died on 21 May 2011 at the age of 56, after suffering illness since the severe earthquake that rocked West Sumatra in September 2009 that destroyed his house and many

226 The HDX Award is the prize awarded by the international company that produces cassettes of the HDX brand to singers whose albums are considered hits and best-sellers. A similar award is also given by the competitor, BASF manufacturer, which is called the BASF Award. These awards are undoubtedly intended to promote the companies' products.

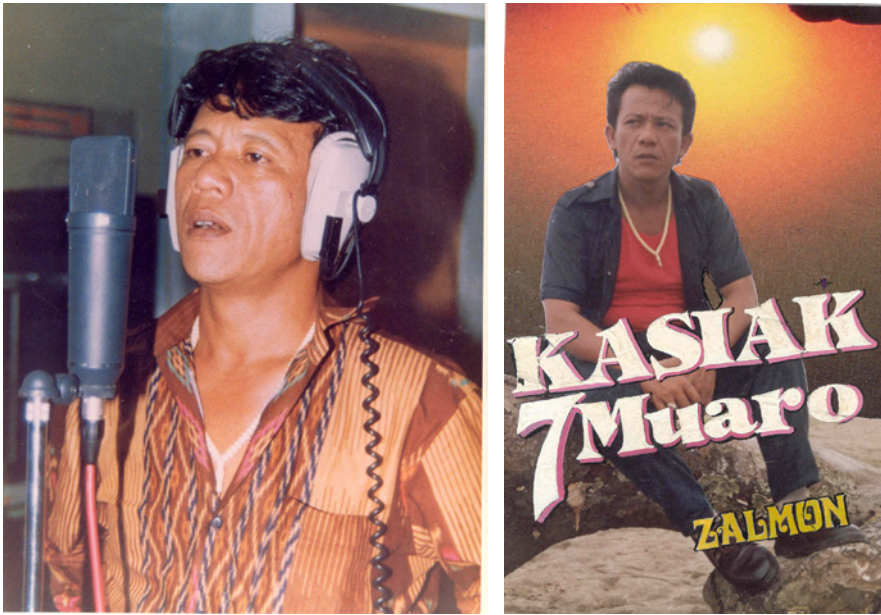


Figure 4.7: Singer Zalmon with hit album *Kasiak Tujuh Muaro* ('Sand from seven estuaries') (Sources: Photograph by Agus Taher, 1993; Zalmon cassette *Kasiak 7 Muaro*, Pitunang Record, 1993)

other houses in the region.²²⁷ He died in misery in a temporary house in the Gunung Pangilun district of Padang city. During his lifetime, Zalmon released no less than 120 albums. Reporting his death, the leading Indonesian newspaper *Kompas* stated that the passing away of Zalmon means that Minangkabau has lost one of its great sons in the world of music, and that the lovers of his songs are not confined to the people of West Sumatra, but also include fans in neighbouring Malaysia.²²⁸

Times and seasons change: as Asbon and his generation grew old, a new group of Minangkabau pop singers came into view in the 1990s. They began their careers in the CD and VCD era, and their number is greater than that of the previous generations. There are many new competitors; some disappear after releasing just one album, while others survive the intense competition among regional artists, sometimes by developing an alternative aesthetic. The most popular figures among them are Edi Cotok and his wife Yuma Sukaisih, Santi Martin, Nedi Gampo (who is also a composer), An Roys, Ratu Sikumbang, Ucok Simbara, Lisna Ariani, Dewi Asri, and Ajo Andre (Andria Adhan). They have brought change to the aesthetics of pop Minang: the lyrics of their songs are mostly no longer inspired by traditional Minangkabau *pantun* metaphors, allegories, and idioms. The language style of their song lyrics is more direct, more simple. Edi Cotok, Nedi Gampo, and Andria Adhan also

227 This catastrophic natural disaster has been encoded in the lyrics of some recent Minangkabau pop songs; an example can be found in Jennifer Fraser's 'The art of grieving: West Sumatra's worst earthquake in music videos' (2012).

228 'Penyanyi legendaris Minang Zalmon wafat' ('Minang legendary singer died'), <http://oase.kompas.com/read/2011/05/21/20022257/Penyanyi.Legendaris.Minang.Zalmon.Wafat> (accessed 2-9-2011).

use humour in their albums, through gestures as well as lyrics. Traditionally, Minangkabau humour is expressed through language using allegories and metaphors, not through gestures (Hadi 2013).

Since the early 2000s the world of pop Minang music is also populated by some *penyanyi cilik* (child singers). Actually, children's pop music is a new phenomenon in the Minangkabau language community. A Minangkabau children's pop album was first produced by Tanama Record in early 2003 and quickly sold out.²²⁹ Tanama Record's success prompted other companies to produce recordings in this new media-bound genre (see Chapter 7), among them Pitunang Record, Minang Record, Planet Record and Sinar Padang Record. Recently many Minangkabau children's cassettes and VCDs have appeared on the market. Several Minangkabau child singers have been popularized by recording companies, notably Marce Utari and Yogi Novarionandes. Both have released albums of this kind that, thanks to the popularity of the singers, have been distributed as far afield as Malaysia.

It seems singers from other ethnic groups also like to sing pop Minang, an indication of how the West Sumatran recording industry influences surrounding ethnic groups. Perhaps this is related to its early appearance on the national scene: the seed of pop Minang was planted in Jakarta in the mid 1950s, the earliest non-Javanese regional music to become popular nationally, which enabled it to become known and popular with other ethnic groups in the country. Since the 1990s some nationally known singers from the Batak ethnic group of North Sumatra have released cassettes (and later VCDs) of pop Minang songs (see Fig. 4.8). There are also Malaysian artists who perform Minangkabau pop songs (Barendregt 2002:420) –

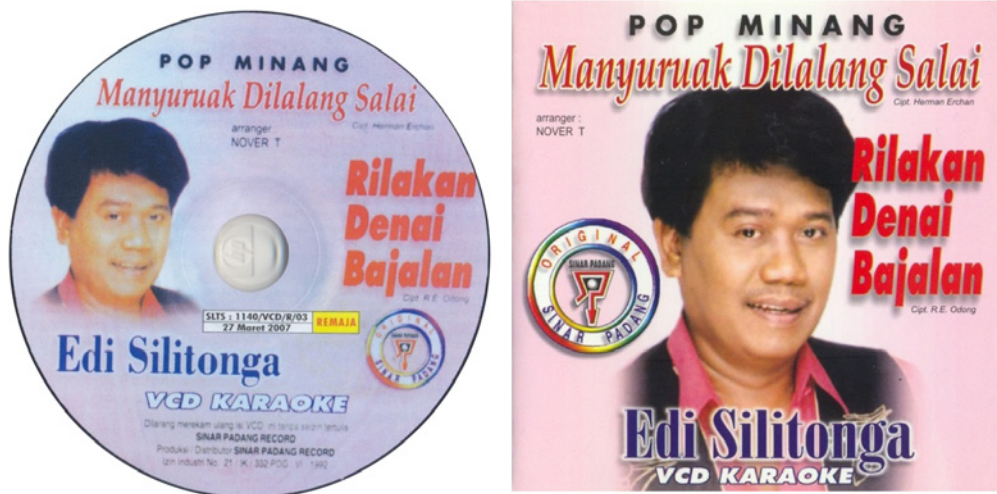


Figure 4.8: A pop Minang album in VCD format sung by Edi Silitonga, a prominent Batak singer of North Sumatra, an example of a pop Minang commercial album by a non-Minangkabau singer

229 'VCD 'Kisah Yatim Piatu Trio Sarunai Diserbu', Padang Ekspres, 11 December 2003.

understandably, since *pop Minang* recordings are among the most popular types of Indonesian regional pop music in Malaysia.

As a result, the thriving regional media industry, particularly the recording industry, inspires many Minangkabau youth to seek their luck and fortune as regional artists. There are always new singers appearing who launch new albums. They come from a variety of professional backgrounds, such as politician, wife of politician, businessman or businesswoman, or government employee. Such singers usually only produce one or two albums, then they disappear from the Minangkabau pop music scene. But the majority of *pop Minang* singers enter the world of pop music to build a career as an artist. In Indonesia, to become a famous artist promises popularity (as a public figure) and economic success. Those who succeed in the arena of *pop Minang* come from various parts of West Sumatra. Besides the economic rewards, perhaps more important is the desire to make one's presence felt in the virtual world: media representation of Indonesian (local) culture encourages a trend towards a sense of group identity and feelings of modernity in people's minds.

The spreading consumption of *pop Minang* recordings in the homeland and in *rantau* impacted the singers. Nowadays many *pop Minang* singers like Andria Adhan, Edi Cotok and Nedi Gampo are frequently invited by Minangkabau migrants in *rantau*, in such places as Bandung, Bogor, Jakarta, and Palembang, to present live musical performances for wedding parties or for gatherings of Minangkabau migrants in the cities. New social media like mobile phone and Facebook have made contact between singers and inviters in *rantau* easy.

FINANCIAL REMUNERATION OF SINGERS

In the West Sumatran recording industry, producers have a strong position, while artists and musicians have a weak bargaining position compared to the producers. As an illustration, recording companies have unlimited rights to reproduce the master recording of an album with no obligation to pay additional royalties to the singers. This is due to the contract system usually used, which is called in Indonesian *jua putuih* or *jual putus* ('outright sale') or *jua master-master*, which means that a producer buys the master recording of an album in perpetuity, and can reproduce it as he sees fit. The artists have no right to receive additional royalties or remunerations. This system is also followed for recording folk genres: storytellers or traditional performers receive payment only for the initial recording of the master. Thus the *jua putuih* contract is exceptionally beneficial for the producer. In fact, recording companies usually reissue *pop Minang* and folk albums several times. The result is that we seldom hear of a regional recording company going bankrupt. Well-established recording companies like Tanama Record (established 1975) and Sinar Padang Record (established 1978) have a particular advantage with their extensive backlists, which they can reproduce as often as they like, without any additional costs.

The *jua putuih* contract, used by most West Sumatran recording companies, allows the proprietor of the recording company to preside over all phases of production, from selecting the singers and musicians to contracting the composers, to arranging the recording process,

and finally to marketing the product. The payments to singers, composers and musicians can be negotiated. The cost of producing an album ranges from fifteen to forty million rupiah (roughly US\$ 1,500 to 4,200). A large part of initial production costs is payments to the singer(s), composer and musicians contracted by the producer: the more professional and well-known they are, the higher the payment. Recently, competition among recording companies has intensified; each competes to sign contracts with popular singers and makes efforts to block them from signing contracts with other recording companies. They are enticed with higher remunerations and bonuses. This is most frequently practised by recording companies with strong capital backing, like Tanama Record and Sinar Padang Record. The new competitors, especially those with a smaller capital, respond by hunting for talented young amateur singers, who can be nurtured (*dibina*) and popularized and will sign long-term contracts with their producers.

The singer Andria Adhan or Ajo Andre has now released four albums, all produced by Sinar Padang Record. He estimates that the production cost of each of his albums was about Rp 40 million (roughly US\$ 4,200), and in accordance with the *jua putuih* contracts he signed with Sinar Padang Record, the production company is responsible for all costs. Andria has lost money on the deal, because his albums have sold very well, possibly because of a new style he introduced, alternating songs and humorous stories (more on this in Chapter 5), and Sinar Padang Record has reissued Andria's albums several times. Nevertheless, Andria has not stopped working with Sinar Padang Record because it offers him higher remuneration than other recording companies. He received Rp 20 million (roughly US\$ 2,000) from Sinar Padang Record for his fourth album, *Basiginyang 4*, in which he performs a duet with Santi Martin (pers. comm., 12-2-2006). This album was released in late 2005 in a first edition of five thousand copies in cassette format and ten thousand copies in VCD format. Andria is an example of a newcomer who has quickly gained great success: he has migrated to Jakarta, where he also stars in a *sinetron* (television soap).

Some singers, especially newcomers, regard the *jua putuih* system as disadvantageous to artists, since they do not receive royalties when their albums are reissued. For this reason they may seek alternative means of producing their albums. One such alternative is for the singers to self-finance the production of their own albums, by renting a recording studio, including its digital keyboard facility, and by renting the label of a well-known recording company. They pay royalties to the song composers when their songs are used by them. If they are successful, this arrangement can be more beneficial to the singer than an ordinary *jua putuih* contract. As more artists prefer to self-produce their own albums, the demand for contract recording studios has increased. The situation is constantly changing, especially after the West Sumatran recording industry entered the VCD era in the early 2000s, and because of rampant piracy, which means leading recording companies cannot always afford to pay high royalties to singers. More and more singers release their albums under new producer names, mostly established by themselves or financed by other people. So, some singers, or members of their families, have become producers as well. Some cassette/VCD retailers have entered the market as well, producing albums themselves.

The market segment of regional recording industry products is well defined: principally, it is the community speaking the language of that particular ethnic group. In a young nation-state like Indonesia, ethnicity is still a more considerable symbol of identity than nationalism, and is reflected in various sectors of everyday public life – socially, economically and politically. Though the global music industry continues to penetrate the national music industry of developing countries, including Indonesia, it has not been able to weaken Indonesia's regional recording industries. As long as Minangkabau remains a significant identity, *pop Minang* will retain its market segment. Viewed from the reverse side, as pointed out by Barendregt (2002), the dynamics and development of the West Sumatran recording industry have also been credited with reinventing the sense of Minangness. The producer Agus Taher (pers. comm., 4-8-2005) emphasizes that, in addition to being a good investment, the West Sumatran recording industry helps to promote a love of Minangkabau culture, and helps people hold onto a sense of togetherness as an ethnic group.

THE SONG COMPOSERS

Pop Minang songs recorded on commercial cassettes and VCDs are composed by local composers. They are different from Minangkabau storytelling called *kaba* which is anonymous in terms of creation (see Chapter 6). Like the producers and singers, all these composers of *pop Minang* songs are Minangkabau natives, though they come from different dialect areas of the Minangkabau language. Inevitably, due to the keen competition between producers, composers try to present individual characteristics. Older composers differ from those of the younger generation in their choice of words for their song lyrics. It seems that in forging new aesthetic and stylistic expressions, Minangkabau song composers have explored the wide range of possibilities available in their mother tongue. Some composers are musicians as well as singers, while others are solely composers, often contracted to a particular recording company, though nevertheless remaining independent and free to sign contracts with more than one recording company.

Syahrul Tarun Yusuf (Fig. 4.9), often called Satayu, is the best-known and most prolific *pop Minang* song composer. His compositions have become a benchmark for the latest generation of Minangkabau composers and artists. One contemporary popular singer, Andria Adhan, says that Satayu is his favourite composer (email, 29-1-2006). Satayu, a son of Datuak Lelo Marajo (father) and Nurani Gani (mother), was born in Balingka, Agam regency, on 12 March 1942. He was educated up till senior high school (*sekolah menengah atas*, SMA) in West Sumatra and then, like most Minangkabau men, temporarily migrated to the *rantau*. He has composed some 400 *pop Minang* songs (see his 50 top song compositions in Appendix 4). Muchsis Muchtar St. Bandaro Putiah, the editor of Satayu's biography *Syahrul Tarun Yusuf: alam takambang jadi guru* (2008), mentions that the composer is not as popular as the songs he has composed; generally Minangkabau people are familiar with Satayu's songs, which are all included in the standard *pop Minang* repertoire, but not many people know that he is the composer of those songs.²³⁰ Satayu's career peaked during the 1960s and 1970s with

230 See 'Biografi Tarun Yusuf, Malam ini Diluncurkan', *Singgalang*, 7 June 2009.

dozens of compositions like ‘Kasiah Tak Sampai’ (‘Unrequited love’), ‘Minang Maimbau’ (‘Minangkabau calling’), and ‘Ayah’ (‘Father’) that served to enhance the reputation of the Minangkabau pop singers Elly Kasim, Lily Sjarif and Tiar Ramon who made those songs famous.

Satayu’s compositions have been frequently reproduced up to the present day: his composition ‘Bugih Lamo’ (‘Old fashion’), for example, has been reproduced eleven times and won him an HDX award in 1996. Satayu is the leading composer of what is called standard *pop Minang*. It is through his compositions that the regional genre of *pop Minang* became known at the national level. ‘Bugih Lamo’ is also well known in Malaysia and Brunei. According to the Minangkabau cultural observer Edy Utama, it is evident from Satayu’s song lyrics that he has a sensitive appreciation of Minangkabau culture: his compositions gain power from his use of symbolism drawn from nature. His compositions can be said to reflect the collective consciousness of the Minangkabau people. It is not surprising that his songs make such a memorable impression in people’s hearts (Yurnaldi 2002).



Figure 4.9: Songwriter Syahrul Tarun Yusuf
(Source: Yurnaldi 2002)

Another leading composer of *pop Minang* is the late Yusaf Rahman (1933-2005; Fig. 4.10). With his wife Syofyani, Yusaf established Sanggar Tari dan Musik Syofyani (Syofyani Dance and Music Studio) in Padang in the 1970s, and was known as a leading composer of standard *pop Minang* songs and dances. His songs such as ‘Indak ka Barulang’ (‘Will not be repeated’), and ‘Usah Diratok’i’ (‘It should not be mourned’) – just to mention two examples – are very popular and became standard *pop Minang* songs. Likewise the dances created by him with his wife, including ‘Tari Piring’ (‘Plate dance’) and ‘Tari Saputangan’ (‘Handkerchief dance’). The songs and the dances strongly express the essence of Minangkabau culture.²³¹ Yusaf Rahman is also well known for pioneering the use of the diatonic music scale (*tangga nada*) for the traditional Minangkabau musical instrument *talempong* (a small kettle gong), which originally

231 See ‘Yusaf Rahman hidup kembali’, *Singgalang*, 2 April 2009.

used a pentatonic music scale and was only used to accompany traditional Minang music. Use of the diatonic music scale has enabled the instrument to be used to accompany newly created Minang music such as *pop Minang* (Sjarif 2007:113). During his lifetime, Yusaf Rahman and his wife frequently went abroad as West Sumatra's art ambassadors (*duta wisata Sumatra Barat*), among others to Malaysia, France, Italy, the Netherlands, Germany, and Greece (Basir 2007:273-5).



Figure 4.10: Songwriter Yusaf Rahman (Source: Basir 2007)

Folk genres too are commercially recorded in cassette and VCD formats, and thus some traditional performers and storytellers are also involved in the recording industry. Many traditional storytellers have signed contracts with producers to produce commercial recordings of Minangkabau verbal arts. The number of storytellers engaged by recording studios is far less than the number of regional pop singers. The commercial recordings of Minangkabau verbal arts and the structural and socio-cultural consequences thereof will be discussed further in Chapter 6.

MARKETING AND DISTRIBUTION

West Sumatran recording companies promote their products in the local press and on private radio stations. Local newspapers are published in Padang and Bukittinggi, the most prominent being *Singgalang*, *Padang Ekspres*, *Haluan*, and *Post Metro Padang*. Local journalists often report on new albums released by Minangkabau pop singers as a way of promoting West Sumatran recording companies' products.²³² Yessy Tri Putri, manager of Talao Record, says she promotes albums produced by her company in local newspapers as well as on the radio. Big companies like Tanama Record and Sinar Padang Record always promote their new products in a local daily such as *Singgalang*, *Padang Ekspres*, and *Haluan*. In 2006 a new album was usually advertised in local dailies for one or two weeks. The cost of advertising in a local

232 For example, 'Trio Ucok Simbara, Nedi Gampo dan Edi Morgen', *Padang Ekspres*, 17 November 2005; 'Fenny Launching Album Kedua', *Padang Ekspres*, 23 March 2006.

newspaper every day for one month amounts to Rp 1,500,000 (roughly US\$ 150), compared with Rp 500,000 (roughly US\$ 50) for an advertisement broadcast three times daily for one month on radio (pers. comm., 22-2-2006).

As can be seen in Figure 4.11, the ads of West Sumatran recording industry products in local print media are quite simple: the VCD cover is displayed, with a few additional words of promotion, usually: 'Dapatkan di toko kaset terdekat di kota Anda' ('Get it at a nearby cassette store in your city'). These simple forms of ads are certainly related to the cost: the more space of a newspaper page is used, the greater the cost. As small-scale businesses, West Sumatran recording companies have no big budget for promotion. In 2011, the cost of advertisements was more expensive. The newspaper *Singgalang*, for example, charged Rp 400,000 (roughly US\$ 40) for a one-day publication (Khairul Jasmi [chief editor *Singgalang*], pers. comm., 10-8-2011). Since the cost of promotion is quite high, only established companies – Tanama Record, Sinar Padang Record, Pitunang Record, and Minang Record among them – frequently advertise their new products in the local press. New competitors rarely advertise in the local press. Instead, they tend to promote their products on the radio because it is cheaper than in newspapers.

West Sumatran recording companies tend to limit their expenditures on promotion. According to Indonesian official terminology, they are classed as small-scale businesses (*industri kecil*).²³³ Subject to government regulations, nationally and above all regionally at the



Figure 4.11: Advertisements for Minangkabau VCDs in the local press in West Sumatra (Source: Haluan, 18 and 19 January 2011)

²³³ This is a classification in Indonesia based on number of employees. A small-scale business employs 5-19 employees. Other categories are: *industri rumah tangga* ('household business') employing 1-4 employees, *industri menengah* ('mid-scale business') employing 20-99 employees, and *industri besar* ('large-scale business') employing 100 employees or more.

province and regency levels, West Sumatran recording companies with a small capital²³⁴ have to pay some taxes, which means they have to manage their expenses, including promotion costs. Promotion tends to rely heavily on traditional ethnic-based networks in *rantau* rather than modern ways of newspaper and radio advertising.²³⁵

Many producers use the content of their VCDs to promote their products. It is a smart way to advertise their products without having to spend extra money. For example, if we play VCDs of Minangkabau oral literature produced by Sinar Padang Record, we can see the following advertising phrases on the TV screen: 'Produced by Sinar Padang Record [which has a distributor outlet] in Pasar Raya Padang, Blok A, Floor 1, No. 1B Padang, phone (071) 23168, West Sumatra, [and a distributor outlet] in Jakarta, Glodok City, AKS 121, phone (021) 632546. Also look for Minangkabau songs [albums] produced by Sinar Padang Record.'²³⁶

Some big recording companies like Tanama Record, Sinar Padang Record, and Talao Record have wholesale outlets in Padang. These shops supply the company's cassettes and VCDs to retailers coming from regency and sub-district towns all over West Sumatra and neighbouring provinces. In Padang itself there are many cassette retailers and sidewalk cassette vendors (Fig. 4.12), and in the eight regency towns of West Sumatra, cassette shops and sidewalk cassette vendors are numerous. But in fact, Minangkabau cassettes and VCDs are also sold at weekly markets scattered over the sub-districts of West Sumatra. Leading recording companies' wholesale outlets also engage in retail sales in Padang and some regency towns. Other recording companies, mostly those operating on a smaller capital, have a different means of distributing their products which seems more aggressive: their agents deliver their products directly to retailers in many towns, in and outside West Sumatra. Retailers do not pay cash in advance for the products; they are called *barang titipan* (on consignment). Once the products are sold, the retailer has to put aside the money to repay the agent, who returns to the retailer periodically to collect the money while delivering new orders or new products. When selling on consignment, retailers profit from a commission.

Cassette is the medium that has brought regional music to the Minangkabau diaspora worldwide. Minangkabau migrants might forget their songs and customs when they move to cities outside West Sumatra, but cassettes serve the purpose of educating and reminding

234 According to some producers I interviewed, by investing some Rp 100 to 150 million (roughly US\$ 10,000 to \$ 10,500) one can establish a regional recording company.

235 To establish a regional recording company, the entrepreneur should obtain a license from the Department of Industry and Trade, called Surat Izin Usaha Perdagangan ('Business Trade Permit'). The government will issue such a license if the applicant has fulfilled certain requirements like producing a notarized document (*akta notaris*) issued by a local notary (*notaris*) and a Business Location Permit (Surat Izin Tempat Usaha [SITU]) issued by the municipality or regency government. Officials of the Department of Industry and Trade provincial or regency branches make spot checks in the field to make sure that applicants do not misuse the permit for other kinds of businesses. The license is always displayed on the cover of any cassettes, CDs or VCDs produced by a license entrepreneur by noting 'Izin Perindustrian no...' ('Industry license number...').

236 'Produksi Sinar Padang Record Pasar Raya Padang Blok A Lantai 1 No. 1B Padang Tlp (071) 23168 Sumbar / Jakarta Glodok City AKS 121 Jakarta Tlp (021) 632546 Dapatkan juga lagu-lagu Minang produksi Sinar Padang Record.' Quoted from Sinar Padang's *rabab Pariaman* VCD 'Raun Sabalik: Dendang Panjang' (Vol. 2, 2011) with performers Monen and Mayur.



Figure 4.12: A cassette shop and a sidewalk cassette vendor in Padang (photographs by Suryadi, 2005)

them, especially those born in *rantau*, of their regional musical culture. According to Alimar Ahmad, director of Tanama Record, sales increase during the days of celebration at the end of the fasting month (Idul Fitri or Lebaran). This is a time when many Minangkabau migrants come back to West Sumatra for a visit. Lebaran or Idul Fitri, which runs for one to two weeks, is a special holiday for Minangkabau migrants. As Muslims, their custom is to return to their home village in West Sumatra a few days before the fasting month ends to celebrate Lebaran in the village. Migrants who originate from the same village (*nagari*) may come back in a large group, a practice referred to as *pulang basamo* (literally ‘coming back home together’). Most then return to the *rantau* one or two weeks later. In 2003, for example, more than one million Minangkabau *perantau* journeyed home to celebrate Lebaran in West Sumatra.²³⁷ Minangkabau commercial cassettes and VCDs – *pop Minang* as well as traditional genres – are one of the favourite items taken by Minangkabau migrants from their homeland to the *rantau* for their own consumption (Alimar Ahmad, pers. comm., 8-6-2005).

To distribute and sell their products outside West Sumatra, with Minangkabau migrants as the main target, certain West Sumatran recording companies have established branch outlets. For example, to distribute their products outside Sumatra, two leading recording companies, Tanama Record and Sinar Padang Record, have each opened their own outlet in Jakarta, situated at Jalan Gajah Mada No. 219D and Glodok Harco 2nd Floor, Bloc C, No. 353 respectively. Both shops are located in the Glodok shopping complex of Central Jakarta (Fig. 4.13). Glodok is part of Jakarta’s old town. In the colonial era it was Batavia’s Chinatown. Nowadays Glodok is known as one of Jakarta’s biggest centres for the electronics trade, and the majority of the traders there are of Chinese descent.

According to Ilfan, manager of Sinar Padang Record’s outlet, most of his retail customers are Minangkabau migrants living in Jakarta, while his wholesale customers are retailers mainly from various parts of Jakarta and other towns in Java. Java is important for marketing Minangkabau cassettes and VCDs because of the many Minangkabau migrants that can be found in the provincial and regency towns of the island. Ilfan also mentioned that some people belonging to non-Minangkabau ethnic groups like to buy Minangkabau cassettes. Among these, the most numerous are the Butonese from Southeast Sulawesi and Chinese Indonesians (pers. comm., 16-7-2005). Butonese bought recordings for their own consumption (see Chapter 9), but Chinese seemingly bought them solely for commercial use. From Ilfan I got the information that these Chinese buyers also brought recordings to Malaysia (see more on the Malaysian Chinese business of Minangkabau recording in Malaysia in Chapter 9). Of the more than seven million Minangkabau migrants Indonesia-wide, some three million live in Jakarta. By comparison, there are only 4.2 million people living in the West Sumatra homeland (Kompas, 18-11-2003). Most of the Minangkabau migrants in Jakarta are small and middle traders. This makes the capital of the Republic of Indonesia a large potential market for Minangkabau commercial cassettes.

237 See ‘Sejuta Lebih Perantau Minang di Jawa dan Bali “Pulang Basamo”’, *Kompas*, 18 November 2003.



Figure 4.13: Name boards of wholesale outlets for the products of Tanama Record and Sinar Padang Record situated in Glodok Shopping Complex in Jakarta (photographs by Suryadi, 2005)

Some West Sumatran recording companies cooperate with national companies in the distribution and marketing of their products. For example, Talao Record of Padang partners with the national firm Anastra Record located in Jakarta. Talao Record serves as an agency for distributing Anastra's products in Sumatra, while Anastra Record is licensed to distribute Talao's products in Jakarta and surroundings. The cooperation is only for marketing, not for production.

Minangkabau cassettes, though in small numbers, are offered in many cassette shops in metropolitan towns like Jakarta, Bandung, and Surabaya. They are displayed along with cassettes of national and international genres. A similar situation can be found in many towns in the provinces of Sumatra where Minangkabau migrants dwell. Indonesia's third largest city, Medan, capital of North Sumatra province and homeland of the Batak ethnic group, is one clear example. It has been a multi-ethnic city since its beginnings as a plantation centre built by the Dutch in the 1920s. Since the 1930s it has received large numbers of Minangkabau migrants (as reflected in Hamka's *Merantau ke Deli*, 1939). Nowadays one can easily find Minangkabau commercial cassettes and VCDs in various parts of Medan, especially the Sukaramai district, which is inhabited largely by Minangkabau migrants. In Palembang, the capital of South Sumatra province, the main cassette shop offering Minangkabau cassettes is Toko Gumarang, located at Pasar 16 and at Pasar Burung. Similarly, in other neighbouring provincial and regency towns like Pekanbaru, Bangkinang, Dumai, Jambi, Lubuk Linggau, and Kerinci, Minangkabau cassettes are readily available in shops and from sidewalk vendors.

Minangkabau people in *rantau* can often buy Minangkabau cassettes in 'Padang restaurants' (*restoran Padang* or *rumah makan Padang*, the term is usually used by other ethnic groups in Indonesia to denote a restaurant specializing in Minangkabau cuisine). These are well known all over Indonesia and can be found across the country, a sign of the widespread migration of Minangkabau outside their homeland. In Yogyakarta, for example, several Minangkabau restaurants sell Minangkabau commercial cassettes. There are many other such restaurants in other towns like Medan, Pekanbaru, Palembang, Bandar Lampung, Bandung, and Surabaya, which, besides selling Minangkabau meals, also sell Minangkabau cassettes

and sometimes also books, magazines and newspapers from Padang. Thus, Minangkabau cultural institutions in *rantau* like the Padang restaurants play a role in facilitating the dissemination of Minangkabau cassettes to Minangkabau migrants living outside their homeland. The distribution and marketing of Minangkabau cassettes even reaches the neighbouring country of Malaysia, where many Minangkabau migrants dwell. The reception of Minangkabau commercial cassettes and VCDs by Minangkabau *perantau* outside West Sumatra, including in Malaysia, will be discussed further in Chapter 9.

SURVIVING THE SIEGE OF PIRACY

Commercial recordings of regional music, including Minangkabau cassettes and VCDs, are not immune from piracy. And today many *pop Minang* songs are available on YouTube. Pirated cassettes and VCDs of Minangkabau music have been distributed not only in West Sumatra, but also in *rantau*, even in neighbouring Malaysia. Reaching a level among the highest in the world – 85-95% of music sales in the country are estimated to be pirated – the culture of piracy in Indonesia is as bad as the culture of corruption. The huge Indonesian market remains dominated by retail piracy of all copyrighted materials, whether motion pictures, business software, entertainment software, records and music, or books. The International Intellectual Property Alliance (IIPA) report of 2005 continued to place Indonesia on its priority watch list. The music market in Indonesia is dominated almost completely by pirated CDs, VCDs, and DVDs, and regional markets are flooded with pirated regional VCDs.

The association of regional recording industries estimates that seven of every eight sound recordings on the market are pirated. An increasing number of pirated VCDs on the Indonesian market are produced domestically. Prices for pirated products continue to be unbelievably low; for example, in 2005 at the wholesale market at Harco Glodok, Jakarta, a pirated VCD could be had for Rp 2,000 (roughly US\$ 0.20) without the box (just in a plastic case), and Rp 3,000 (roughly US\$ 0.30) with the box. These exceptionally low prices are part of a ‘price war’ that has erupted among retailers of pirated VCDs. This of course has a negative effect on the legitimate VCD market. Nationally, Tubagus Sadikin Zuchra, head of PAPPRI (Persatuan Artis Penyanyi, Pencipta Lagu dan Penata Musik Rekaman Indonesia, ‘Indonesian Association of Song Singers, Song Composers and Arrangers of Recorded Music’), estimates that the state suffers a financial loss of tax revenue amounting to Rp 11 to 15 trillion per year due to the pirating of music recordings.²³⁸

Pirated Minangkabau VCDs can be found easily among the pirated music recordings offered in Jakarta’s worst hot spots for retail piracy, Mangga Dua, Ratu Plaza, and Harco Glodok Market. In my investigation at Harco Glodok Market in August 2005, I found cassette retailers openly displaying many pirated Minangkabau VCDs for Rp 3,000 each, in a simple plastic case. Characteristics of pirated VCDs: they are in a simple plastic case and decorated with an imitated cover sometimes copied from the original cover, a practice that lowers the price; the names of the singers are often not written on the cover, and of course there is no

238 See ‘Pembajakan Kaset Rugikan Negara Rp.11 Trilyun’, *Kompas*, 30 October 2002.

producer's name, VAT sticker, or other official sticker on the cover. The quality of the pirated VCD covers is often poor. Pirated cassettes can be recognized promptly: the distance between the edge of the copied cover and the edge of its plastic case is quite wide. Figure 4.14 shows the white blank space to the right of a photocopied VCD cover. Besides that, the photocopied cover of a pirated VCD often does not correspond with its content. Many covers show an image of female singers wearing sexy fashions, and sometimes a photograph of Western girls in bikini. This is aimed to attract customers.

As happens with national cassettes and VCDs, it is the best-selling pop Minang albums that pirates tend to copy illegally. Some albums are pirated compilations of top hit songs. Wallach (2008:88) states that 'one advantage the pirated compilations had over legitimate hits collections was that they could combine songs released by different recording companies, since they were not bound by copyright restrictions. Thus, pirated hits compilations were not only cheaper but also more likely to contain every hit song popular at a particular time.'

Though to a certain extent pirating has directly and indirectly helped to popularize Minangkabau music, even among other ethnic groups, West Sumatran recording companies have cooperated with relevant institutions to try to eradicate piracy. Nevertheless, raids under the copyright law rarely lead to effective prosecutions, and almost never result in convictions of pirates or imposition of deterrent sentences; the court system remains largely ineffective. Since 2005 the Indonesian police have increased raids against pirate retail outlets, street vendors, distributors, and production facilities. The raids have been extended to provincial and regency towns, including Padang and other West Sumatran towns. A variety of campaigns have been launched against piracy. For example, Minangkabau music albums may have a song reminding the audience not to buy pirated cassettes or VCDs. The lyrics of such songs mention that by purchasing an original copy of the album, and not a pirated copy, the audience will save (local) artists' careers from possible detriment. This is actually a creative campaign by local singers to combat piracy. Since piracy became rampant in Indonesia, one more word – strangely, an English word – has been added to cassette and VCD covers: 'Original'. With this word consumers are reminded not to buy a pirated copy. Other producers include a warning on the cover such as '*Pembajakan adalah kejahatan. Teliti sebelum membeli!!!! Produk asli selalu dilengkapi dengan stiker PPN dari Dirjen Pajak yang ditempel*' ('Piracy is a crime. Be careful before buying!!!! Original products are always complete with a VAT sticker issued by the Directorate General of Tax which is stuck [to the VCD cover]').

According to Nofi Sastera, head of the West Sumatra branch of PAPPRI, West Sumatra is a potential market for pirated records and music, and the institution he leads has cooperated with ASIRINDO and the police to intensify raids against the trade in pirated records in this province. Nofi states that Minangkabau artists, particularly members of the association he leads, have suffered serious financial losses due to piracy.²³⁹ There is, however, no indication yet that pirate companies have been set up in West Sumatra itself; pirated Minangkabau music albums seem to originate from outside West Sumatra. According to Agus Taher, the

239 See 'Bongkar Mafia Pembajakan', *Padang Ekspres*, 8 April 2006.



Figure 4.14: Front cover of two pirated Minangkabau VCDs, identifiable as pirated especially by the white space to the right of the cover

suspicion is that the production facilities and main distributors of pirated Minangkabau VCDs are situated in Jambi and Jakarta (pers. comm., 14-7-2005).

Piracy is regarded as a cancer in the capitalistic world economic system. Experts like Chesterman and Lipman (1988) and Coombe (1998) have summed up piracy's negative effects as criminality and erosion of property rights, and its function as a pathology of information processing, parasitically reducing legal media flows. World-wide, no government has been wholly successful in eradicating piracy, because piracy develops its own structures of reproduction and distribution, both external and internal to the state economy. In the case of Indonesia, piracy is especially difficult to combat because members of the state bureaucracy and the police are also involved, for example by receiving bribes from the pirates.

Though the Indonesian government enacted its own copyright law in 1982, which was revised in 1997, to protect the copyright on music, lyrics, performances, broadcasts and other creative expressions (Tunggal and Tunggal 1997), its implementation seems not to have been effective at the national level, and even less so regionally. In practice, Indonesian regional song composers' compositions are easily pirated, nationally and internationally, and there is no adequate legal protection for them. The production and trading of Minangkabau music recordings in Malaysia is an example of the international extension of the piracy of Minangkabau cassettes: dozens of Malaysian recording companies have reproduced Minangkabau music VCDs illegally. They did not seek permission from or notify the producers of these albums in West Sumatra and never pay royalties on the albums they have pirated. The Malaysian government legalizes distribution and trading of these pirated Minangkabau music VCDs throughout the country by permitting a legal distribution sticker to be placed on every copy of these albums. In the words of Andria Adhan, one of the Minangkabau singers whose albums have been pirated in Malaysia, this is an example of the legalization of music piracy by the state. He says Indonesia's law on property rights is unable to restrain this action (pers. comm., 10-12-2005). Likewise, international law on property rights seems mostly concerned with the violation of Western property rights by developing countries. International organizations

reporting on property rights are similarly focused on the violation of Western property rights internationally. The report on piracy in Indonesia released by the International Intellectual Property Alliance (IIPA), for example, quantifies the violation of American property rights in the country, while not touching at all on violation of Indonesian property rights by other countries. United States authorities consider Indonesia a net importer of intellectual property. Indonesia has been accused of being the world's number one exporter of pirated audio and video recordings (Uphoff 1991:27).

Although Indonesia has two legal instructions dealing with intellectual property, the 2002 copyright law and the Intellectual Property Protection and Use of Traditional Knowledge and Traditional Cultural Expressions,²⁴⁰ they have not been able to protect and defend the rights of traditional performers across the country. Indonesia also has national organizations interested in property rights like YKCI (Yayasan Karya Cipta Indonesia, 'Indonesian Foundation of Creative Works'). But YKCI tends to focus only on national-level song composers and artists rather than regional ones. Regional music practitioners often express their complaint in the media that the YKCI does not concern itself with the fate of regional music practitioners. The YKCI, founded by artists, art critics, and government officials in 1990, is concerned with pop music, and also concentrates on the performing rights of artists other than musicians, like actors and dancers. The YKCI is a non-profit organization, but used thirty contributions it received to cover administration costs (Jurriëns 2004:73).

Though the YKCI ideally covers both national and regional arts workers, as the use of the word 'Indonesia' in its title would suggest, in fact it does not help regional composers and artists; rather it works for the interests of composers and artists in the capital Jakarta and a few other major towns in Java. YKCI does no work in other islands, which are more difficult to access, and Minangkabau song composers complain that it is difficult for them to become YKCI members.²⁴¹ Up to the present, YKCI still has no branch in West Sumatra. As an alternative, West Sumatran recording industry practitioners fend for themselves in combating piracy.

To ensure the survival of the West Sumatran recording industry, producers under ASIRINDO have actively organized campaigns and actions to combat piracy. They have cooperated with police and other organizations to conduct *razia anti bajak* ('anti-piracy raids'). In November 2010 H. Musfar St. Pamuncak, acting head of ASIRINDO, released a circular letter (*surat edaran*) to all cassette and VCD shops and retailers in which he appealed to them not to sell pirated Minangkabau cassettes and VCDs. The circular letter also states that as of 1 November 2000 the price of VCD-ekonomi was raised, becoming Rp 12,000 (roughly US\$ 1.30), due to increasing production costs.

To a certain extent, the circular letter suggests how practitioners of the local recording industry view piracy. For ASIRINDO the recordings that most need to be protected from pirates

240 See Aragon and Leach 2008 for an extensive analysis of these documents.

241 See 'Seniman daerah pencipta lagu-lagu Minang mengeluhkan sulitnya menjadi anggota Yayasan Karya Cipta Indonesia [YKCI]', *Kompas*, 7 March 2000.

are the KI (Karya Indonesia, 'Indonesian creations'), meaning recordings of Minangkabau and other regions in Indonesia, as well as national recordings. Regional and national products should have priority in being protected. Pirated cassettes and VCDs of foreign works seem to be excluded from ASIRINDO's concern.

CONCLUSION

Emerging in the early 1970s, following the political and economic recovery of Sumatra from the PRRI civil war in the previous decade, the West Sumatran recording industry continued to show significant development into the 2000s, supported by three generations of singers, musicians, and song composers, while producers increased in number. Early contenders among the producers have survived for four decades, challenged by many new competitors appearing since the 1980s. These commercial cassette and VCD producers are no longer concentrated in the capital of West Sumatra, Padang, but have spread to district towns. Likewise, the products of the West Sumatran recording industry have been marketed not only in the homeland but also in *rantau*.

Closely linked to Minangkabau ethnicity, the West Sumatran recording industry is mostly in the hands of Minangkabau practitioners. Among the singers, however, surrounding ethnicities are represented as well, indicating that the West Sumatran recording industry has become a hub that attracts other ethnic groups. Similarly, pop music albums of some neighbouring ethnic groups have been produced by West Sumatran recording companies.

West Sumatran recording companies are categorized as small-scale businesses (*industri kecil*) and are more strongly influenced by local factors than by national or global ones. The Minangkabau ethnic identity is not only translated into products that include commercial recordings of *pop Minang*, Minangkabau verbal arts, and media-bound Minangkabau genres, but also used in the distributing and marketing of these products in the homeland (West Sumatra) as well as in *rantau*. Producers play the dominant role in the industry: they control the singers, the musicians, and the song composers, as reflected in the *jua putuih* ('outright sale') contract system by which singers are required to transfer full rights to the producer to reproduce their albums without any obligation to pay additional royalties.

Like other regional recording industries, the West Sumatran recording industry has a clearly defined group of consumers – those of Minangkabau ethnicity – even though its products may also be popular with people from other ethnic groups. Due to their well-defined ethnic base of consumers and because they are more independent in terms of capital, West Sumatran recording companies are more autonomous than their national counterparts. This has enabled them to show a stronger resilience in the face of economic fluctuations and to survive in spite of the invasion of pirated cassettes and VCDs.

In the next chapter I will discuss the main product of the West Sumatran recording industry: *pop Minang*. How and when did *pop Minang* emerge? How has it developed since the 1970s and what fundamental aspects have changed? How do we interpret the physical

and non-physical aspects of this major product of the West Sumatran recording industry to understand the cultural dynamics of Minangkabau ethnicity during the last decades of the twentieth and the early decades of the twenty-first century? These considerations will be examined in depth in the following chapter.