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

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Citation
Suryadi,. (2014, December 16). *The recording industry and 'regional' culture in Indonesia : the case of Minangkabau*. Faculty of the Humanities, Leiden University. Retrieved from https://hdl.handle.net/1887/30115

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Author: Suryadi
Title: The recording industry and 'regional' culture in Indonesia : the case of Minangkabau
Issue Date: 2014-12-16

Chapter 5

Pop Minang: its features and sociological aspects

This chapter looks at the cultural position, functions, and meanings of *pop Minang*, the foremost product of the West Sumatran recording industry, in the context of Minangkabau music and ethnicity.[242] I try to comprehend the characteristics of *pop Minang* by looking at three aspects: its linguistic and aesthetic elements, the history of its emergence, and the surrounding discourses. I seek to demonstrate what the aesthetic characteristics of *pop Minang* are, and how these characteristics have transformed due to social changes in Minangkabau society. From the historical review we want to learn when the genre emerged, why and how? While by analysing the surrounding discourses the aim is to comprehend what cultural function *pop Minang* has and what its meaning is for the Minangkabau ethnic community. I argue that *pop Minang*, like pop culture in general, is an arena of cultural struggle, 'the arena of consent and resistance', to borrow the words of Stuart Hall (1981:239), through which the contestation between modernity and authenticity continually draws attention to ethnic identity. Most publicly accessible and widely disseminated, *pop Minang* cassettes and VCDs increase agency by presenting powerful Minangkabau encodings of the problematic and complex world people face today.

Pop Minang has been scrutinized by Bart Barendregt in his article 'The Sound of "Longing for Home": Redefining a Sense of Community through Minang Popular Music' (2002) in which he describes the development of *pop Minang* and the sense of Minangness expressed in its aesthetic elements. He also discusses the extensive mediation of *pop Minang* from locally embedded music to mass-mediated regional music and its effects on the Minangkabau community as a whole, both in the homeland and in *rantau*. But it is not my intention, nor is it the aim of this chapter, to repeat Barendregt's article. Rather this chapter goes beyond the points he discusses, shedding new light on some relatively unexplored areas. I follow the aesthetic development of *pop Minang* since the 1950s up to 2006 and the Minangkabau community's responses, by summing up public comments, discussions and debates that appeared in local media and other lively public discussions. Beyond examining the pop music phenomenon in a regional context, I also want to look at what are the influences that have shaped *pop Minang*. I will also discuss *pop Minang* cassette and VCD covers, which did not get much attention from Barendregt, and I provide cultural interpretations for them.

Pop Minang: a cultural definition

In the field of Indonesian music, *pop Minang* is categorized as *pop daerah* ('regional pop'), while *pop daerah* in turn is classified as a type of regional music (*musik daerah*), 'a catch-all category

242 This chapter is partly based on Suryadi 2003.

that includes every style of music sung in regional languages, from the most westernized pop to the most stable indigenous performance tradition' (Wallach 2008:34). *Pop daerah* is 'the label given to music in regional language or dialect that contains non-traditional elements' (Wallach 2008:21). *Pop Minang* is a type of Indonesian *pop daerah* that refers to non-traditional regional music associated with Minangkabau-speaking communities. It includes some genres or subgenres which are innovative and which selectively adopt elements of global music. In other words, *pop Minang* is a term that refers to a mixture of traditional Minangkabau music or verbal arts and national or foreign musical influences, with song lyrics in the Minangkabau language written by local songwriters and sung primarily by local vocalists. Language is the main differentiating factor here: *pop Minang* lyrics are by definition in the Minangkabau language, though its music and melodies might adopt elements of foreign music.

The term *pop Minang* itself indicates that there is something new and modern in its features, whereas this genre of music is categorized as a *budaya daerah* repertoire, which is associated with conventionality or something that is traditional. So, by helping to build agency, *pop Minang* supports cultural progress and modernity in a local context without a loss of local colour. But its aesthetic aspects and musical syntax, including rhythm, melody, tempo, and formal structure, differ from traditional Minangkabau music genres. The composers of *pop Minang* songs are certainly known, whereas the composers of traditional genres are anonymous. Each occupy different language domains: the traditional Minangkabau verbal arts genres (Chapter 6) tend to use local Minangkabau dialects, while Minangkabau popular genres tend to use the dialect that is regarded as the most common one, called by some linguists Bahasa Minangkabau Umum (General Minangkabau). It is used for communication among speakers across dialects in major Minangkabau towns like Padang and Bukittinggi (Arifin 1980; Nadra 2003). Whereas devout Muslims favour genres like *qasidah* or *gambus*, which have long been known in Minangkabau because its people are adherents of Islam, such genres have never been considered part of *pop Minang*. Since its beginnings, one hallmark of *pop Minang* is its novelty, as I will describe in the following section.

Pop Minang: born in Rantau, growing in the homeland

Pop Minang originated in *rantau*, especially Jakarta, by Minangkabau migrants. It was associated with the Orkes Gumarang, which was founded in 1953 by some young Minangkabau *perantau* in Jakarta. They were Alidir, Anwar Anief, Dhira Suhud, Joeswar Khairudin, Taufik, Syaiful Nawas, and Awaluddin Djamin (the latter later became head of the Indonesian Police, 1978–1982). Orkes Gumarang became famous when it was led by Asbon Madjid (Fig. 5.1).[243] Born in Sibolga on 8 May 1926 to a Minangkabau migrant couple, Asbon was familiar with musical instruments before he was twelve years old. He was active in 'Smiling Hawaiian' music in Padang in the 1940s, which made tours to several towns in North Sumatra, and he played in the army music corps in West Sumatra during the Japanese occupation (1942–1945) before migrating to Jakarta and joining the Gumarang band (Sardono *et al.* 1983:160). Through

243 Asbon led Orkes Gumarang starting in May 1955. Before that it was led by Anwar Anief and by Alidir (Madjid 1997:xviii). Gumarang's performers are Nurseha, Sjaiful Nawas, Dhira Suhud, Anas Yusuf and his wife Ingrid Michel from Germany, Asbon Madjid (as head), and guest star Elly Kasim (Madjid 1997:xix).

Gumarang, Asbon Madjid pioneered in synthesizing the elements of Latin American music with Minangkabau music. Thus, the musical colour and rhythm were a synthesis of traditional Sumatran music like Minangkabau *gamad* and Malay *joged* beats and Latin America's beguine, rumba, mambo, and cha-cha-cha (Barendregt 2002:424).

Gumarang's music rhythm was strongly influenced by the beat of Latin American songs like 'Melody d'Amour', 'Besame Mucho', 'Cachito', 'Maria Elena', and 'Quizas, Quizas, Quizas'. Performing such synthesized music in Minangkabau-language *lagu Melayu* (songs using Minangkabau language but cheerful Malay melodies), Gumarang specially emphasized the percussive element through the use of maracas, piano, guitar, bass *betot* (stand-up bass), and bongo drums along with Minangkabau traditional musical instruments like idiophones *talempong*, aerophones *saluang* and *bansi*, chordophones *rabab*, and membranophones *gandang*. The *rantau* was definitely a good place for experimenting with ethnic music, as was done by Gumarang performers and those of other music groups formed by Minangkabau migrants. The *rantau*, which is associated with modernity, offers cultural, aesthetic, and ideological aspects that are unavailable in traditional customs in the homeland. The *rantau*, where people from different ethnic groups and races dwell, was a suitable place for launching innovations in ethnic music brought from the homeland (West Sumatra).

By 1956 Orkes Gumarang's songs began to be recorded on gramophone disc by National Recording Company Lokananta, followed by private companies like Remaco Record, Mesra Record, Suara Mas Record, Dimita Record, Indah Record, Perindu Record, and Irama Record (Madjid 1997:xvii), making this band nationally famous. Gumarang's album *Kampuang Nan Djauah di Mato* ('My distant village'), produced by Irama Record, became a hit and further popularized the name of the band. Other Gumarang songs then became hits and rocked the country, among others 'Urang Talu', 'Laruik Sanjo', and 'Upiak lah Gadang'. Gumarang's beautiful female singer Nurseha was a strong symbol of this band (Fig. 5.1). In 1958 her name shot to the top after the song 'Ayam den Lapeh' sung by her and released by Irama Record became a hit. 'Along with Gumarang, her voice dominated the musical scene, boosting the popularity of Minang songs to the top, while also shaping the appreciation of regional music throughout the country' (Sardono *et al*. 1983:161). Gumarang, whose name is taken from a magic horse in the Minangkabau oral story (*kaba*) *Cindua Mato* (see Toorn 1886; Abdullah 1970), is credited with introducing Minangkabau songs throughout Indonesia and neighbouring Malaysia. The personnel of this orchestra were sent abroad by the Indonesian government to participate in Indonesian cultural events, including the New York World's Fair in 1964 and the EXPO Fair in Osaka, Japan, in 1970 (Madjid 1997:xix-xx). Orkes Gumarang is still remembered with fondness by the older generation of Minangkabau. Its national achievements and popularity are proudly remembered by Minangkabau people of all ages.

Besides Gumarang, there were four other *rantau*-based bands that contributed to the hybridization of Minangkabau music in the 1950s and 1960s, namely Orkes Sjaiful Bahri (founded 1951) led by Sjaiful Bahri, Orkes Taruna Ria (founded 1959) led by Oslan Husein, Orkes Zaenal Combo led by Zaenal Arifin, and Orkes Kumbang Tjari founded in 1961 by Nuskan Sjarif. These music groups retain their 'Andalas style' (*tjorak Andalas*), meaning

Figure 5.1: Singer Asbon Madjid and Nurseha (Sources: Sardono *et al.* 1983; Madjid 1997)

the Minangkabau musical characteristics.[244] Decades later, *pop Minang* songs were played predominantly in 4/4 metre, often with a typical counterbeat, while their melodies were largely adapted from a vast repertoire of traditional songs with free improvisations and extra ornamentation (*bungo*). These music groups became famous not only among Minangkabau people but also nationally. Gumarang was the prominent one among them. It became the pride of Minangkabau communities, both in *rantau* and in the homeland.

In fact, there had been other music groups started by Minangkabau *perantau* prior to the generation of the legendary Gumarang. For example, in the 1930s and 1940s 'Oostersche uitzendingen' ('Oriental broadcast') programs of NIROM for West Java headquartered in Bandung broadcast the performances of a Minangkabau Orkes called Penghiboer Hati, led by St. Perang Boestami. The singers in this musical group included M. Siti Soelastri alias Siti (Ni) Soeltje (daughter of M. Soemarta Atmadja from Bantam/Banten), Oetika, and Meni.[245] Penghiboer Hati was considered pioneering modern Minangkabau songs.[246] By 1942, following the Japanese occupation of Java, the Indonesian-language Radio Bandung had programs of Minangkabau music sung by another Minangkabau band called Sri Minang led by St. Sjariff.[247] Another Minangkabau music group whose songs were broadcast by this radio station was Orkes Minang Saijo led by Rozen Bahar. There was yet another Minang music band, called Sinar Sumatra (Thio 1939a). In its programs the radio station used the terms *lagu-lagu Minang modern* ('modern Minangkabau songs') and *lagu-lagu Minang aseli* ('traditional Minangkabau songs').[248] No further information is available on how the

244 'Tjorak Andalas' yang disusun 'selalu "ber-dendang2" membawa pada kita kenangan pada suasana tari pajung dan tari piring atau kaparinjo. Lagu2 gubahan dan musik susunannja dikenal sebagai modernisasi musik Minangkabau' ('Orkes Sjaiful Bahri', *Garuda*, No. 40, 7 January 1951, p. 12). Andalas is another name for the island of Sumatra.

245 *De NIROM-Bode*, 1 April 1939; *Tjahaja*, 13 January 1943.

246 'Orkes Gumarang yang dikenang", *Kinantan*, Edisi 04, Juli 1995: 12-13.

247 Information found in the vernacular press shows that during the Japanese occupation Minangkabau songs were broadcast by radio stations in major Javanese cities like Bandung, Jakarta, Yogyakarta, and Surabaya. See for example 'Siaran radio' in *Pembangoen* (Jakarta) 24 September 1943, p. 4.; *Sinar Matahari* (Yogyakarta), 11 October 1943, p. 2; *Poestaka Radio* (Surabaya), 1 March 1944, p. 24.

248 Information in this paragraph is drawn from the Bandung daily *Tjahaja*, especially August and September 1942 editions, in the column 'Programm Siaran Radio Indonesia'. Yampolsky (2014:65) mentions in 1938, VORO

songs were broadcast, but apparently the bands performed live in studio and were directly broadcast. It was common at that time that radio stations broadcast live as well as recorded music (Yampolsky 2014:49). Among the NIROM and PHOHI (Philips Omroep Holland-Indië 'Philips Broadcasting in the Dutch Indies') programs at that time was what was called 'muziek gramofoon' or 'Lagoe gramophoon'.[249] Minangkabau songs were broadcast by Radio Bandung because there was a large audience of Minangkabau migrants living in Bandung. Since the early 1900s Batavia (Jakarta) and Bandung have been the favourite destinations of Minangkabau migrants moving to Java.[250] I could find no evidence on where the Minangkabau music groups Orkes Minangkabau and Orkes Minang Saijo came from, but I believe they, like the Jakarta-based Gumarang, Taruna Ria, and Kumbang Tjari, were music groups established by Minangkabau migrants in Java. Similar music groups were established by Minangkabau migrants in Medan (Yampolsky 1987), the most developed city in Sumatra where pop culture had grown significantly since the 1930s. Minangkabau migrants in Jakarta and other *rantau* locations actively performed and promoted Minangkabau music at various events.[251] This shows the important role played by Minangkabau migrants in *rantau* in the first half of the twentieth century in modernizing Minangkabau music that, facilitated by gramophone disc technology, planted the seed of *pop Minang*.

In the mid 1970s, during the early years of cassette consumption in Indonesia, *pop Minang* began to grow in its own homeland. It developed significantly during the following decades, facilitated by the West Sumatran recording industry, which initially arose in West Sumatra following the socio-political and economic recovery of the region after the bloody PRRI civil war. During the 1980s, *pop Minang* development vastly accelerated, which was crucial for the expansion of Minangkabau pop music in the following decades. Not only did the numbers of musicians, singers, and producers increase explosively, but the genre diversified and its musical aesthetics were enriched. As a consequence, the quantity of *pop Minang* songs increased, which in turn encouraged the emergence of new styles in terms of musical syntax. It can be concluded that the West Sumatran music industry did not just respond passively to an emerging popular demand for a new genre, but actively participated in stimulating this demand in order to exploit the potential of the new medium and the new genre. So the popularization of Minangkabau music had consequences both aesthetic and sociological.

The above historical review suggests that the origin of *pop Minang* was the innovation of Minangkabau music by Minangkabau *perantau* living outside the homeland, which led to the music becoming popular publicly thanks to gramophone disc technology facilitated by earlier

(Vereeniging voor Oostersche Omroep, 'Association for Eastern Broadcasting') in Batavia also broadcast '*lagoe-lagoe Minangkabau aseli*' ('old-style Minangkabau music') performed by the perkoempoelan A.S.A. under the direction of Tamimi gelar Soetan Roemah Tinggi, which was intended to the Minangkabau migrants in Batavia.

249 See 'Siaran radio' column in *Sinar Sumatra*, 2 Juli 1935; *De NIROM-Bode*, 1 April 1939; 'Penjiaran radio' column in *Pemandangan*, 14 May 1937 and subsequent dates.

250 In 1942 there were some 100 Sumatran youth (*pemuda Sumatra*) living in Bandung (*Tjahaja*, 9 September 1942); among them, it is believed, were Minangkabau.

251 See for example the activity of a group named Pantjaran Kesenian Minangkabau in Jakarta in 1943. To celebrate Ied (Lebaran) at the end of 1943, the group performed Minangkabau art (*kesenian Minangkabau*) in an orphanage house in the Kramat district of Jakarta (see *Pembangoen*, 12 October 1943, p. 3).

national recording companies as described in Chapter 3. After germinating in Jakarta, this music was brought to its homeland in West Sumatra in the 1970s, where the genre acquired its label *pop Minang*. Its existence continued to be supported by the successors of the gramophone disc.

Pop Minang as an assortment of genres and subgenres

As a broadly defined genre of popular music with lyrics in the Minangkabau language, *pop Minang* is not at all homogeneous in terms of aesthetics. Rather, it contains several genres and subgenres. Among the different genres of *pop Minang* are *gamad*[252] and *kim*. *Gamad* is a genre unique to Padang that has adopted many elements of overseas music. It was a product of the urban culture that emerged in Padang in the late 1800s.[253] In its hybrid character it is similar to the national music called *keroncong*. Like *keroncong*, *gamad* was reputedly brought to the west coast of Sumatra by the Portuguese. Accompanied predominantly by Western musical instruments such as saxophone, guitar, violin, accordion, and *ketipung* (a small drum adopted from India), *gamad* also incorporates elements drawn from the Indian (*Keling*), Niasan, and Minangkabau communities in the port of Padang. The Niasans contributed to the genre a special dance brought from their home island (Nias), namely *balanse madam*, often performed with *gamad* music. It can be said that the genre is a historical footprint of urban culture generated in the late nineteenth century by the multi-ethnic society that existed in Padang, the most important seaport on the west coast of Sumatra.

A favourite among the older generations, *gamad* always has a duet between a male and a female singer, who follow Islamic requirements by avoiding physically touching each other. Its song lyrics are mostly composed in allegoric and metaphoric *pantun* verses, and tend to be romantic and nostalgic in character. Some songs are melancholy, while other songs are

Figure 5.2: Cover of a *gamad* VCD

252 Minangkabau people pronounce it *gamaik*.

253 See 'Gamaik, Musik akulturasi Barat dan Minang', Kompas (24 January 2001); Anatona 2003.

cheerful. As an example, the following transcription of a *gamad* song represents the sad feelings of a girl who is left behind by her sweetheart who found another girl in *rantau*. The song is 'Rosmani' (a girl's name) sung by Rosnida YS on her VCD album *Aneka Gamad Millenium 2* (Sinar Padang Record, 2005).

Ujuang Tanah aianyo dareh,	Ujung Tanah has a river with huge water,
Daulunyo tapian mandi,	It was once a bathing place,
Maso di kampuang janji diikek,	When we were still in the village we pledged allegiance,
Manga di rantau kasiah bajadi? (2x)	But why did you fall in love again in *rantau*?
Rami urang pai ka pakan,	Many people go to market,
Pulang baliak di hari sanjo,	Back home at sunset,
Jikoknyo tau Uda ko anggan,	If you dislike me now, dear,
Eloklah denai mailak sajo. (2x)	I would be better off avoiding you.
Jodoh bana nan indak ado,	It is not our destiny to be paired with each other,
Bakeh cinto kito baduo,	For uniting our love,
Di hati lai apo ka dayo,	I love you deep in my heart but I am powerless,
Marano badan kasudahannyo. (2x)	I am suffering at the end.
Paik pariyo alah diraso,	I have tasted how bitter momordica is,
Indak sapaik raso ampadu,	yet less bitter than bile,
Sakik bacinto alah dicubo,	I have felt how painful a broken heart is,
Sakik ndak ado tampek mangadu. (2x)	A pain I can share with no one.

Gamad VCD covers and clips always show the singers wearing traditional fashions (Fig. 5.2). The performance of *gamad* tends to be presented in duet with a romantic shade: the male and female singers sing with slow dances and flirt with each other (sometimes waving a handkerchief in their hands as a symbol of flirting). Some recent *gamad* VCDs show clips presenting singers and dancers with a background of landscapes of Minangkabau nature like beaches and parks around Padang. The most famous *gamad* songs are 'Kaparinyo', 'Sarunai Aceh', and 'Perak-Perak'. The *gamad* singers – the famous ones among them are Yan Juneid, Rustam Raschani (who is blind; Fig. 5.2), and Rosnida YS – are not accustomed to sing other genres of *pop Minang*.

Kim is a combination of game and song. Therefore the genre is called *main kim* ('playing *kim*'; Fig. 5.3). Introduced first in coastal Padang and Pariaman, *kim* proceeded to become famous throughout Minangkabau, even in *rantau*. When Minangkabau *perantau* hold parties in *rantau*, *kim* is a favourite type of music to enliven such parties. Usually performed in the evening, *kim* is also performed at weddings and various other festivities. The genre has a faster rhythm and cheerful character, but it does not require dance. Such a game-music performance provides prizes for the audience, like radios, kerosene pressure lanterns, and bicycles, even motorcycles (Fig. 5.3). *Kim* is performed at night. The spectators are both male and female.

Figure 5.3: Commercial disc, cassette, and VCD covers of *kim* game music

It is not clear where the word *kim* originated. The game is similar to the European *bingo* game but I have found no evidence that *kim* was inspired by *bingo*. According to the singer and song composer Edi Cotok, *kim* is an acronym of Kesenian Irama Minang (Minangkabau rhythm art). Some people of the post-independence generation whom I interviewed recalled that *kim* emerged in the 1960s and was initially *pantun*-style songs without accompaniment by musical instruments. Later musical instruments were added. In becoming popular among the ethnic Chinese communities of Medan and Padang, *kim* was further transformed into game music. It is interesting to note that the Chinese involvement in this music genre is expressed in songs that imitate Chinese melodies. When the singers sing these songs, they also imitate the sounds of the Chinese language. It is not surprising, therefore, that some early *kim* albums

contain songs about Chinese gamblers, such as a song entitled 'Tan A. Kong' (see Fig. 5.3). But *kim* songs usually contain humorous elements, which are presented in the lyrics or the melodies by imitating Hindustani/Indian or Chinese music melodies. In the 1970s *kim* was popularized in Jakarta by a hotel businessman from Minangkabau named Ilham Rajo Bintang, who presented a performance of *kim* at the Jakarta Fair. Hence the audience supposed he was the founder of the genre, as reflected in the lyrics of Nedi Gampo's song 'Kaleng Kuncang' ('Shaking the tube'): '*Kim* game, the entertainment of Minangkabau people, founded by Mr. [Ilham] Rajo Bintang'[254]. Nowadays *kim* is a favourite genre among Minangkabau *perantau* in various cities outside West Sumatra. As prizes are provided and *kim* is always performed in the evening, some groups in Minangkabau society, especially those with religious labels, look upon *kim* as being associated with gambling. Hence *kim* acquired a negative stigma as gambling music. But others state that *kim* is just a form of public entertainment: '*Kim* is not gaming and gambling, *kim* is just for treating worried hearts'[255], says the singer Nedi Gampo.

In live performances of *kim*, the songs are usually sung by a solo singer (often male), accompanied by digital keyboard. Some commercial VCDs of *kim* produced by Sinar Padang Record and Gita Virma Record seem to have been recorded from live performances, suggesting that 'live performance now incorporates the technology of reproduction [and the way] in which mediatization impinges upon live [musical] events' (Auslander 1999:158). The singer sings while shaking a tube containing a kind of dice (Fig. 5.3). The audience hold papers with numbers that are in blocks. These papers are distributed to the audience before the performance begins. The singer takes out one of the dice and calls out the number written on it by singing. The spectator must circle or mark a cross on the number mentioned by the singer. A spectator who has the numbers in one block matching those already mentioned by the singer will come out as the winner. One will win a prize if getting five numbers in a horizontal line which match those mentioned by the singer (Fig. 5.4). The winner will receive a prize directly, and then the singer will move on to another song.

The main source of *kim* song lyrics is Minangkabau *pantun*. The singer can make various improvisations following the melody of the song being sung. Whatever *kim* songs, *pantun* is their basis. *Pantun* in *kim* songs are mostly full of jokes and humour. When the singer takes a numbered dice from the tube, he (or she) will directly insert that number in the *pantun* verse he is singing by spontaneously composing a line whose end rhyme is adjusted to the end rhyme of other lines of the verse. This can be seen in the transcription below of the *kim* 'Dendang Lamo' ('Classic chanting'). The underlined parts of the lyrics refer to the numbers of the dice taken by the singer from the tube.

254 'Main kim hiburan urang Minang, Ciptaan Pak [Ilham] Rajo Bintang', quoted from Nedi Gampo, *Kaleng Kuncang, Nedi Gampo Bandendang; Album Kim Terbaru* (VCD karaoke) (Padang: Gita Virma Record, 2012): song no. 1: 'Kaleng Kuncang'.

255 'Kim kim kim bukan ampok bukan judi; Kim kim kim paubek rusuah hati', quoted from Nedi Gampo, *Kaleng Kuncang, Nedi Gampo Bandendang; Album Kim Terbaru* (VCD karaoke) (Padang: Gita Virma Record, 2012): song no. 1: 'Kaleng Kuncang'.

Layang-layang batali banang,
Banang datang nan dari Baso,
Lah sudah buah diguncang,
Hati-hati Mamak manjago.

Babiduak badayuang sampan,
Lah pasai dilamun ombak,
Dima indak ka kuruih badan,
Adiak sayang cowoknyo banyak.

Tujuah puluah lapan angkonyo,
Hati-hati Sanak manjago,
Ganefo nan di Jakarta,
Anam puluah tigo kalua.

Tanang-tanang riak Siboga,
Kapa marapek ka muaro,
Pasanang hati urang tingga,
Kami bajalan jo untuangnyo,

Parapat di Danau Toba,
Ampek puluah duo jan tingga,
Duo hari kurang sabulan,
Cari duo puluah salapan.
[...][256]

Kite has thread
Thread came from Baso,
After the dice was shaken,
Maternal uncle, be careful to guard it.

Go boating, rowing dugout,
Misery overwhelmed by waves,
How could my body not be skinny,
My dear sweetheart has many boyfriends.

78 is its number,
Friends, be careful to guard it,
Ganefo was launched [by President Soekarno] in Jakarta,
Number 23 appears.

Sibolga sea is calm,
Ships dock in estuary,
Be glad those who left,
We go away bringing our destiny.

Prapat in Lake Toba,
Number 40, do not forget;
Two days short of a month,
Seek number 28.

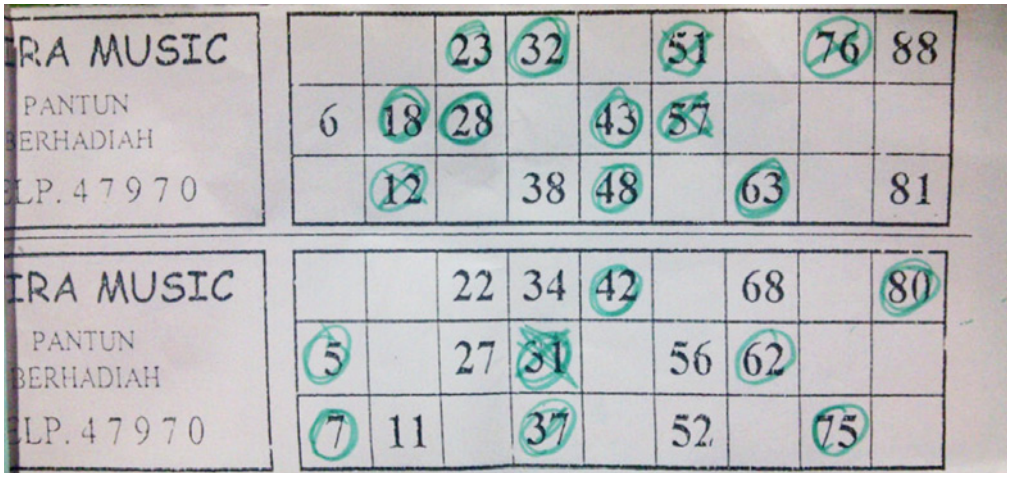

Figure 5.4: Piece of paper with numbers in blocks held by *kim* spectators at a live performance (Source: live performance of *kim* on the 52nd birthday anniversary of Minangkabau businessman Basrizal Koto in Pekanbaru, capital of Riau province, on 10 October 2011; photograph by Eko Yanche Edrie, 2011)

256 Transcribed from http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8h4O1BE30_U (accessed 14-6-2011).

Kim commercial recordings have been made since the gramophone era. One of them was produced by Mesra Record in Jakarta with the singer Elly Kasim (Fig. 5.3). *Kim* music is recorded outside the studio, because its songs need audience participation, hence it is impossible to make the recording in a studio. The company that has most often produced *kim* commercial recordings is Sinar Padang Record. In the late 1970s it produced two volumes of *kim* cassettes with the singer Mans Anur (Fig. 5.3). A new *kim* VCD produced by Sinar Padang Record appeared in 2005 with the singer S. Effendi Koto (Fig. 5.3). As written on the cover of this VCD, *kim* is identified as 'Pantun & Lagu' ('verse and song'), meaning the songs are totally composed in *pantun* (verse) form. The clips of this VCD show that the concert was conducted in the yard of Haji Yuskal's house, the owner of Sinar Padang Record, in the Simpang Haru district of Padang. The concert was held in the evening and directly recorded by Sinar Padang Record, which then appeared in cassette and VCD formats.

Elements of Minangkabau traditional verbal arts genres like *rabab Pariaman*, *rabab Pesisir Selatan* and *saluang jo dendang* (literally 'flute with song') or *bagurau* ('jollity') have certainly long been incorporated in *pop Minang*, and these traditional genres are the source of the tone of sorrow and misery that have come to characterize *pop Minang*. Jennifer Fraser's recent study of the representation of the powerful earthquakes that rocked West Sumatra in 2009 on Minangkabau music videos (2012) shows how local VCD producers used the mournful sound of the *saluang* to represent the severe suffering experienced by Minangkabau people due to the catastrophic disaster. *Pop Minang* thus accommodates a wide variety of musical experiments in the context of Minangkabau ethnicity. Not only different musical forms are combined, but also many songs are recycled and reproduced. 'A given song will be introduced by one singer and then imitated or reinterpreted by others; a given singer will produce a number of albums within one genre and then branch out to another genre; a successful song or composition will be translated into new genres or idioms' (Yampolsky 1995:717). Listening to *pop Minang* music, one can recognize adopted or recycled aspects of Malay music, *dangdut*, Indian music, rap, reggae, house – but not Islamic music – whether in the melody, the rhythm, or the sound of musical instruments.

As a cultural expression, *pop Minang* reaches other aspects of Minangkabau society, including local politics. As can be found in a national context, political albums under a *pop Minang* label have appeared in West Sumatra. For example, we can find the VCD entitled *Membangun Padang Piaman* ('Develop Padang Pariaman [regency]') produced by Pemda Kabupaten Padang Pariaman ('Local Government of Padang Pariaman Regency'). The making of this album was sponsored by the former regent (*bupati*) of Padang Pariaman regency, Muslim Kasim, who now holds the post of Vice Governor of West Sumatra (Fig. 5.5). Muslim Kasim also appears as the singer on another VCD entitled *Dendang Salingka Nagari: PKDP*[257] ('Chanting about all the villages: the Union of Padang Pariaman Families'). Produced by Tanama Record in cooperation with the Pariaman regency government, *Dendang Salingka*

257 PKDP is the abbreviation of Persatuan Keluarga Padang Pariaman ('Union of Padang Pariaman Families'). It was established in Pariaman on 29 April 1984. This union is an association of Minangkabau migrants from Padang Pariaman who live in *rantau*. It has branches in several towns in Indonesia, also in Malaysia's capital Kuala Lumpur.

Nagari contains political messages in which Muslim Kasim's administration promotes Padang Pariaman as a tourist destination and calls on Padang Pariaman migrants to participate (*sato sakaki*) in developing their home villages.

In 2013 the candidate for mayor of Padang, Desri Ayunda, released an album in VCD format entitled *Rindu Bapusarokan* ('Yearning for a lost love'). It is obvious that the album was intended to attract prospective voters so that he could win the race to become Padang mayor for

Figure 5.5: VCD covers of political albums dealing with Padang Pariaman regency and Padang municipality. The cover conspicuously exhibits the politician who financed the production of the album.

2014–2019. Produced in Ayunda's own name, the album cover is full of his political messages, like the motto of his political campaign, 'Peduli dan profesional' ('Care and professional'), and the main program of his political party, 'Terwujudnya kota Padang yang religius dan berbudaya dalam rangka menumbuhkan ekonomi berbasis pendidikan, perdagangan, dan pariwisata' ('To develop the religious and cultural city of Padang in order to have economic growth based on education, trade, and tourism') (see Fig. 5.5). The songs on the album are recycled from prominent songs taken from several Minangkabau commercial cassettes and VCDs released previously.

Such political VCDs suggest the importance of regional pop music for local politicians in their efforts to build a *politik pencitraan* ('political image'). The connection between artists and politics came into existence in Indonesia's early days as an independent state (Kartomi 2005; Lindsay 2005). Nowadays *pop Minang* artists are actively involved in political campaigns of regional politicians. John Storey (2003b:128-29) mentions that 'using pop music to establish constituencies for a specific political campaign makes pop music political'. By using political VCDs like Muslim Kasim's albums, politicians try to reach the public with a specific political agenda, usually to gain the public's sympathy to vote for them again in the next elections. This can be seen as a manifestation of what John B. Thompson calls politicians' 'management of visibility through the media' (Thompson 1995:238).

Aesthetic enrichment: *pop Minang standar* and *pop Minang baru*

Discourse on *pop Minang* today speaks of *pop Minang standar* ('standard *pop Minang*') and *pop Minang baru* ('new *pop Minang*'). The terms indicate the aesthetic transformation of *pop Minang*, mirroring a change in audience tastes in regional pop music. *Pop Minang standar* refers to the earlier version of *pop Minang* that was initially formed during the gramophone period and popularized by the older generation of *pop Minang* artists, including Nurseha,

Figure 5.6: Typical VCD covers of standard *pop Minang* (left) and new *pop Minang* (right)

Elly Kasim, Syamsi Hasan, Nuskan Sjarif and Tiar Ramon. *Pop Minang baru*, on the other hand, refers to the aesthetic innovations of *pop Minang* endorsed by the younger generation of singers. Appearing since the mid 1990s, this new *pop Minang* has a different musical colour and caters to a different musical taste. This aesthetic transformation is a response to the ongoing penetration of elements of foreign music. As Jeremy Wallach (2008:34) notes, in Indonesian *pop daerah* the extent to which local elements other than language are present varies considerably. And yet, regardless of how modern a regional pop recording is, and how much foreign influence it has absorbed, local elements (the sound of its music and its local language) are still discernible. A prominent example is the *saluang dangdut* subgenre. It is the Minangkabau verbal arts genre of *saluang jo dendang* or *bagurau* with a national tinge, and the term *dangdut* in the title signals that this localized product has a commodity value within the contemporary national music market dominated by national *dangdut* music, which itself is a hybrid music (Weintraub 2010:212, 214; Sen and Hill 2004:76-9). A *saluang dangdut* ensemble has the same line-up as *saluang jo dendang* but is augmented with drums and tambourine borrowed from *dangdut* (Fraser 2012:15). In contrast, in *pop Minang baru* albums like 'Bawang Bombay' ('Onions') and 'Ratu Triping'[258] ('Queen of *triping*'), foreign musical elements are very prominent (Naafs 2005:98-100). This new style of Minangkabau pop songs, incorporating fast melodies adopted from Western 'house' music, are very popular in public transportation vehicles in Padang, which are equipped with very loud music (see Yurnaldi 2001b; Jones 2008).

In terms of melody, standard *pop Minang* songs stress feelings of misery predominantly supported by the melancholy sounds of *talempong* and *saluang*. The sounds of these traditional Minangkabau musical instruments impart a feeling of sorrow (Fraser 2012) which bring 'dysphoric emotions', to borrow the words of Dana Rappoport (2014:221). The themes of standard *pop Minang* songs deal with Minangkabau traditional values, the beautiful Minangkabau nature and culture, and even Minangkabau matrilineal families. In these songs, the emotional effects of *merantau* (for those who have left the homeland as well as for those remaining in the homeland) are conspicuously reflected. They tell about the sad feelings of prospective *perantau* when they have to leave their home villages and families, the ups and downs of their lives in *rantau*, and their longing for home and families back in the beautiful homeland, the sadness and yearning of those left at home, and the broken hearts of sweethearts because of social class segregation or because one side breaks their vows of love after being separated by the far distance between the homeland and the *rantau*. Below is an example of such songs, entitled 'Sinar Riau' sung by Elly Kasim. Composed in *pantun* verse, it expresses the yearnings of a *perantau* for his (or her) mother in West Sumatra whom he has not seen for many long years. He/she also yearns for special Minangkabau foods like *dadiah* (fermented water buffalo milk), which is rarely found in *rantau*. Here is the transcription of the song text based on Elly Kasim and Tiar Ramon's album *Pop Minang 1* (re)produced by Insictech Musicland Sdn Bhd (Malaysia) in 2004 (fillers are removed).

258 The term *triping* refers to the type of dance that is commonly used to accompany house music, which also has influenced *pop Minang*. The *triping* dance is preferred by young people. They prance, shake their heads, and move their bodies erotically. For some observers, the *triping* dance carries connotations of drug use (mostly XTC or ecstasy) in nightlife and parties (Sastramidjaja 2000:ix; Naafs 2010:389) because when dancing *triping* people feel stronger and it induces a trance. Therefore the public often perceive *triping* dancing as damaging the morals of young people and not in accordance with Indonesian culture

Oto banamo Sinar Riau[259],	The bus named Sinar Riau,
Baliak manambang dari Pakan,	back from serving the Pekanbaru route,
Baranti tantang Danau Bingkuang;	stopped at the edge of Lake Bingkuang;
Taragak Mandeh jo urang rantau,	Mother misses the people in *rantau*,
Ka pintu tangih bakaluakan,	she can only cry and cry.
Sabalah mandeh denai lai ka pulang.	Be patient, mother, I will certainly return home.

[...]

Dangalah Sinar Riau *di pandakian,*	Hear (the horn of) Sinar Riau in the hills,
Rabab, *tolong sampaikan,*	Fiddle, please deliver (my messages)

Pakanbaru, Taratak Buluah,	Pekanbaru and Taratak Buluah,
Labuhan kapa dari Siak,	the seaports in Siak,
Mamuek gambia dari Bangkinang;	loading gambier from Bangkinang;
Jawek pakirim dagang jauah,	Hear the messages sent from the wanderer far away,
Sayang bacampua, Mandeh, jo taragak,	Mother, I have mixed love and longing,
Denai taragak dadiah di rantau urang.	I miss the *dadiah* from my home village.

Dangalah Sinar Riau *di pandakian,*	Hear (the horn of) Sinar Riau in the hill,
Rabab, *tolong sampaikan.*	Fiddle, please deliver (my messages).

The manner of new *pop Minang* musically, lyrically, and linguistically parodies its standard counterpart. The lyrics invite laughter rather than contemplation, emphasizing triviality and foolishness. The soundtrack of new *pop Minang* is predominantly supported by the sounds of guitar and drums. The sounds of traditional Minangkabau musical instruments are limited, especially the anguished sound of the *saluang* flute, which is dominant in standard *pop Minang* soundtracks. The sound of *saluang* has almost disappeared from new *pop Minang* soundtracks. Full of comic phrasing, new *pop Minang*, textually and visually, incorporates various aspects of foreign pop music. The atmospheres of disco, house remix, reggae, hip-hop, and of course the prominent national genre *dangdut*, can easily be perceived in new *pop Minang*. New *pop Minang* reflects a youth culture expressing freedom and spontaneity that is often criticized by the parental generation. The Lepoh group is one outstanding example: since 2007 it has produced several albums, of which the most popular is the series *Bagadele* 1-4 ('Triviality 1-4') produced

259 'Sinar Riau' ('Riau Ray') was a prominent inter-province bus service in the 1970s and 1980s which connected Pekanbaru and other prominent towns in Riau province with West Sumatran towns like Padang and Bukittinggi. The bus service was very well known among the Minangkabau migrants that migrated to Riau province at that time. It was a time when an innovative music genre called *kalason oto* (lit. 'car horn') was very popular in West Sumatra. Made by a kind of organ with pipes fitted in the engines of inter-province Chevrolet buses, the music, which was played by means of a keyboard mounted on the dashboard of the bus, was used to attract (potential) passengers (Barendregt 2002:437-8). Its lilting sound (*mendayu-dayu*) is melancholy, as if representing the longing of Minangkabau *perantau* for their homeland (Perlman 1998). The sorrowful sound of *kalason oto* music does not refer to any Minangabau musical genre but reminds Minangkabau people of the sounds of their traditional music instruments *saluang* and *rabab*.

by Leprin Production situated in Solok. The albums extremely parody standard *pop Minang* songs by employing humour, jokes, hilarious facial expressions, and Minangkabau slang.

New *pop Minang* song lyrics conspicuously represent the crisis experienced by couples (wife and husband) in their domestic relations due to economic difficulties or the negative impacts of the culture of materialism and hedonism brought by global and Western cultures. Such impressions can be perceived in the lyrics of a new *pop Minang* song from an album of the Mak Lepoh group entitled *Bagadele 3* ('Triviality 3') (Leprin Production, 2007), which is also available on YouTube.[260] Another song is 'Rumah kontrak[an]' ('Rental house'). Sung in a hilarious way with funny facial expressions, and opening with a humorous dialogue, the song tells about the wife in an ordinary couple who does not have a sense of propriety in managing their limited family funds. The wife is so eager to buy new clothes and shoes that the couple face difficulties paying the expenses of their rental house.

Suami:	Husband:
Sabalah Adiak dulu,	Please be patient, my dear,
Janlah bakandak juo,	Do not demand too much,
Patang lah bali sipatu,	You bought shoes yesterday,
Kini lah tarompa pulo.	Today you buy sandals.
Nan wajib didaulukan,	Essential things should take priority,
Nan sunaik bulan di muko,	Optional things can be purchased next month,
Mangko itu Uda katokan,	The reason I am saying this to you,
Seo rumah lah tibo pulo.	The rent for our house has to be paid.
Sabalah Adiak dulu,	Please be patient, my dear.
Usah bakandak juo.	Do not demand too much.
Istri:	Wife:
Baragiah baru saketek,	You just gave me little things,
Uda lah manyasak pulo,	Now you, my dear, pushed me,
Bisuak denai pai baralek,	I will go to a wedding party tomorrow,
Pakaian baru indak ado.	I do not have a new outfit.
Iyo Uda janyo denai,	Oh my lovely dear,
Usah Uda bakato ibo,	Do not talk so sadly,
Jikok rancak pakaian denai,	If I am wearing pretty clothes,
Urang mancaliak lah sanang pulo.	Those who look at me will be delighted.
[...]	

260 The extensive mediation of West Sumatran recording industry products, as part of media convergence in the contemporary world, is discussed in Chapter 8.

Generally speaking, standard *pop Minang* is favoured by the older generation and new *pop Minang* is favoured by Minangkabau youth, who strongly associate it with a cosmopolitan culture. People who like standard *pop Minang* consider that it conveys authentic Minangkabau cultural values (*nilai-nilai keminangan yang asli*). Conversely, the youth who like new *pop Minang* think standard *pop Minang* is boring, and too melancholy and full of laments (*ratok*). They say the lyrics of standard *pop Minang* sound too sentimental (*cengeng*).

But the features differentiating standard *pop Minang* and new *pop Minang* are not only their musical colour, but also their language register. Marked by extensive use of figurative phrases, standard *pop Minang* songs are rich in the Minangkabau literary dialect, which is characterized by the manifold use of traditional proverbs, metaphors, allegories, and analogies. The lyrics of standard *pop Minang* are rich in *kieh*, that is 'any kind of analogy, allegory, figure of speech, implicit moral or other type of indirect language used [...] whenever someone says one thing, literally, but there is another, deeper meaning behind the surface of what is said' (Simon 2007:213, 461).[261] Its song lyrics are also dominated by *pantun* verse.[262] Sharing important stylistic characteristics of Minangkabau and Malay performing arts, *pantun* 'largely determine the form of songs, which are essentially strophic but allow a high degree of improvisatory freedom on the performer's part, including the insertion of melodic phrases (with or without repeated textual phrases) or sections of percussive rhythms, and the insertion of incidental ornamentation, largely at whim' (Kartomi 2012:19).

In contrast, new *pop Minang* song lyrics tend to reject such Minangkabau literary forms, using language that is poor in metaphors and allegories. The young generation of new *Minang pop* singers and composers – Edi Cotok, Opetra, Nedi Gampo, Santi Martin, and Lepoh, to mention just a few – tend to utilize unadorned language in their lyrics, sometimes by laying emphasis on local dialects. Others mix their mother tongue (Minangkabau language) with the national language (Indonesian) and English. This phenomenon can be seen in the lyrics of recent songs sung by Tommy Bolim, Mak Itam, Buset and Lepoh. Directly or indirectly, their songs parody the aesthetic concepts of standard *pop Minang* songs. Buset, Mak Itam, and Lepoh have also sung such songs in Western pop rhythms like rap and reggae. These alternative aesthetics of *pop Minang* appear along with changes in the Minangkabau vernacular due to the strong penetration of Indonesian into regional languages. The metaphorical and figurative language of Minangkabau oral literature, a most beautiful vernacular style according to some colonial Dutch scholars (see Hasselt 1883; Eerde 1887), is regarded as out of date by most of the Minangkabau young generation.

261 According to Gregory Mark Simon, '[traditionally] many Minangkabau people identify an extensive use of *kieh* as a particularly Minangkabau attribute, even in contrast to other Malay and Indonesian groups' (Simon 2007:408).

262 *Pantun* is a verse-form found widely in the Malay world (Ding 2010; Salleh 2011). It consists of quatrains rhyming *abab*, but also of verses of six, eight or more lines, rhyming *abcabc*, *abcdabcd*, and so on. A couplet is made up of two parts: the first half is called the *sampiran* ('hook') while the second half is called the *isi* ('meaning'). The *sampiran* is usually unconnected with the *isi* in sense, but foreshadows it in sound (Daillie 1988). For more on Minangkabau *pantun*, see Rangkoto 1982, Chadwick 1994, Sati 2005, Gani 2010, and Suryadi 2013.

Humour and jokes are conspicuous in new *pop Minang*. Though a few standard *pop Minang* songs from the 1970s and 1980s have comical lyrics, most of them are predominantly characterized by sorrow and lamentation. According to Hajizar, recently *pop Minang* has been dominated by a trend towards more humour.[263] One new *pop Minang* singer who employs humour and jokes in his albums is Andria Adhan. He produces albums in which songs alternate with funny stories presented in the Pariaman dialect. These hilarious stories have become a characteristic of Andria's albums and are adored by audiences. Other singers such as Nedi Gampo intentionally insert the coarse language (*idiom keras*) of bazaar Minangkabau (*Bahasa Minang pasar*) into their song lyrics, creating a comic effect.[264] The Lepoh group in their albums use comical expressions, physically and linguistically.

'Aesthetic defiance' can be found in *pop Minang* in terms of the language of its lyrics, as shown by the younger generation of artists, which is reminiscent of the phenomenon of rap in Western pop music. Based on public perceptions of standard and new *pop Minang*, the former can be compared to high literature and the latter to popular literature. In this regard, the main factor distinguishing them is the register or style of language used in their song lyrics.

To some extent, the division between standard *pop Minang* on one hand and the new *pop Minang* on the other hand represents the 'consciousness of generation', to borrow Murdock and McCron's words (2006:162). However, there are young people who like standard *pop Minang* songs, though it is only rarely that people of the older generations like its new counterpart. What is certain is that the emergence of new *pop Minang* has provoked controversy among Minangkabau people. Agus Taher (2007:4) mentions five elements of new *pop Minang* that have become the subject of debate: first, new *pop Minang* is deemed not to be rooted in Minangkabau culture; second, individuals and parties involved in the production of new *pop Minang* recordings are considered as only thinking in commercial terms and ignoring the quality of the songs they produce; third, the musical instruments used to accompany the songs of new *pop Minang* such as the organ, piano, even MIDI (Musical Instrument Digital Interface) technology, are considered too Western oriented and, therefore, deprived of the sounds of traditional Minangkabau musical instruments; fourth, new *pop Minang* is considered less religious because its song lyrics mostly have a vulgar tone and are aesthetically, as Elly Kasim mentions in an interview (see below), far removed from the style of Minangkabau traditional literary language. As well, the clips of new *pop Minang* VCDs tend to present erotic dances and its VCD covers show pictures of singers in sexy clothes; therefore, fifth, new *pop Minang* is considered to deviate from traditional Minangkabau custom (*adat*).

Those who idolize standard *pop Minang* charge that the lyrics of new *pop Minang* songs are coarse, simplistic, candid and straightforward, hence they are appraised as not suitable to Minangkabau custom. These critics say the lyrics of new *pop Minang* represent a loss of Minangkabau cultural identity.[265] The composers of new *pop Minang* are regarded as having no

263 See Nasrul Azwar's interview with Hajizar in 'Lagu pop Minang dikuasai aliran lawak', *Haluan*, 13 February 2011.

264 See 'Nedi Gampo: Asal-usul nama Gampo', *Padang Ekspres*, 23 February 2007, column titled 'Selebritis'.

265 See 'Lagu pop Minang kehilangan identitas kultural', *Haluan*, 6 February 2011.

aesthetic sense of Minangkabau literary language. Their compositions are considered kitsch. The songwriter Sexri Budiman agrees that the lyrics of many new *pop Minang* songs have no aesthetic value. And the senior Minangkabau cultural observer Bagindo Fahmi declared that one can no longer be called Minangkabau if one does not understand figurative language (*kato melereang*) (pers. comm., 20-1-2009). But not all of the songs created by the new generation of composers are considered kitsch. Some of the young composers still maintain the quality of their work. Among them are Sexri Budiman, Agus Taher, Alkawi, Alextris, Ades Sadewa, Zul Azham, and Rhian D'Kincai, just to mention a few (see Wahyuni 2001).

In an extensive report on *pop Minang* based on interviews with practitioners of the West Sumatran recording industry, and supplemented with essays on the subject, the leading West Sumatran newspaper *Padang Ekspres* (15 March 2009) quotes a devotee of standard *pop Minang*:

> There are no more Minang songs now. What are found are simply bad songs using the Minangkabau language. They are far different from those of the pre-1980s, which were resonant, engrossing, and meaningful. As a consequence, such songs are eternal. They are known and adored by people of all generations. [266]

While the observer and composer of Minangkabau songs Ardoni Yonas says:

> Although there are exceptions, we would agree that recent Minangkabau songs no longer reflect the culture. For example, in one recent Minangkabau song, there is a man who cries because his girlfriend has left him. In fact, in the Minangkabau culture, men were strong and would not cry.[267]

'For the Minangkabau, the song is a message, delivered through allegories. This is no longer evident in the [recent] development of Minangkabau song,'[268] adds a researcher named Indra Yeni. While the legendary Minangkabau singer Elly Kasim states:

> Formerly Minangkabau songs were taken from the *pantun* [poem] which is one aspect of the Minangkabau culture that hides implicit meaning in its lyrics, but today it has begun to thin out; perhaps Minangkabau culture is less desirable or less maintained by the younger generation today.[269]

In a discussion of recent developments in *pop Minang* held at Padang Cultural Garden (Taman Budaya Padang) in 2007, Agus Taher argued that the change and transformation of

266 'Kini sudah tidak ada lagi lagu Minang. Yang ada, lagu-lagu kacangan berbahasa Minang. Jauh beda dengan masa-masa di bawah dekade 1980-an. Lagu Minang melantun, menghanyutkan dan sarat makna. Akibatnya, sepanjang masa tembang-tembang demikian abadi. Dikenal dan disenangi semua generasi.'

267 'Walau tidak semuanya, tapi kita akan sepakat bahwa lagu Minang sekarang ini tidak mencerminkan budaya[nya]. Contoh, dalam sebuah lagu Minang ada lekaki yang menangis karena ditinggalkan pacarnya. Padahal dalam budaya Minang lelaki itu tegar dan tidak boleh menangis.'

268 'Bagi orang Minang lagu itu adalah sebuah pesan, yang disampaikan dengan makna yang berkias. Dalam perkembangannya, lagu Minang tidak lagi menampakkan itu.'

269 'Kalau dahulu lagu Minang itu diambil dari pantun yang merupakan salah satu budaya Minangkabau yang menyembunyikan makna tersirat dalam tiap syairnya, namun saat ini hal tersebut sudah mulai menipis, barangkali budaya Minangkabau sudah kurang diminati lagi atau kurang dipertahankan oleh generasi-generasi muda zaman sekarang.'

Minangkabau music is a reasonable and necessary process. In his view, regional music should not be static. He notes the recent trend of songs with classical motifs, which aesthetically take on the spirit of Minangkabau oral literature genres (Taher 2007). An outstanding example is the new creations of new *pop Minang* songs based on *rabab Pesisir Selatan* music, especially by young performer/singers of *rabab Pesisir Selatan* like Siril Asmara, Tiar Palaga, and Iwil Melayu.[270] In this case, the music of the Minangkabau verbal arts genre of *rabab Pesisir Selatan* is used to accompany newly created Minangkabau pop songs. Likewise, the comical songs sung by anti-standard singers such as Buset, Mak Itam, and Lepoh,[271] have humorous conversations in hilarious song lyrics, and funny video clips. Current Minangkabau music should not be judged using the aesthetics of earlier Minangkabau music, Agus Taher states, countering the scathing criticism directed toward the songs of new *pop Minang*, which certain parties regard as no longer reflecting the culture of Minangkabau society. Such harsh criticisms of new *pop Minang*, he says, will only have a negative impact rather than enhancing the way Minangkabau popular music evolves (Taher 2007). Esy Maestro (1999:6) mentions two factors that have brought about changes in musical aesthetics. First, the nuances of the sound of local musical instruments have been reduced to an electronic instrument through sound engineering technology. Second, with the rise of the recording industry, as far as the kind of music recorded, all practitioners – composers, singers and producers – obey the tastes of consumers. Whatever consumers want, practitioners will produce it.

The views quoted above reflect the conflicting views on *pop Minang*. This genre has most often become the subject of polemics and criticism, unlike the traditional genres, which do not give rise to debates and polemics because – to borrow the words of Agus Taher – 'the traditional songs [with lyrics taken from oral literature] require hardly any innovation or experimentation, and have little or no commercial aspect, and they are performed in order to demonstrate ethnic identity. Their authenticity and traditionalism are often maintained fanatically.'[272] Media-bound genres such as modern Minangkabau cassette dramas also seem not to spark debate. The themes of Minangkabau cassette dramas are critical of social and individual behavior that is not compatible with Minangkabau culture. Essentially, the aim of these dramas is to retain and promote Minangkabau culture. Therefore, this genre does not give rise to polemics because it sustains the Minangkabau culture rather than subverting it. Similarly, there is no criticism of the other Minangkabau media-bound genre, Minangkabau children's pop music. The lyrics of Minangkabau children's pop songs are sorrowful and melancholy, for example depicting unhappy orphans or poor children struggling to survive (see Chapter 7). I speculate that there is no criticism of Minangkabau children's pop music

270 This can be suggested from the terms written on their VCD covers, like 'Rabab Dije', 'Rabab Dangdut Mix', 'Rabab Gaul', 'Rabab Terbaru', and 'Rabab Spesial'. See Siril Asmara and Igus Sikumbang, *Pak Dukun; Rabab Dije* (VCD karaoke), Vol. 4 (Padang: Sinar Padang Record, 2012), Tiar Palaga and Devi Pasla, *Kanai Tilang; Rabab Terbaru* (VCD karaoke) (Padang: Diva Production, 2012), and Iwil Melayu and Imil P., *Hari Panantian; Rabab Spesial* (VCD karaoke), Vol. 2 (Padang: Sinar Padang Record, 2012), just to mention a few examples.

271 See 'Agus Taher, seniman musik: antara kreasi dan hujatan', *Haluan*, 6 February 2011.

272 '[L]agu tradisi relatif tidak memerlukan inovasi, eksperimentasi, serta kurang atau tidak ada unsur komersialnya, dan ditampilkan untuk menunjukkan identitas etnik. Secara fanatik, keaslian dan ketradisionilannya sering dipertahankan sebagaimana adanya [...]' (Taher 2007:3).

because aesthetically the lyrics of this genre are generally similar to the lyrics of standard *pop Minang*.

As mentioned above, some practitioners of West Sumatran recording argue that change in the language and musical style of *pop Minang* is natural and should occur, because nothing is static in human culture. It is not bad to accompany the songs with an electronic organ, according to Agus Taher, since it can be enriched with the sound of indigenous Minangkabau musical instruments. In an interview with a *Padang Ekspres* journalist, he said:

> Actually, with the electronic keyboard we are freer to arrange music. We can insert any sound to support the song with just the right instrument. The majority of our keyboard players now are professionals. Then it's a business calculation: if we are using a band, how are we going to pay each player?[273]

Agus Taher adds that the transformation from the cassette era to the VCD era also influenced the quality of production, because VCD pirates are difficult to eradicate. 'The sound quality of the pirated cassettes and pirated VCDs is very poor. The impact is subsequently accepted by producers, musicians, and artists.'[274]

Recently, criticism in the controversy about new *pop Minang* has become increasingly sharp: in June 2009 the local press reported that some religious and traditional groups were intent on curbing what they labelled as 'Minang songs that do not educate' (*lagu Minang yang tak mendidik*). This criticism was provoked by a statement released by the chairman of the Indonesian Council of Religious Scholars West Sumatra Branch (Majelis Ulama Indonesia Cabang Sumatra Barat), Gusrizal Gazahar, who stated that many recent *pop Minang* songs have lyrics which no longer contain typically Minangkabau philosophy and aphorisms. Gusrizal said that the institution he leads had received many complaints from the public on this subject.[275] Criticizing this new phenomenon, which is regarded as a negative influence of globalization, the old generation of *pop Minang* artists like Elly Kasim, the traditional art practitioners, and the ulemas have been acting as keepers to maintain the original values (*nilai-nilai asli*) of Minangkabau music.

Facilitated by the national policy of regional autonomy, as the result of political reform in Indonesia, the debate about *pop Minang* represents a continuing search for identity and tradition in Minangkabau society in this era of globalization. As the cultural product that most strongly deals with the Minangkabau realm of *perasaan* (feeling), which is influenced by the ethnic cultural setting, *pop Minang* represents the folk emotion of the Minangkabau ethnic group. Anthony Giddens (1994:80) is probably right in saying that tradition is a 'constant process of recapitulation and reinterpretation' with 'creation of constancy over time'. My reading of

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273 Sebenarnya dengan organ kita lebih bebas mengolah musik. Kita bisa memasukkan bunyi apa saja, untuk mendukung lagu yang dibuat dengan satu alat itu. Pemain organ kita sekarang juga sudah banyak yang professional kok. Kemudian perhitungan bisnisnya, kalau pakai band, berapa pula pemainnya akan dibayar per orang? (*Padang Ekspres*, 15 March 2009).

274 See 'Di balik layar pendendang', *Padang Ekspres*, 15 March 2009.

275 See 'Lagu Minang mulai meresahkan', *Singgalang* 15 June 2009.

Minangkabau cassette and VCD covers in the next section is aimed to better comprehend this ongoing search for Minangkabau identity through the visual images of Minangkabau regional commercial recordings.

Pop Minang cassette and VCD covers as cultural texts

A commercial cassette or VCD is an entity consisting of auditory, pictorial, and visual elements which interrelate with each other. Cassettes and their covers, as Deborah Wong (1995:45) has pointed out, 'are artifacts that aggregate several media: sound, the printed word, and pictorial representation'. Forming a complex cultural package of various expressive and commercial media, the auditory and the visual elements of a cassette or VCD relate to each other in an intricately complex system (Slobin 1982:166).

Images on cassette covers of regional music, including the printed text as well as pictorial representations, are important sites through which we can capture the dynamics of a particular regional music and the society it is associated with. Cassette covers also reflect musical practitioners' strategies to attract consumers to their products. Regional cultural changes manifested in the tension between modernity and tradition have been made visible in the printed, pictorial and visual dimensions of Minangkabau cassettes and VCDs. This section focuses on these printed, pictorial, and visual representations, discussing their cultural significance by investigating their nature and patterns, and interpreting the cultural meanings they exemplify.

'Cassette cover designs vary consistently by genre, and are a primary indication of the genre to which the music on a given cassette belongs' (Wallach 2002:114). Cassette covers of Indonesian Islamic songs, for example, represent local or national singers with the cultural landscape of the Arabic world (Rasmussen 2010:198). Customarily, *pop Minang* cassette covers have more extensive written and visual elements and a greater variety of colours than the covers of traditional genres. All the accompanying texts, not just the album title, are written not only in Minangkabau but also in Indonesian, even occasionally in English. The covers show patterns and images in the background, the company's logo, and invariably a picture of the artists. In short, *pop Minang* cassette and VCD covers exhibit diversity in terms of colour, text, and visual aspects, greater than those on covers of traditional genres, offering an impression of bustling crowdedness (*rami*).

Closer examination of the cassette and VCD covers of *pop Minang* reveals that though there are resemblances, each is different from the others, corresponding to the audio and musical content. It seems there is an interrelation between the content and the cover of a *pop Minang* album. To take one example, the covers of albums containing jokes in their song lyrics usually show the performers in a funny scene (Fig. 5.7). Likewise, the musical features of particular cassettes or VCDs labelled by genre names (*gamad*, *kim*, *saluang dangdut*, etc.), and the songs' lyrical orientation and characteristics are represented in the cassette or VCD cover design. The cassette and VCD covers of the *gamad* hybrid genre using traditional melo-

Figure 5.7: Two VCD covers of new *pop Minang* which contain hilarious songs interspersed with jokes. Left: Ajo (Andria Adhan) and One (Ida Busra) on *Basiginyang* (Sinar Padang Record, 2005); right: Edi Cotok's *Tambah Pitih Balanjo* (Sentral Musik Record and Kreatif Record, 2008)

dies, for example, often picture the artists in traditional dress, contrasting with the appearance of artists' photographs on many *pop Minang* albums, which depict modern fashions of dress. The covers of albums that can be categorized as standard *pop Minang*, which is usually characterized by songs with melancholy lyrics, have a much less crowded layout compared to albums that can be categorized as new *pop Minang*, especially those adopting house and hip-hop musical rhythms, with cheerful and spirited lyrics.

The text, which on *pop Minang* covers is extensive and written in different colours and sizes, conveys economic, political, social, and musical aspects. Linguistically it is interesting to examine how the spoken Minangkabau language is written by practitioners of the West Sumatran recording industry in romanized form. For example, the spelling of text on cassette and VCD covers does not match the Minangkabau spelling system (see Ali *et al.* 1990), as can be seen in the title of Susi's album produced by Sinar Padang Record: 'Gamang Di Seso Mimpi' is written instead of 'Gamang Diseso Mimpi' (my underlining). In the Minangkabau language /*di-*/ in this context is a prefix, so that in writing it should be combined with the verb *seso* (misery). Errors are also frequently found in the transcriptions of song lyrics appearing as subtitles in the clips of *pop Minang* VCDs.

On *pop Minang* covers, the album title appears conspicuously, though I have found some *pop Minang* albums which have no title. The title of an album is usually printed in a big font using several bright colours. It competes in terms of size with the name of the artist(s) and the subgenre label such as '*Tembang Minang*' ('Minang songs'), '*Pop Minang Standar*' ('standard *pop Minang*'), '*Pop Minang Alternatif*' ('alternative *pop Minang*'), or '*Pop Minang Abadi*' ('everlasting *pop Minang*'). Sometimes the title is printed in the biggest font; sometimes the artist's name or the subgenre label is printed in the biggest font. This depends not only on which aspect of the album is being promoted by the producer but also the kind of image that the producer expects will attract consumers.

The title of an album is usually taken from the song that is considered the most prominent in it – '*lagu yang terkuat*' ('the strongest song'), borrowing the term used by the producer and lyricist Agus Taher – that is, the song which producer and singer expect to become the most popular. There are several considerations behind the choice of which song to promote as the title of an album, as Agus Taher mentions:

> [The decision is made based on] feelings. The producer or the production practitioners usually have a feeling, which is rarely wrong. There are indeed some criteria: the power of the melody and the lyrics, the poetry of the title, whether the theme is trendy, with some specific nuances, for instance, magic, the trendiness of the rhythm plus the music, the singer's inspiration or the singer's characteristic way of performing.[276]

Sometimes the old favourite songs of standard *pop Minang* which were popularized by legendary Minangkabau artists of earlier times such as Elly Kasim and Tiar Ramon are the ones that tend to be promoted as the title of an album. There are many new albums containing new songs but often including one or two classic songs of standard *pop Minang*, such as 'Hitam Manih', 'Urang Talu' or 'Bareh Solok'. Usually the name of the song used as the title of the album is placed number one in the list of songs of the album. In a few cases, the title of a *pop Minang* album is named after a song other than number one in the list of songs. Some *pop Minang* albums only present a single song as their title, while other albums list several songs on their covers. The additional song titles, up to a maximum of four titles, are usually printed in a smaller font size. Occasionally, particularly with *pop Minang* VCDs, the titles of songs number one and number two are printed in almost the same font size, making it unclear which one of them is to be regarded as the title of the album.

If we compare the front covers of *pop Minang* albums in gramophone disc, cassette, and VCD formats, it is apparent that the covers have become more and more crowded. On the front covers of gramophone records, the singer's name is highlighted conspicuously and sometimes no song title is written. In the glory days of cassettes (1970s and 1980s) the singer names and the song titles, maximally two, are usually printed on the front cover. Seemingly both are equally important: they are often written in the same font size. During this period, commercial Minangkabau cassette covers still look relatively 'empty'. But since the 1990s till the present, cassette and VCD front covers look more crowded not only by singer names and song titles, but also other elements (see below). To a certain extent, the change in Minangkabau commercial album covers over time not only reflects Minangkabau cultural transformation but also represents the way media practitioners (cassette and VCD producers in this case) respond to changing tastes of consumers. Viewed from an economic perspective, producers always try to follow the latest trend in cultural symbols to attract consumers' interest to their products. By incorporating these cultural symbols into their products, producers hope to locate their products in the consumers' horizon of expectation.

276 By feeling. Produser atau pelaku produksi biasanya punya feeling [yang] jarang meleset. Memang ada kriteria: kekuatan melodi plus lirik lagu, puitisnya judul lagu, temanya yang sedang trend, ada nuansa tertentu, misalnya magis, trend irama plus musik, penjiwaan penyanyi atau tampil beda (pers. comm., 9-8-2007).

To illustrate the titling practices of *pop Minang* currently, I present in Figure 5.8 the front and back covers of seven albums categorized as standard *pop Minang* which were produced between 2000 and 2008. In Ucok Sumbara's *Nyao Taruhan Kasiah* (Fig. 5.8a), only the title of the album is printed on the front cover (referring to the title of song no. 1). This differs from Zalmon's album (Fig. 5.8b), which presents two song titles on its front cover, 'Titian Lapuak' (song no. 10) and 'Rumah Sudah Tukang Dibunuah?' (song no. 1). Since the former is written in a smaller font than the latter, we assume the title of the album is the latter. In Kardi Tanjung's album (Fig. 5.8c), two song titles are written in almost the same font size on the front cover, 'Surek dari Rantau' (song no. 9) and 'Usah Diratoki' (song no. 4). But the former is written in a slightly larger font than the latter, so that we can conclude that the title of this album is *Surek dari Rantau*. This is rather similar to Dia Camellia's album (Fig. 5.8d), the cover of which has two song titles: 'Balulua Banci Ka Dado' (song no. 3) and 'Kasiah Nan Hilang' (song no. 1). One can surmise that the title of the album is *Balulua Banci Ka Dado* because it is printed in orange combined with yellow. This totally contrasts with Ody Malik's album (Fig. 5.8e). One immediately knows that the title of this album is 'Cinto Tak Sampai' (song no. 1), not 'Minangkabau bukan Kubangan Kabau' (song no. 3), because the former is printed in a larger font size than the latter.

Efrinon's album (Fig. 5.8f) and Tiar Ramon's album (Fig. 5.8g) show many more song titles on their front covers. Nevertheless, we can see that one of them is written in the biggest font. In Efrinon's album, 'Batu Tagak' (song no. 1) can be regarded as its title, though there are two other songs on the front cover: 'Tinggalah Kampuang' (song no. 2) and 'Ubekkan Denai' (song no. 7). Whereas on Tiar Ramon's album, 'Badindin' (song no. 1) can be regarded as its title. Four other songs are written in smaller fonts: 'Helo Pukek' (song no. 10), 'Kambang Bungo' (song no. 2), 'Hujan' (song no. 6), and 'Sayang Tak Sudah' (song no. 12).[277]

The name of the artist is also strongly foregrounded on *pop Minang* covers. As with the album title and the subgenre title, the name of the artist tends to be printed in a large font in several colours. The artist's name may be positioned anywhere on the front cover. The name of the artist is also printed on the back cover, on the printed side of the disc, and sometimes on the inside of the front or back cover as well. The majority of *pop Minang* albums are released by a single artist, but there are also many albums released by artists in duet and in group performances. As the artists involved in producing an album, their names are shown on the album cover, though occasionally not all artists' names are shown on the front cover, as can be seen with Ucok Sumbara's *Nyao Taruhan Kasiah* ('Life at stake for love') (Fig. 5.8a). The second artist's name (Wenny Afni) and picture are shown only on the back cover of this album.

Another element of text often presented on *pop Minang* covers is the subgenre of *pop Minang* represented by the songs recorded, such as *Disco Reggae Minang*, *Tembang Favorit*, *Saluang dangdut*, *Pop Minang Exlusive*, and *Karya Legendaris*. The words used are often taken from English, such as *disco* (not *disko*), *show*, and *standard* (not *standar*). On the front cover of one of Ucok Sumbara's albums produced by Sinar Padang Record, for instance, we find printed in

277 Unlike most *pop Minang* albums, this album contains twelve songs instead of ten.

A

POP MINANG
UCOK
SUMBARA
Musik/Arr. : NOVER T.
Nyao Taruhan Kasiah
CIPT. : SEXRI BUDIMAN

01. NYAO TARUHAN KASIAH
CIPT : SEXRI BUDIMAN
02 IZINKAN DENAI PULANG
CIPT : M.NUSE / UCOK SUMBARA
03 PITARUAH
CIPT : SEXRI BUDIMAN
04 DEK ULAH CINTO
CIPT : JUP REHAN
05 SABANA PADIAH
CIPT : RE.OOONG
06. BUNGO BARALIH KASIAH
CIPT : SATRIA RUDI
07. ANGAN -ANGAN TAK SAMPAI
CIPT : BOY SANDY
08. BUKAN DT MARINGGIH
CIPT : EKA PUTRA
09. HILANG TIADO KASAN
CIPT : IN KUNDEL
10. CIMBURU BUTO
CIPT : UDIN BRT
POP MINANG UCOK SUMBARA
Wenny AFNI
UCOK SUMBARA

B

VCD KARAOKE
ZALMON
Titian Lapuak
CIPT. ZUL AZHAM
VCD ORIGINAL
Rumah Sudah Tukang Dibunuah?
ARR. : NEDI GAMPO
CIPT. NEDI GAMPO

VCD KARAOKE
ZALMON
01. Rumah Sudah Tekang Dibunuah?
02. Pasaro Arsah Nan Hilang
03. Candu Karakok
04. Cinto Putiah Sabungo Ungo
05. Sayuik Sareh
06. Ratok Biasak Pasiah Leleng
07. Paik Hideik
08. Baganti Janjuangan
09. Seso Dek Parasaan
10. Titin Lapuak
Rumah Sudah Tukang Dibunuah?
CIPT. NEDI GAMPO
VCD KARAOKE - ZALMON "RUMAH SUDAH TUKANG DIBUNUAH?"

C

Pop Minang Standar
10 Lagu Nostalgia
Kardi Taujung
Surek dari Rantau
Usah Diratoki
Arr. : Af Kidal
Operator : Herman Erchan

Pop Minang Standar
10 Lagu Nostalgia
1. Di Kampuang Raso Marantau
Cipt. : Udin BRT.
2. Pasan Urang Minang
Cipt. : Nofian Nobel
3. Ameh jo Loyang
Cipt. : Udin BRT.
4. Usah Diratoki
Cipt. : Yusaf Rahman
5. Janji Bakarang
Cipt. : Oyon Ms.
6. Indak Kabarulang
Cipt. : Nuskan Syarif
7. Ratok
Cipt. : Nuskan Syarif
8. Di Salo Galak
Cipt. : Udin BRT.
9. Surek dari Rantau
Cipt. : Nuskan Syarif
10. Basimpang Jalan
Cipt. : Nuskan Syarif
ORIGINAL
SINAR PADANG
Arr. : Af Kidal
Operator : Herman Erchan

D

Dia Camellia
Kasiah Nan Hilang
Cipt. Ridwan Idma
Arr. Indra
Balulua Banci Ka Dado
VCD Karaoke
POP MINANG ISTIMEWA

Dia Camellia
01. Kasiah Nan Hilang
02. Tabanglah Cinto
03. Balulua Banci Ka Dado
04. Rindu - Rindu Seso
05. Sakik Diseso Mimpi
06. Hepta - Hepta - Hepta
07. Bia Indak Kaduonyo
08. Dek Matekan
09. Ulah Dek Kato
10. Antaro Cinto Budi
VCD Karaoke
POP MINANG ISTIMEWA DIA CAMELLIA Kasiah Nan Hilang

E

10 AGUS TAHER
CINTO
Tak Sampai
Minangkabau
Bukan Kubangan Kabau
ODY MALIK

ODY MALIK
01. Cinto Tak Sampai
02. Rindu Nyalo Dibathin
03. Minangkabau Bukan Kubangan Kabau
04. Marintang Gamang
05. Lupo Bacamin Diri
06. Luko Baulang Tikam
07. Langang Dinan Rami
08. Bungo Sayang
09. Bayang Manari
10. Bialah Riak Manapi
HP. 081363439496
Produksi : PITUNANG RECORD

F

Seleksi VCD-Karaoke
Tinggalah Kampuang
Efrinon
Ubekkan Denai
Arr. Musik
AF KIDAL
Batu Tagak

Seleksi VCD-Karaoke
Batu Tagak
Efrinon
01. BATU TAGAK
02. TINGGALAH KAMPUANG
03. KARAM DI TAPI
04. AMPUN MANDE
05. II JO KAPALO
06. NASIB KABAU PADATI
07. UBEKKAN DENAI
08. KATO RANG MUDO
09. INDAK MANYASA
10. BONUS : BATU TAGAK
SELEKSI VCD Karaoke Efrinon

G

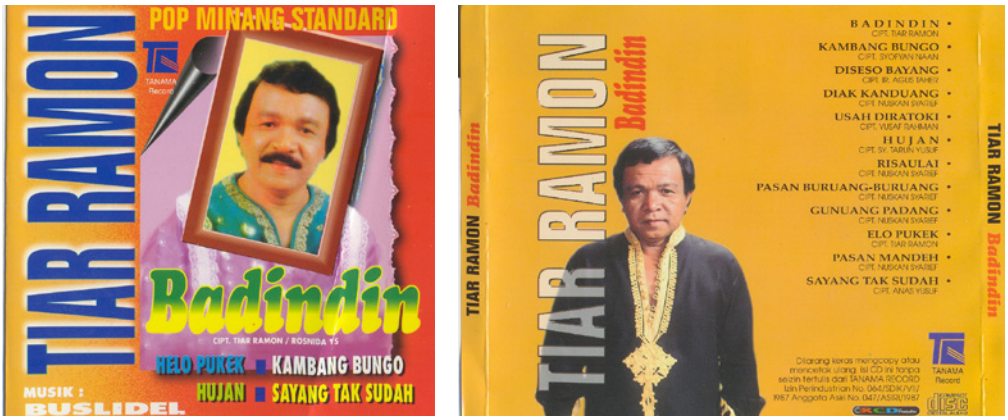

Figure 5.8 (pp. 150-152): Front and back covers of seven standard *pop Minang* VCDs: A) Ucok Sumbara's [and Wenny Afni's] *Nyao Taruhan Kasiah* (Sinar Padang Record); B) Zalmon's *Rumah Sudah Tukang Dibunuah?* (Balatif Music Record); C) Kardi Tanjung's *Surek dari Rantau* (Sinar Padang Record); D) Dia Camellia's *Balulua Banci ka Dado* (Planet Record); E) Ody Malik's *Cinto Tak Sampai* (Pitunang Record); F) Efrinon's *Batu Tagak* (Sinar Padang Record); and G) Tiar Ramon's *Pop Minang Standard: Badindin* (Tanama Record)

large fonts 'Pop Minang Standard' and 'Best Seller', and on Boy Shandy's album 'The best of slow hits Minang' (Fig. 5.9). This suggests that the English language has also entered Minangkabau pop music, as has occurred in popular culture in various other Asian countries (see Lee and Moody 2012). However, the English influence in *pop Minang* is limited to the text on the cassette and VCD covers and does not affect the song lyrics.

Other information presented on *pop Minang* covers is the name of each song's composer and lyricist. Sometimes on the covers we find more detailed information about backing vocalists, presenters, sound engineers, music arrangement, operators/mastering, and the producer's name. The company's logo is also an important element presented on the front and back covers of *pop Minang* albums. It always appears on *pop Minang* VCD covers. On some VCDs the logo is very much enlarged. The term 'VCD', 'Video CD', or 'VCD karaoke' is usually found on the front cover of *pop Minang*. Some other phrases often found on *pop Minang* covers, such as 'Special VCD Emas' and 'VCD original', seem to be intended to indicate the specialness and originality of the album. Another phrase often found is 'Stop Pembajakan' ('stop piracy') which, seen from the presence-absence consideration, is apparently intended to remind the consumer to buy the original product, not a pirated copy. But, as discussed below, these messages are bound up with complex socio-political and economic aspects of Indonesia's cassette culture.

Generally speaking, the design of cassette and VCD covers of new *pop* Minang is not far different from that of their standard counterparts. But one element is outstandingly distinctive, and that is the photographs of the singers, which usually present them wearing clown-style clothes that certainly convey humour and comedy. For example, male singers wear shirts, short or long trousers, long gaudy coloured shoes, sometimes combined with Minangkabau

Figure 5.9: Examples of *pop Minang* albums with English text that stands out on their covers. Left: Ucok Sumbara's album (Sinar Padang Record, 2005); right: Boy Shandy's *Anggan Balayia* (Planet Record, 2005)

traditional clothing like *peci* (cap), *destar* (headband), and *sarung* (*sarong*) worn in eccentric ways (Fig. 5.10). It is clear that such photographs are intended to present humorous images which fit with the comical song lyrics of the albums. But, directly or indirectly, these humorous photographs of singers also suggest opposition to conventions. In other words, the eccentric appearance of the singers in the photographs laughs at tradition.

As noted by Wallach (2002:119), 'In Indonesia, pop artist photographs are usually integrated into an overall design scheme that incorporates the artist's name and the album title (which often is not the same as the title of the song)'. This is also true of the covers of *pop Minang* albums. On the majority of cassette and VCD covers, the singers are depicted in clear

Figure 5.10: Cover images of a new *pop Minang* VCD entitled *Bagurau dalam lagu* ('A joking song') by Buset and Pipin K., Planet Record, 2013

and well-lit photographs. Artists appear in traditional, modern Western-style fashion, or wearing modern-style Muslim headscarves (*kerudung*), the last being a concession to the desire for modernism among female Muslims in a Muslim-majority country like Indonesia, as well as to reverse the association of pop music with Western culture. Compilation albums usually feature a collage of photos of the artists involved in the recording (Fig. 5.11). But on most recent *pop Minang* cassette and VCD covers, the popular singers, especially those of the new generation, appear in modern-style dress. Many male singers are portrayed wearing Western-style shirts (*kemeja*), often with a jacket or a leather jacket. Female singers appear with modern short hairstyles, sometimes wearing a hat, and dressed in modern fashion.

Minangkabau commercial cassette and VCD covers seem to reflect the appropriateness of Western dress for *pop Minang*, showing male and female artists dressed elegantly and very often looking directly into the camera. Apparently, the modern Western-style clothing shown on covers, which tends to be respectable and decent clothing, is acceptable to consumers, possibly because in Minangkabau society modernity has long been accepted and far from unknown as part of their cultural experience. Minangkabau *perantau* have long played an important role in promoting modernity to their compatriots in the homeland. This brings to mind the debate about jackets and neckties, two symbols of modern fashion introduced by Western-educated Minangkabau intellectuals in the 1920s. As Graves (1981) has noted, the Minangkabau are an Indonesian ethnic community that in the early stages most enthusiastically accepted the Dutch education system, as successfully implemented by the people of the small

Figure 5.11: Three contrasting images of singers' photographs on Minangkabau VCD covers suggesting the influence of traditional *adat*, Islam, and modern Western-influenced fashion

village (*nagari*) of Koto Gadang in the West Sumatra highlands of Agam, from where a group of Minangkabau modern intellectuals emerged at an early date.

Another aspect shown on cassette covers is printed text such as the title of the album, the name of the singer(s), the name and logo of the recording company releasing the album, the name of the composer(s), and the name of the musicians. These bits of text displayed on the cassette cover are not all the same in terms of size. Considering this, Wong (1995:45) mentions that 'the relative value of different parts of the text is usually indicated by size, that is, the title or the singer's name is usually in the largest print, whereas text that is expected to have little impact on marketability will be in the smallest possible print. Some information never makes it into print at all. Connections between the text(s) and images on a cassette cover are open to extensive manipulation.' Among the bits of text displayed on Minangkabau cassette covers, those which appear in the largest print are the singer's name or the title of the album. The album's title is usually written in the Minangkabau language, using Latin script, which is usually linked together with words such as 'pop Minang alternatif', 'disco Minang', or 'pop Minang legendaris'.

The consumers of *pop Minang* cassettes and VCDs whom I interviewed mentioned that the biggest and most conspicuous text on the front cover of an album is automatically considered to be its title, no matter where on the front cover it appears. When a customer wants to buy a cassette or VCD, he/she always asks the seller for it by referring to the biggest sized text on the front cover or by mentioning the name of the singer(s). No doubt besides having cultural meanings that represent Minangkabau responses to the changing world, various symbols shown on cassette and VCD covers also function as veiled advertisement intended to attract consumers. Hence the appearance of artists on cassette covers is not natural but seems to have been recast and polished. An ostentatious and flashy appearance of the singer on a cassette cover may play an important role in the marketing of this product. As Wallach argues, 'the Indonesian music cassette is a commodity designed to attract consumers by conveying specific information about the genre it represents and the ideal audience for whom it is intended' (Wallach 2002:114).

Pop Minang and redefining Minangness

So, what is the cultural significance underlying the lively debates on the subject of *pop Minang*? What is the meaning of the various symbols, modern and traditional, represented in audio as well as visual elements of Minangkabau cassettes and VCDs? If we view this in the context of ethnicity as an imagined community, then it can be said that it is no other than a reflection of the sharing of a sense of collectiveness: the sense of Minangness. In other words, we can interpret such debates as showing a feeling of togetherness within an ethnicity. As one of the most highly structured human cultural expressions, music can be used to challenge and deconstruct rigid notions of ethnic particularity (Hyder 2004:320). It 'encapsulates social groups' most essential values affecting individual members' worldviews or "cosmovisions"' (Béhague 1994:v). Jennifer Anne Fraser (2007) has shown how Minangkabau people, in the homeland and in *rantau*, package Minangkabau ethnicity by using music (and other elements of

Minangkabau culture). Music is a constitutive element in identity formation for the composer as well as the audience, because the symbols incorporated in it may have a certain cultural connotation which is familiar to those who share a specific group identity (Wolvers 2010:12).

The continuous evolution of *pop Minang* provides a micro example of how Asian popular musics and cultural industries, facilitated by modern media, develop in local socio-political and cultural contexts, and directly or indirectly impact on expressions of ethnicity, inter-ethnic relations, and the complexity of relations between ethnic groups and the state. *Pop Minang*, which has now spread beyond West Sumatra through many media, not only through cassette and VCD but also through radio and Internet, appeals to the Minangkabau community as a whole. It is no longer centred on a particular village, but increasingly covers the whole regional or ethnic group, including Minangkabau in both the homeland and in *rantau* (Barendregt 2002:420).

Actually, commercial cassettes and VCDs of regional music are 'most truthful in recording social reality and treat it as an entertaining reflection of life' (Suwarna and Yunita 2011). They are cultural sites that record local socio-cultural changes as well as the collective memories of a particular community. Barendregt (2002) has shown convincingly that *pop Minang* has played a significant role in redefining Minangness (*rasa keminangan*) among the Minangkabau people who, due to their widespread *merantau* (out-migrating) habit, have formed a diaspora all over Indonesia as well as overseas. Conversely, *pop Minang* has served as a marker for other ethnic groups in Indonesia to identify Minangkabau ethnicity. Some standard *pop Minang* songs such as 'Ayam den Lapeh' ('My hen has run away') and 'Kambanglah Bungo Parawitan' ('Parawitan flower is blooming') have become famous nationally. By using Bahasa Minangkabau Umum, the common dialect among Minangkabau people from diverse regions of West Sumatra, *pop Minang* increases agency by bringing together all Minangkabau, geographically and socially. Unlike Minangkabau traditional genres, such as *rabab Pariaman*, *indang*, and *dendang Pauah*, which are associated with particular regions of West Sumatra (see Chapter 6), *pop Minang* no longer implies allegiance to a particular village of origin. Thus *pop Minang* addresses the Minangkabau community as a whole.

Regional music like *pop Minang* functions as an ethnic marker as well as a national symbol for Indonesian migrants, those who came from Minangkabau in this context, who live abroad. Conversely, in a national context, Minangkabau music will be associated just with the Minangkabau ethnicity. In contemporary Indonesian cultural life, which is more and more strongly influenced by pop culture, *pop Minang* functions as a means by which Minangkabau people distinguish themselves from other ethnic groups and, at the same time, it is a cultural expression used by those of other ethnic groups to recognize the Minangkabau ethnicity. This ethnic consciousness can be strengthened by external factors. The popularity of *pop Minang* among some neighbouring ethnic groups (see Chapter 4) has directly or indirectly engendered pride among Minangkabau people, which in turn has raised the sense of Minangness.

The popularity of *pop Minang* among neighbouring ethnic groups may also be due to the language factor: socio-linguistically, the Minangkabau language is regarded as a 'Malay dialect' (Suryadi 2006b), and historically, Minangkabau writers made a significant contribution as

pioneers of modern standard Bahasa Indonesia (Anwar 1976). Prominent among the regional pop music of western Indonesia, commercial cassettes of *pop Minang* spread outside the Minangkabau ethnic homeland, West Sumatra, along with Minangkabau migrants who settled in many towns of the island (and other islands). The migration factor indirectly contributed to introducing *pop Minang* outside its region and culture of origin: as early as the 1950s the Minangkabau Gumarang music group was formed in Jakarta by some Minangkabau migrants in that city, with the result that Minangkabau pop music became known nationally at an earlier stage than other Indonesian regional music styles of the outer islands.

Through *pop Minang*, Minangkabau ethnic identity has been subtly redefined: increasingly an overall regional or generalized ethnic identity is conveyed, encompassing Minangkabau people in both the homeland and the *rantau* (Barendregt 2002:27). *Pop Minang* today is a widely established genre and has become a new symbol of Minangness. It has come to express a regional cultural ideology, by stressing regional characteristics, standing as a representative of Minangkabau ethnicity, and everywhere confirming Minangkabau ethnicity.

Conclusion

Pop Minang is the largest category of West Sumatran recording industry products. It is a local cultural musical expression in which the elements of Minangkabau traditional music, national music, and global music hybridize in a complex alliance. Born in *rantau* (Jakarta) in the 1950s, the genre was given its start by the Gumarang band organized by some talented young Minangkabau migrants. Since its first appearance in *rantau*, the genre has been inextricably connected with recording media (initially the gramophone disc). In the 1970s *pop Minang* developed in West Sumatra, the homeland of Minangkabau people, along with the rising consumption of cassettes in Indonesia and West Sumatra's political and economic recovery after the collapse caused by the PRRI civil war. Since then, *pop Minang* has developed significantly, supported by the West Sumatran recording industry, which has also influenced the live regional pop music of surrounding ethnic groups.

Pop Minang consists of several genres and subgenres in which the elements of three kinds of music are mixed: traditional Minangkabau music, regional music, and global music. It also links up with the world of local politics. The involvement of *perantau* in the beginnings of *pop Minang* suggests the importance of external elements in its development. Since the beginning, *pop Minang* has had a hybrid character by combining elements of traditional Minangkabau music with regional and foreign ones. This characteristic has been persistently embedded in *pop Minang* up to today, as suggested by the emergence of what is called 'new *pop Minang*', which contrasts aesthetically with its standard counterpart.

Pop Minang is a principal cultural means through which Minangkabau people build agency, reinvigorating their Minangness in changing times. *Pop Minang*, which uses the Bahasa Minangkabau Umum dialect that is acceptable and understandable for all Minangkabau people, is an effective means to raise the sense of regionality. Representing cultural unity in an ethnic context, *pop Minang* creates a musical language of togetherness that can emotionally

link Minangkabau people in the homeland and in *rantau*. Debates among the Minangkabau centre on aesthetic innovations of *pop Minang* and reflect how Minangness has been redefined.

Like products of pop culture in general, *pop Minang* has become a tool for local cultural transformation, as represented on cassette and VCD covers of this genre. Such covers are cultural sites in which the Minangkabau adaptation to ongoing changes in the world is represented. Using a mixture of symbols of regionalism and globalization, *pop Minang* cassette and VCD covers are a popular phenomenon in which Minangkabau ethnicity is evoked and the tension between tradition and modernity is represented. Both audio and visual elements of *pop Minang* commercial recordings encapsulate the cultural dynamics of Minangkabau ethnicity facing the globalized world.

The next chapter will shed light on the second category of the West Sumatran recording industry's products: commercial recordings of Minangkabau verbal arts. It describes the Minangkabau verbal arts genres that have appeared on commercial cassettes and VCDs. It also examines how the recordings have affected the features of these genres and changes in their reception.