

The Spirit of Ethnicity in Minangkabau Commercial Cassettes in West Sumatra

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Introduction

Since the late 1960s an important cassette and recording industry has emerged in Indonesia. A long time before that, in the 1880s, recording technology was introduced into this country.¹ But so far there has never been a systematic or comprehensive study of its impact on daily life, primarily because concrete data have not yet been seriously collected. Apart from a historical description of Indonesia's national recording company, *Lokananta* by Andrew Toth (1980) and Philip Yampolsky (1987a), only some relatively few articles have been published regarding the subject.²

Nowadays, the majority of Indonesians are very familiar with commercial cassettes, in urban as well as rural communities. Unlike TV sets which are most commonly found in homes and are not yet spread all over the country, cassettes are played almost everywhere – in city and intercity buses, cafes, discothèques, homes, etc. – and they are disseminated all over the country, and spread among people of low and high class.

The development of the cassette industry has also resulted in the growth of media genres and has directly or indirectly supported the establishment of cultural hybridity.

¹ Apparently, a Dutch man, de Greef (it is not known what is his first name), have demonstrated a simple phonograf machine around 1882 to the public in Java (see P.B.'s [P. Brooshooft – the editor in charge of *De Locomotief*, Semarang] article entitled "De nieuwe phonograf" published in *De Locomotief*, Friday, June 3, 1892). Ten years later a "new" talking machine was introduced to the island. On May 22, 1892, Profesor Douglas Archibald, a representative of the Edison Company from the USA, demonstrated an Edison phonograf to the public in Surabaya. In an advertisement in *De Soerabaiasch-Handelsblad* (Monday, June 16, 1892 [see also Saturday, May 14, 1892]), his manager, Allan Hamilton, mentions that this was the first introduction of recording technology in Java ("voor het eerst op Java"). In addition, Archibald traveled from Calcutta by the steamer S.S. *Nerbudda* and arrived in Singapore on Wednesday, May 4, 1892. He conducted phonograf exhibition in Singapore two times (the first exhibition presented in Singapore Town Hall was attended by the Honourable Singaporean Hinghe Official, W.E. Maxwell). One week later he sailed to Surabaya (see *The Straits Times*, 4 May 1892, p.265; 10 May 1892, p.274). At the same time, J. Calabressini, an Italian, demonstrated the phonograf machine for people in Batavia and some other towns in western Java (e.g. Cirebon, Tegal, etc.). He appears to have been seen like a travelling magician (*gouchelaar*). He also claimed to be Edison's representative in the Dutch East Indies (DEI). See newspaper *Tjerimai* (Saturday, November 26; Saturday, December 3; Wednesday, December 7; Saturday, December 10, 1892); *De Java Bode* (Thursday, January 11, 1901).

There can be no doubt that cassettes have an influence on their public. It cannot be doubted either that, conversely, socio-economic, political, and aesthetic life have a strong influence on the cassette industry. One observation can be made clearly: cassette recordings, and media technology in general, have created new and ever-growing business opportunities in Indonesia. Yet another observation can be made: recording studios which are commercially oriented have increased in number, and this growth has concurred with a growth in artistic creativity and the advent of media genres. There is no doubt that the rise of the recording industry and the boom in cassettes all over Indonesia since the 1970s have stimulated the stylistic diversity and musical variety in the country.

In this paper I examine the production of commercial cassettes and their role as agents of cultural awareness in Indonesia. As a case study, I will focus on one community in particular, namely the Minangkabau of West Sumatra. I will make some remarks on the history and general nature of the cassette industry in West Sumatra. I want to discuss the socio-cultural significance of the mediatization of Minangkabau culture (musics and verbal arts); how the media (cassette) can create ethnic identities, and strengthen (or weaken) ethnic stereotypes. Beyond this, theoretically, I want to discuss what is happening in human lives when almost all of our cultures, from the metropolitans to the remote parts in the third countries in Africa, Asia, and Latin America, have been mediatized.

The arrival of recording technology in West Sumatra

Since the late of 19th century, Padang has been a “metropolitan” town in Sumatra. This town has been occupied by various ethnic groups: Minangkabau, Javanese, Niasan, Chinese, Chinese Macao, Arabian, Indian (Keling, Tamil), Japanese, European, and Eurasian or *Indische* (Colombijn 1994:34-65). Besides its direct contact with foreign peoples, this town also became the Dutch military base in Sumatra. For instance, during the Aceh war (1873-1914), this town became the place for treatment of injured Dutch soldiers. Hence many military barracks, government buildings, trade offices, and hospital were build there (Amran 1988:11). Padang become more developed after the international port, Emmahaven (now: Teluk Bayur) was opened in 1892. Since the turn of 19th and 20th century Padang has acquired almost all the requisites which characterize a

² See e.g. Sutton (1985); Rodgers (1986); Williams (1989/1990); Bangun (1999).

“modern” city, such as insurance companies (e.g. branch of Utrechtsche Insurence, Bataviasche Zee & Brand Ass. Mj.), urban entertainment (e.g. The Royal Excelsior Bioscope, Cinema Theater), bank institutions (e.g. Padangsche Spaarbank, Volksbank Minangkabau), large stores (e.g. Toko A. Jesinoswski in Pondok, Toko Toyo in Kampung Jawa, Pondok, and Kampung Cina, Toko Zeillinger in Hiligoo), auction houses (the well known auctioneers are A. Goldstein and H. Chevalier), hotels (e.g. Hotel Sumatra and Hotel Oranye in Muara, Hotel Kong Bie Hiang in Pondok), executive and business clubs (e.g. Lodge Matahari), newspapers (e.g. *Pelita Ketjil*, *Insulinde*, *Pertja Barat*),³ lawyers and private attorney services (e.g., Mr. Cautinhoo in Goeroen, Mr. Bosmann in Parak Kerambil, Mr. Sarolea in Sawahan), medical specialist practices (e.g. Dr. Driessen in Blok Belakang no. 22, Dr. H. Arends in Sawahan), etc. Padang has also opened a shipping line with towns and islands along the westcoast of Sumatra, Batavia, Semarang, Surabaya, Singapore, Penang, Middle East and Erope (see ships timetable e.g. *Sinar Sumatra*, Wednesday, 12 January 1916). Imported products from Europe, including talking machines, could be immediately marketed in Padang, as in the major towns in Java.

Recording technology seems to have entered Padang (West Sumatra) not long after it became known in Java. As an illustration, in the early month of year 1911, the store of A. Jesinowski in Padang sold gramophones and discs; the price of a talking machine varied from f.40 to f.80, and a disc from the price of f.2.50 to f. 3.50. (*Pertja Barat*, Tuesday, January 31, 1911); J. Boon Jr., who owned Toko Tuinenburg in Tanah Lapang Alang Lawas also became a distributor of gramophones and dics in Padang (*Oetoesan Melajoe*, Thursday, April 13, 1916). But in the first half of the 20th century, gramophone-trading in Padang seems to have been dominated by Chinese traders, such as the Firm of Siauw Beng Tjoan in Kampung Tionghowa, Pondok, Toko Public, Toko Lie Sam Tjoen, Toko Madju in Kampung Jawa, all three in Padang, and Toko Minangkabau in Fort de Kock.⁴ Toko Anti Mahal, also situated in Fort de Kock, and seemingly the property of a Minangkabau *pedagang* (merchant), also sold gramophones and discs (*Sinar Sumatra*, Monday, July 8, 1940).

The talking machine immediately became a new form of home entertainment in

³Padang has the longest history in the press industry in Sumatra. The city first saw the birth of a vernacular paper in December 1864 when the *Bintang Timor* (Star of the East) was put in trial circulation. Between 1856 to 1913 recorded not less than 29 newspapers and periodicals were published in Padang, not including newspapers in the Dutch language (See Adam 1975:75-99).

⁴ see *Pewarta*, Wednesday, May 3; Thursday, June 8; Saturday, July 22; Friday, August 11, 1933).

Padang, and certainly enhanced the owner's status, mostly among European and Eurasian houses. In many auctions (*acara lelang*), gramophones and discs were often sold; customarily, the items that were auctioned were owned by European and Eurasian people, government officials as well as private entrepreneurs.⁵

Some Minangkabau genres were recorded on the *Beka*, *Odeon*, and *Tjap Angsa* labels in the 1930s. Those record discs were intended for commercial use; by the 1930s people were able to buy Minangkabau records such as *Angsa Minangkabau*, *Koedo-koedo*, *Polau Air*, *Odeon Minangkabau*, etc. at an average price of f.1.35 each.⁶ In the first half of 20th century many Minangkabau discs were produced. According to Pahilip Yampolsky (1999:14), among 15,582 sides (just 75% of estimated production) gramophone records (78s) were distributed for DEI/Malaya market between 1903 to 1942, 170 sides contained Minangkabau genres. This was the second highest representation on disc of any ethnic groups outside Java (after Malay).

It is suggested that the Minangkabau records sold quite well. So, who were their consumers? Based on these facts, I conjecture that the Minangkabau commercial discs at that time were consumed by Minangkabau people themselves rather than people from other ethnic groups, as can also be seen in Minangkabau (and other ethnic groups) commercial cassette consumption at present. Nevertheless, the Minangkabau people were quite advanced at that time, both in their homeland and in *rantau*⁷; an educated and

⁵ Thus, for example, already in 1916 the following persons had gramophone machines and discs (with up to 60 discs each) in their house: J.A. van der Bijl (in Blok No.12), Agent *pakketvaart* (packet boat service) Admiraal (in Terendam), Bellman (in Terendam), J.F. Bakker (in Emmahaven), Stanley Price (in Hiligoo), Ed Pfennigwerth (in Pondok), de Puijl (in Kandang), W. Perquin (in ?), Sergeant Majoor V.J.A. Vlinders (near Bataljon 17), J.C.A. Alting Siberg (in Balai Baroe), van der Dussen (in Kampoeng Djawa), Ch. L.G. Brugman (in Nipa[h]laan), J.B. Schrooijesteijn (in Hiligoo), and Wouters (in van Bossestraat). See auction advertisements in *Sinar Sumatra* in subsequent dates: (Monday, January 3; Wednesday, February 2; Wednesday, February 9; Friday, March 10; Saturday, March 11; Thursday, March 30; Wednesday, May 10; Tuesday, July 4; Tuesday, September 26; Monday, October 2; Thursday, October 5; Tuesday, October 10; Tuesday, November 14, 1916). Apparently, at that time white peoples in Padang lived quiet spread, not so exclusive.

⁶ See advertisement Toko Anti Mahal in Ford de Kock in *Sinar Sumatra* (Monday, July 8, and Tuesday, July 9, 1940).

⁷ *Rantau* originally mean shoreline, the riches of the river, land outside West Sumatra, and now "abroad" or foreign countries. It is estimated that in 1930s, 1.717.031 (89%) orang Minang live in their homeland, West Sumatra while 211.291 (11%) lived outside West Sumatra, comprises in towns in Sumatra (188.246), Java and Madura (7.206), Malay peninsula (13.790), and other regions (7.206). See Naim (1979:31).

modern elite had formed in their society; the *merantau*⁸ custom had resulted in the development of wealthy class, as reflected in many Minangkabau kaba (oral narratives).⁹ Based on the fact that many advertisements for gramophones and discs were published in Malay newspapers in Padang, it is suggested that the advertisements were intended for the indigene readers (*pembaca pribumi*), especially for those who had the financial capability to buy talking machines.

But it is still not exactly clear who were recorded the Minangkabau genres on the gramophone era. Presumably the commercial recording was done by Chinese recording companies of agencies, such as Tio Tek Hong, Jo Kim Tjan Record, etc. who were for the most part based in offices in Batavia. Thus, if it could be determined from where *the Tjap Angsa* brand distributed in Sumatra, the process of recording ethnic genres on disc in Sumatra could probably be clarified, especially Minangkabau genres. Possibly the recording process was not only done in the studio. At that time it was usual to record local songs outside the studio; an expert from a record company usually recorded a singer in his/her home and then the master recording was sent to the studio. The recording equipment itself was relatively compact and easy to transport. Earlier, this method was applied by European record companies to record native musics in e.g. Asia (Gronow 1981:253).

Between 1959 and 1960 the Lokananta studio issued some gramophone records with Minangkabau songs on the *Indravox* label, but not many: a total of 90 minutes or 3.5 discs (Yampolsky 1987a:10). There were records of Orkes Gumarang directed by Asbon recorded in Jakarta, Orkes Senandung Baru directed by Juzwier Djainun recorded in Bukittinggi, Orkes Minang Gantosari directed by A.A. Navis recorded in Bukittinggi, Orkes Kesenian Gurindam Minang directed by Daoed Optical recorded in Medan, and some instrumentals by Persatuan Talempong Muda Harapan directed by Buyung Dt. Bagindo Ulak recorded in Bukittinggi (Yampolsky *Ibid.*:160-62).

The recording of Minangkabau traditional genres on a larger scale for commercial purposes was initiated in the early 1970s. In later years more and more traditional Minangkabau genres -- oral narrative, drama, oratory, song, etc. -- appeared on

⁸ Literally means "go to rantau" (originally frontier region, now includes all migration destination outside the heartland, West Sumatra, even abroad). Merantau is institutionalized in Minangkabau custom (*adat*). For the characteristic of *merantau* as a unique behavior and its difference with other migration types, see Naim (*Ibid.*:2-13).

⁹ See Junus (1984).

commercial cassettes, most of them produced in the capital of the province of West Sumatra, Padang. Many Minangkabau oral narrative genres, which were only chanted orally in villages, then become mediatized into cassettes. A genre of Minangkabau oral narrative which was recorded frequently on cassette was *kaba*. *Kaba* is Minangkabau prose, always containing stories, usually chanted professionally by the singer or the storyteller, accompanied by musical instrument(s).¹⁰ Some others do not contain stories, such as *pidato pasambahan* (adat speech), composition and recital of *pantun* couplet, *Salawat Dulang*, an oral performance presented in the *surau* (Islamic prayer-house, traditionally a special house for boys before they are going to rantau) during Islamic festivals, discoursing about religious matters (Amir 1996:55-69), and so forth. These traditional oral narrative genres differ from the song genres (*lagu Minang*). Minangkabau Oral narratives are usually anonymous while lagu-lagu Minang are usually written by composers and arrangers.

Although it is known that Minangkabau genres have been recorded on discs since the 1940s, it is not so clear whether at that time Minangkabau oral narratives were also mediatized. The great number of Minangkabau recordings on disc seem to contain songs and Koran recitation. Up to the present I have not been able to find *kaba* recording on disc. Jaap Kunst in his ethnomusicological research in West Sumatra only recorded vocals (e.g. *Lagu Patah Tiga*), *Lagu Dindin*, and *Lagu Baru* which were accompanied by *pupui(k)* and two *saluang* (flutes)(Kunst 1994:268). The oldest *kaba* recorded on cassette is *Kaba Hasan Surabaya* in Rabab Pasisia. According to Umar Junus, it was recorded by a small recording studio in Kampung Jawa, Padang, in 1971.¹¹ *Kaba Merantau ke Jambi* as narrated by Syamsudin, also in Rabab Pasisia, was recorded in 1974 (Phillips 1991).

From 1970 electronic media technology was intensively disseminated throughout the villages.¹² As was the case throughout all Indonesia, the local recording industry rapidly

¹⁰ Different regions in West Sumatra have different ways of *kaba* chanting (using different music instrument(s) and styles of arranging the text): e.g. in Padang and its surrounding area was called *Dendang Pauah* (Suryadi 1993a); in Pesisir Selatan regency it was called *Rabab Pasisia* (Suryadi 1993b); in Pariaman regency it was called *Rabab Pariaman* (Suryadi 1996:82-96; 1998:66-7); in Payakumbuh and its surrounding it was called *Sijobang* (Phillips 1981). *Kaba* is also dramatized in Minangkabau open air theater, *Randai* (Pauka 1998). *Randai* is also performed orally. Recently many *kaba* can be found in print, but the printed *kabas* were not as popular as the oral versions.

¹¹ Umar Junus, personal e-mail communication, 18 April 1999.

¹² For the collection of Minangkabau audio cassettes at the University of Wisconsin, see Yampolsky (1987b:53).

grew and the sale of cassette tapes soared not only in the urban areas but also in rural communities (see Sutton 1985:24–25). Through process many traditional Minangkabau genres were recorded for the cassette market; concurrently the number of radio-cassette recorders expanded. In this period, TV sets were still scarce; they were items of luxury in rural communities. Nowadays, almost every kind of audio-visual media are founded in Minangkabau houses.

The mediatization of ethnic genres using cassettes throughout Indonesia stimulate the rise of local recording companies and encouraged local markets. Nevertheless, commonly a recording entrepreneur from one ethnic background is not very interested in producing cassettes for people from different ethnic background. Thus for example, a recording studio owned by a Sundanese person tends to produce Sundanese cassettes more than Javanese or other ethnically associated cassettes.¹³ This phenomenon is a reflection of the fact that on ethnic identity is still maintained and presented in the recording business in Indonesia. This also happens in Jakarta, a metropolitan area in which many ethnic groups interact with each other, but culturally, each of them lives in “enclaves”. Thus for example, the *Balerong Group* (*balerong* means ‘royal audience hall’), a well-known Minangkabau theater group that established its studio in Tanah Abang, Jakarta Barat. The founder of this group is Yus Datuk Parpatiah, a Minangkabau headman (*penghulu*) from Maninjau, West Sumatra. In Jakarta, he had the idea to create a new Minangkabau genre based on traditional ones. He produced hundreds of commercial cassette dramas specifically comedy, family, household, or domestic dramas which called *drama Minang moderen* (modern Minangkabau dramas) (see Rosa 1990). Additionally, he created the *adat* discussions. Commonly, the stories take two or four 60-minute cassettes. The Balerong Group cassette dramas have been very popular since the 1980s, especially among Minangkabau living outside their homeland of West Sumatra. These cassette dramas of Yus Datuk Parpatiah form just one of the numerous examples of how ethnic culture was revitalized, as a side-effect of the modern media technology. This revitalization made people create new genres, often by mixing of genres that already existed.

¹³ The Chinese-peranakan recording entrepreneurs, with their business talent and big capital are precisely the opposite of this fact. They recorded many genres from different ethnic backgrounds in Indonesia. The important thing for the companies is the market opportunity. They have recording studios in some Indonesian main towns, like Jakarta, Surabaya and Medan. But

There are several recording studios that have recorded Minangkabau genres. Presently, there are about 50 recording companies doing popular Minang songs, some of the biggest examples are Pitunang Records, Caroline Records, Ganto Minang, Gurindam, Amel and the again active Edo Records (Barendregt 2001:19). The two most prominent ones are Sinar Padang Record and Tanama Record which were established in 1975 and 1978, respectively. Both have a distributor shop to market their own products. Their main products are Minangkabau popular songs (*lagu-lagu pop Minang*), which are not only played at home but also in the intercity-interprovince buses that carry Minangkabau migrants (*perantau*). The lyrics of those songs express the Minangkabau yearning for their homeland.

Besides Pop Minang cassettes and house drama cassettes from the Balerong Group, recording studios in Padang also produce traditional Minangkabau oral narrative cassettes. The villagers-storytellers are introduced to recording media. Their performances were recorded in recording studios. For the storytellers, performing in a recording studio is still a novel experience. This can be understood because they have only recently become accustomed to performing face to face with their audience. In an unmediated performance, a storyteller chants all night long. Before morning (*Subuh*) prayer, all the audiences disperse and the text of story just chanted disappears just as quickly as the night passed. Now, after recorded in studios, their repertoire is preserved (standardized) in 60-minute tape-cassettes.

An example: Pop Minang cassettes

Here I would like to illustrate how the (Minangkabau) cultural identity is redefined and “rearticulated” in close connection with recording materials. Specifically, I will describe the Minangkabau musical genre innovations, i.e. (Lagu) Pop Minang. Like some other regional Pop music in Indonesia, nowadays Pop Minang songs available in thousands of commercial cassettes, CDs, and VCDs are consumed by the Minangkabau people both in West Sumatra and the *rantau*.¹⁴ Because of this, today Pop Minang is a booming industry offering work to a large number of singers, songwriters, musicians, studio-engineers, and recording entrepreneurs. Most of the recording companies have their own networks of

recently the Chinese-Indonesian business strategy has been followed by some Indigene recording entrepreneurs, especially in Padang, Medan, and Surabaya. See Bangun (2001: 11-13).

¹⁴ Nowadays the information about Pop Minang musics also available in internet. See for example web sites www.musikminang.com.

agents, which distribute their products far into the *rantau*. At a regular basis cassettes, and now increasingly CD and VCD as well, are distributed to Minangkabau living as far as Jakarta, Medan, Palembang, Riau, Malaysia, Singapore and Brunei. There is moreover also a huge non-Minang audience (Barendregt *op.cit.*:19).

There should be little need to argue the importance of popular music and popular culture in modern Minangkabau society. Many Minangkabau people are more familiar with commercial popular culture than with their traditional arts and customs. The hundreds of songs recorded by Melati, Zalmon, and Nedy Gampo, have a much wider audience than the traditional oral narratives recited by Amir Hosen (*rabab Pariaman*), Edwar Rajo Mule (*dendang Pauah*), Pirin Asmara (*rabab Pasisia*), etc.

Seen from this point of view, the emergence of pop culture seems to erode and endanger the ethnic identity. In the classic neo Marxist analysis of commercial popular culture, music-making ability is taken from people and returned in the form of commodity. Individuals and communities are thus alienated from their own creative talent and deprived of the warmth and solidarity reinforced by communal music-making. Instead, they become increasingly dependent on the media for the musical needs, which are exploited and manipulated by entertainment industries, which fetishize stars and songs.

I have precisely opposite opinion. The Pop Minang itself has become a new icon to rearticulate and redefined the "Minangness" among the Minangkabau society in this age. In recent decades, scholars such as Stuart Hall, Simon Firth, and Richard Middleton, deriving their initial inspiration from Antonio Gramsci, have found it fruitful to treat public culture, including popular music, neither as pure corporate manipulation nor as grassroots expression. Instead, they treat it as contested territory where hegemonic and oppositional values symbolically or explicitly engage each other (see Manuel 1993:10). Popular music and more generally the mass media are thus best seen as site of negotiation, mediation, and "rearticulation" of these and other dialectics, such as traditional/modern, young/old, male/female, city/countryside, and regional/pan-regional. Such an analytical approach employs neo-Marxist principles of hegemony, alienation, and cultural materialism as means of linking the cultural and ideological superstructure with its socioeconomic base. At the same time, it extends the application of these concepts to encompass contradictions pertaining to region, ethnicity, religion, race, gender, and class as well as other factors (Manuel *Ibid.*).

Linguistically, the Pop Minang (cassettes) have become a vehicle to forming a

“collective language” which is acceptable and understandable for all Minangkabau, from all parts of West Sumatra. It different from the Minangkabau oral tradition languages which only acceptable and understandable among the Minangkabau people in certain nagari¹⁵ However, it would be the Pop Minang genre that adressed the Minangkabau communcity as a whole. Through this genre, it was no longer a particular village of origin that was adressed to the exclusion of other villages, but rather increasingly an overall regional or ethnic identity, including Minang both in the home land and the *rantau*. Today Pop Minang is a widely established genre (Barendregt *op.cit.*:27).

So, the continuity of the values is apparent in both the older and new traditions. In this way, Pop Minang both represents and serves as a vehicle of Minang culture. Over all, the Minangkabau experience is evoked by depicting a recognisable everyday landscape, constituted by the methapors of motherland, merantau, and a longing for the hamlet of birth (Barendregt *op.cit.*:4-5). Pop Minang furthermore functions as a popular platform first on which concepts of “Minangness”, authenticity, and globalisation are discussed, and second through which a new vision of the motherland is constituted at the dawning of the 21st century.

“Cassettes culture” and cultural contest in Indonesia

The Republic of Indonesia is not only a state with a distinct Indonesian culture-under-construction, it also consists of hundreds of ethnicities, each with its own culture and each with its own community. The rapid growth of the cassette industry in Indonesia has forged national as well as many regional styles, mixing outside, often times Western elements with local elements and using the national language (*bahasa Indonesia*) along side the regional languages too. For example, musicians recorded *pop Indonesia* was well as *pop Sunda*, *pop Minang*, *pop Batak* and so forth (see e.g. Lockard 1998:83-87). The outcome could have been otherwise. Cassettes have also contributed to the formation of a so-called national culture. Cassette have also contributed to reinvented local cultures. Nowadays these so-called national cassettes (*kaset [lagu] nasional*) have become national icons. These cassettes are acceptable among the ethnic groups, acting as bridge for the people who come from different ethnic cultural backgrounds in the frame-work of a nationhood or Indonesian awareness. But on the other hand, the studios that produce

¹⁵ For example, the language of *dendang Pauah*, for instance, just acceptable and understandable among the people in Pauah and surroundings, outskirts Padang. *Sijobang*'s language is only

commercial cassettes serve, more or less intentionally, as vehicles for revitalizing these ethnicities which often tend to resist the hegemony of the state and its ideology of an all-Indonesian culture. The status of national cassettes is clearly different from that of so-called regional cassettes (*kaset [hiburan] daerah*). The latter are only more acceptable and popular among each ethnic group. Thus, for example, the Acehese cassettes are not acceptable among the Javanese people, and vice versa.

Cassette is a type of “small” or “micro” media. The main characteristic of this micro media is its ability to evade state control. The audio cassette is – to use Enzenberger’s term – a kind of “democratic participant media” (Manuel *op.cit.*:3–4). Next to the internet,¹⁶ cassettes have the greatest subversive power, for example, against the state. “Cassette, unlike film, can be used at the owner’s convenience and discretion; they thus resist various forms of control and homogenization associated with the capital-intensive, monopolistic ‘old’ media of television, cinema, and radio” (Manuel *op.cit.*:2). The recording industry in Indonesia, in both its production and distribution, is protected against the domination of the conglomerates that conspire with authority. The cassette industry is run by small capitalists who compete fairly with each other (see Bagun 1999:37-51; 2001). Even this field, the competition is livened up by uncounted illegal hijackers that produced pirate cassettes.

In short, the cultural emergence of recording industry in Indonesia has resulted in decentralization, diversification, autonomy, dissidence, and freedom, in particular in Suharto’s New Order political terms of the contest between so-called *kebudayaan nasional* (national culture) and *kebudayaan daerah* (regional culture). It cannot be denied that the electronic media, by changing the communication patterns in our lives, makes a very important contribution to social and political change.

Yet there is one question that remains unanswered: do these media perpetuate local divisions and heterogenization rather than promote global unification and homogenization? In Indonesia, the electronic media are sometimes seen as agents of Western culture and ideology, which in the long run will erode indigenous cultures. Scholars and politicians always warn of the negative effects of electronic mass media (see for instance Ibrahim 1997; Wardhana 1997). Conversely, others have been very positive

acceptable and understandable among the people in Payakumbuh and surroundings.

¹⁶ Concerning the subversive power of the internet against the Indonesian authorities during the New Order, see Hill and Sen (1997:67-89); Hill (2001); See also Randall (1996:37-51).

about them. Recently, some scholars in media studies argue that certain electronic media have a subversive power *vis-à-vis* the state and “alien” cultures in that they effectively perpetuate local cultures, strengthening the ethnic stereotypes. Moreover, the electronically steered globalization does not necessarily demolish local awareness. Witness, for instance, the intense communication among diasporic people who, originating from a certain area, have spread over the globe and now glorify their places and cultures of origin. Thus for example, the Minangkabau immigrants who live on the five continents communicate in their mother tongue through the following interactive e-mail address: rantau-net@rantaunet.com (see web site: <http://www.rantaunet.com>) talking in lofty terms about their country of origin that expressed a nostalgia to their motherland.

In Indonesia’s multiethnicity, the electronic mass media, particularly cassettes, seem to have contributed to the revitalization, perpetuation, and reconstruction of cultural identities. Therefore, they have had a considerable effect on inter-ethnic relationships and socio-political mobility. The electronic media has become agents in the growth of ethnic sentiments, stimulating cultural contest and rivalry, making vernacular and so-called traditional elements more visible, and reaffirming the “boundaries” between cultures and communities. They have helped redefine local identities among people who came from the same roots but have moved away.

Distinctions between “We” and “The Others”

It cannot be denied that audio-visual media plays an important role in present-day communications. It influences human behavior, in economic, socio-political terms, and cultural terms. It also cannot be denied that modern media is causing an end to the isolation of more and more communities of human beings, pulling its members into the so-called electronic commonwealth (Abramson, Arterson, and Orren 1988). In her study of the impact of television on the American political process, Anne Rawley Saldich has shown that television has had a significant effect on political participation in the United States (Saldich 1979:110). In his study of the cassette industry in North India, Peter Manuel (*op.cit.*: Chapter 10) has shown that commercially recorded cassettes have made an essential contribution to the emergence of socio-political movements in India.

This phenomenon is not restricted to United States and India. It happens everywhere around the globe. The introduction of the new media leads to new and larger socio-political entities, more extensive networks, more comprehensive communities. These factors (or some other word to describes the previous list) stretch and strengthen local,

regional, and national boundaries. However, new media also has a somewhat reverse effect, which is hardly ever discussed. Namely it strengthens our impulses to make distinctions and divisions. When the charismatic leader of Kurds rebels, Abdullah Öcalan, was caught by the Turkish army in February 1999 and the news spread over the world through TV, Kurds in many countries reacted within hours, confirming their distinct identity. After CNN reported NATO planes bombed the Chinese embassy in Belgrado in May 1999, within hours anti-US demonstrations took place in Beijing, igniting Chinese nationhood. These are just two illustrations of how the new media not only creates local togetherness but also non-local distinctions and divisions. We can “see” and “feel” ourselves more clearly, but at the same time we can distinguish ourselves from “the others” as well. In Indonesia, we have seen the same phenomena during the ethnic riots in Kalimantan and Maluku.

In particular, audio-visual media played an important role in the first phase of the construction of Indonesia as a national community in which people developed a feeling of togetherness (see e.g. Alfian and Chu 1981; Wild 1987; Mrázek 1997). Later, however, once the state had come into being, its boundaries had become clear, and its culture somewhat more distinct, the media explored and confirmed local identities *vis-à-vis* the state (see e.g. Sutton 1985; Rodgers 1986; Lindsay 1997). The more and more developed the media becomes, the more and more detailed its subject matter becomes. Mediatization has a double effect on human beings, like a knife with a doubled-edged blade. Specifically, it brings about a new global awareness, but also reaffirms local sensitivity.

One could say that there are two types of people among those who are influenced by the new media technologies in Indonesia other parts in the third world countries. The first are those who own a car, are well-educated, wear a white shirt and a necktie, carry portable computers, consume a large amount of potatochips and discount beer while watching cable TV in a luxurious living room (thanks to my colleague Jan Mrázek), live in comfort, and go abroad on sabbatical leaves. The second are those (by far the greatest part of humankind) who work in the informal sector, are less educated, live modestly in villages or in plain urban housing, enjoy music from cheap battery tape recorders produced by local factories, watch TV from common TV in Village chief offices (*kantor lurah*) or hitchhike watch (*nonton nebeng*) on neighbor's TV, and are hardly able to travel to the capital of the province, not to mention that the capital of the country or abroad. On a national level, these could be called high class and low class. On an international level,

these could be called (post) industrial societies and developing ones. Nowadays, almost all human beings – both high class and low class – are influenced by and cannot avoid the media. That is, villagers as well as urbanites, both high class and low class, receive and are influenced by media, in different way and with different intensities. Their impact, however, follows a different pattern. Mediatization changes the consciousness of space and time of human beings. The unavoidable presence of media technology has clarified the difference between “we” and “the others.”

I hesitate to state that, within a decade or two, people will reach the anti-climax of globalization meaning that more and more media will cannonize global culture and at the same time stretch local cultures. Mike Featherstone (1995:91) suggested that there is a correlation between the rise of traditionalism and the quest for authenticity, local identity, and the cultural root on one hand, and the increased strengthening of global capitalism on the other. The inclination of a global market to make homogeneous and the inclination of a capitalism system to commodify all things both demand a balance in the opposite direction, the direction of the essentials of local identity. This is significant with regard to the role of modern media in our lives. A major characteristic of modern media is its tendency to explore and emphasize specification and diversification. Specifically, it brings to the foreground certain elements and leaves others out. Cassette technology offers a good example of this because it has stimulated an ongoing generic diversification of “traditional” or “ethnic” music as well as of modern music. A so-called traditional society is not a passive recipient of modern technology. On the contrary, it uses this technology for its own purpose, for strengthening the local identity which it has been creating all along, “from time immemorial”.

I suspect that in Indonesia, electronic media have played a leading role in the creation and invention of new icons, new symbols, and new genres in the various local cultures, thus redefining the main characteristics of ethnic cultures in our modern world. This is of course related to the locality effect of media. As Jan Mrázek mentioned, everybody in Klaten seems to be waiting for a *dalang* from Klaten to appear on Javanese *wayang* presentation in Indonesia’s Indosiar TV or in other words everyone is waiting for a letter sent to Indosiar by Javanese originally from Banyumas who now lives in Sumatra thanks Indosiar for showing a *dalang* from Banyumas.¹⁷ During my involvement as a member of the interactive *rantaunet* Minangkabau mailing list two years before, I noticed that the

members from the same district in West Sumatra (e.g. from Bukittinggi, Pariaman, Solok, or Batusangkar) tend very often to reply to each other and express their own dialect rather than Common Minangkabau colloquial (*Bahasa Minangkabau Umum*) that has become the means of communication among the all Minangkabau people. In this “*lapau cyberspace*”¹⁸ everything was discussed in Minangkabau language (some times in Indonesian Language or English). They discussed *adat* (custom), religion, economy, politic. etc., stressing their motherland. But at the same moment each member also expressed their own local dialects to show their village’s identity (*identitas nagari*), as a Minangkabau comes from Payakumbuh, Pasaman, and so forth. This is why the tendency of modern media is to explore and emphasize specification and diversification. In the same way, it is possible make the following analogic. On the nation level, the Sundanese people would remain stock-still in puzzlement in front of TV screen (that is they would not change) if Indosiar presented *Wayang Golek* performance. The same situation would happen to the Minangkabau people in West Sumatra if TVRI presented *Tari Piring* (plate dance) or Minangkabau musics. In a global context, this is expressed through the dichotomy of non-Western culture (“we”) and Western culture (“the other”), that is dangerous and hence must be sorted out. What I want to say is that the mediatization of cultures brings about an alienation effect. Infact, it actually intensifies cultural representation more clearly. In Indonesia, consciously or unconsciously, it brings about a contest between the various ethnic communities as well as between people within one ethnic community. I would like to suggest that these contests will intensify in the near future. The secret effects of this phenomenon, locally, regionally, nationally, and internationally, are not yet well known and therefore are unpredictable.

The technologization of ethnic culture that is taking place in various regions in Indonesia has certain effects on the concepts and practices of the so-called traditional genres. It effects performers, a performance and the audience in ways that are hard to disentangle and describe. Indonesia peresnts an interesting case of how the new mediatization of local genres gives new and strong meaning to local or ethnic culture. That is, it gives a new awareness of locality, a strong awareness of local identity, a strengthened awareness of the differences between “we” and “the others”, and a new

¹⁷ Discussion in VA/AVMI weekly meeting in IIAS Universiteit Leiden, 10 November 1999.

impetus to the dialogues between various ethnicities as well as to the dialogues between particular ethnicities, the national state and "the world".¹⁹

The modern forms of cultural mediatization cannot help but make us more aware of our distinct characteristics as a group, as a community. Physically or ideationally, the media are able to bring together certain people so that they feel as a bunch, even as an "imagined group".

Conclusions

We are presently witnessing a redefinition of interethnic relations in Indonesia similar to many places in the world. We are also witnessing the the threat of disintergration in Indonesia (as a "imagined community"--to borrow Anderson's term).²⁰ Obviously, this phenomenon is not only inspired by political considerations. Cultural mediation also plays an important role in this. The modern media have given a strong impetus to a new awareness of locality, a new awareness of group identities, to the efforts to redefine one's place in the world *vis-à-vis* "the others". The new forms in which the cultural assets (material and non-material) of ethnic groups is mediated cannot but revitalize the self-consciousness of these groups.

In Indonesia, the so-called micromedia, in particular cassettes, have been important agents in the rearticulation of ethnic culture. The authoritarian character of the New Order with its tendency to make everything uniform and standard has only strengthened these moves to articulate the specifics of locality and ethnicity. Commercially produced cassettes have made a substantial contribution to the legitimation of traditional genres as forms of resistance to the state's hegemony. According to Peter Manuel "Cassettes can be a crucial vehicle for evolution and dissemination of grassroots genres ignored, for various reasons, by record companies oriented toward middle-class consumers" (*op.cit.*:31). Since the second decade of the 20th century, Minangkabau genres have been represented in recording media, in gramophone discs and then cassettes. Culturally, changing mediascapes has emerging regional methphors; through those records the

¹⁸ This literally means "cyberspace coffee shop," because its members who live spread out on five continents and in West Sumatra itself imagine and remember the traditional coffee shops in Minangkabau, as an important place to talk and discuss many things while drinking coffee.

¹⁹ In her study of Angkola drama on cassettes, for instance, Susan Rodgers (1996) shows a concrete case of how an ethnic group deals with the dilemmas created by rapid economic modernization and the interventions of the state.

Minangkabau identity is reaffirmed. The Indonesian case shows that some so-called traditional genres have acquired a new prestige because of novel forms of mediatization. The modern media is shaking the roots of cultures, and the basis of people's awareness in a wide variety of unforeseeable ways, so this phenomenon deserves our attention to the full.

When recording becomes a daily activity, is supervised and infiltrated more and more in the private field to the lives of human beings, then the awareness of distinction and difference is on its way to being reproduced in the psyche of the subject. The media itself then can look forward to a future in which the role of supervision can be allowed to wither away, its function having been, in effect, privatized.

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²⁰ See Anderson (1991).

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