

Translocal Popular Music on the *Melayu* Borderlands

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Abstract

Many studies of music in Indonesia focus on cultural heritage and the maintenance of regional or national traditions, or on western-style pop and rock as degrading such traditions or promoting progressive social values. Analyses of hybridised genres such as *kroncong* and *dangdut* present a more complicated picture by calling attention to the region's long history of intercultural exchange; but few scholarly works attempt to account for the highly varied musical and associated style markers that characterise today's urban social settings in and around Indonesia (e.g., Perlman, 1999; Suryadi, 2005; Wallach, 2008). This paper reflects on my initial efforts to relate my doctoral ethnography on Yogyakarta to musical life in Samarinda and other regional centres. Popular culture is interpreted here as informal recreation amid varying, mostly indeterminable levels of engagement with mass media, out of which translocal sociality emerges as an important indicator of inter-group affiliation and harmony. In turn, the notion of '*Melayu* borderlands' highlights elements of a Pan-Malay identity outside the usual centres of power and expressed in forms such as *pop Melayu* and street slang. My overarching aim is to formulate new ways of identifying patterns of association between musical style and social identity in the Indonesian/Malay world.