

6. Intimate Neighbors

Bollywood, *Dangdut* Music, and Globalizing Modernities in Indonesia

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There has been little research on the nature of the relationship between commercial Hindi film music and imagery, and the Indonesian popular music genre *dangdut*, a hybrid pop music extremely popular among the lower classes that incorporates musical elements from Western pop, Hindi film music, and indigenous Malay tunes. Although the strong influence of Hindi film music in the emergence of *dangdut* as a distinct genre in postindependence Indonesia has been noted by most academic and mass media accounts of *dangdut*, it is usually mentioned only in passing. For example, in their recent article about contemporary developments in Indonesian popular music following the fall of President Soeharto in 1998, Barendregt and van Zanten point out that “musically, the genre [*dangdut*] is a mix of Hindustani film music, Malay *joged* dance music, and lately a strong emphasis on reggae-like bass patterns.”¹ Thus, although the influence of Hindi film music on *dangdut* is acknowledged, deeper explorations of the transnational cultural dynamics of Bollywood films and their music and the emergence of regional hybrid popular music genres such as *dangdut* are still lacking, be it from a musicological, sociological, or cultural/postcolonial studies point of view.

My inquiry represents a preliminary foray into this still largely unexplored field. In describing the transnational travel of Bollywood music and its ongoing reception and cultural transformation in multiethnic, postindependence Indonesia, I will primarily be drawing on the discourses surrounding Bollywood and *dangdut* as conducted in the Indonesian mass media. I will examine the two positions that Bollywood occupies in the Indonesian “mediascape”: the films themselves and Bollywood song and dance as a major musical and visual horizon that shaped the emergence of the local popular music genre *dangdut*.²

I will map the distinct yet overlapping cultural space assigned to both Bollywood music and *dangdut* in Indonesia's mediascape. After a preliminary sketch of the position of Bollywood films in Indonesia as well as the historical and contemporary impact of Hindi film songs on the emergence of *dangdut* as a distinct Indonesian popular music genre, I will draw attention to the dynamic upward mobility that both genres experienced in Indonesian mass-mediated "public culture" in the 1990s.³ This development is remarkable since *dangdut* and Bollywood have traditionally been devalued as "low-class" entertainment by the more Western-oriented Indonesian urban elite. *Dangdut's* growing acceptability among upper classes in Indonesia can be tracked alongside a marked revival in Bollywood's popularity in recent years set in motion by the extraordinary success of the film *Kuch Kuch Hota Hai* (Something is happening, Karan Johar, 1998, henceforth *KKHH*) in Indonesia. Hindi films have always enjoyed a fan base among marginalized urban lower classes, but *KKHH* was a middle-class phenomenon that created a frenzy for all things Bollywood in the Indonesian mass media. While this craze might coincide with Bollywood's new popularity in the so-called West, I suggest that the changing fortunes of Bollywood films and *dangdut* music at the turn of the millennium need to be viewed in the context of Indonesia's ongoing relationship with Indian popular culture. Analyzing the positions assigned to Bollywood films and *dangdut* in Indonesian mass-mediated discourses, I contend that the current popularity of these transnational, hybrid cultural artifacts has to be interpreted within the context of Indonesia's ongoing multiethnic contestations about possible local, national, and global identities and the emergence of different notions of what it means to be "modern," "Indonesian," "Asian," and "Muslim" in our rapidly globalizing world.

Indian cultural influence on Indonesian societies can be traced back to the beginning of the fifth century. Since then, Indian cultural elements have been incorporated in a highly syncretic way into local cultures. Even after the Islamization of the Malay Archipelago, Indian cultural heritage continued to play an integral role in core sociocultural institutions. The *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata* and the adventures of their heroes and heroines remain to this day part of a collective imaginary landscape in modern Indonesia. Hence, it is not surprising that the broadcast of the Indian television serials *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* in 1991 and 1992, respectively, by the private Indonesian television

station TPI achieved remarkably high Nielsen ratings that ranged between 48 and 60. In fact, the supervisor for the airing of Indian films at TPI, Rahmat Suardi, traced this success to the long-standing notion of an assumed "cultural similarity" between India and Indonesia.⁴ Yet while the historical, cultural, and religious impact of India on the emergence of local religious, political, and cultural structures has been thoroughly examined and depicted by archaeologists, historians, and anthropologists, the modern, postcolonial transnational flows of mass-mediated cultural forms between India and Indonesia remain under-investigated. Although there has been considerable research into modern Indonesian popular culture, at least since the 1990s, the impact of transnational flows of modern mass culture between two non-Western countries is still to be explored. Too often, globalization has been understood mainly as North American cultural domination or, at best, as a process where Western influences are appropriated and negotiated in local terms. However, Indian influence on Indonesian society is not merely a thing of the past. The continuing presence of Bollywood films in Indonesia and the recent surge in their popularity enable us to grasp the new circuits of distribution and consumption through which non-Western societies participate in globalization.

Bollywood in Indonesia

Commercial Indian films were first imported into Indonesia by the allied armies in 1945, in the aftermath of Indonesia's declaration of independence, as entertainment for the Indian troops that were part of the English contingent. Though Indian mainstream cinema has been part of Indonesia's media culture ever since, its main audience has been the lower classes and the urban poor. Indonesian film historians have argued that Indian (and Chinese) films served as an important model for the national film industry established in the 1950s.⁵ Thus, prominent Indonesian director Jamaluddin Malik not only made imitations of Indian films but also imported an Indian director and several technicians to make movies in his PERSARI studio.⁶ Asrul Sani, an influential Indonesian writer and poet of *Angkatan '45* (Generation '45) who also directed some films himself, has argued that the rise of the star system in

Indonesia could be traced back to the entry of Indian filmmakers into the Indonesia's national film industry.⁷ These early domestic products were also addressed to lower-class audiences and could not compete against Indian imports. Though, in the mid-1950s, the import quota for Indian (as well as Malayan and Filipino) films was reduced in order to strengthen the local industry, the domestic film product continued to struggle. Berated by the upper classes as imitative and escapist, these films were shown in second- and third-class theaters, while the A-grade exhibition spaces were reserved for American and Western cinema. There seems to be considerable overlap between the audiences for Indonesian and Indian films. Though not all moviegoers could read the Indonesian subtitles, they nevertheless could follow the formulaic storylines and enjoyed the song and dance sequences that offered light and sensual musical interludes, speaking directly to one's emotions and even allowing the audience to spontaneously sing along with their film idols.

However, the recent surge in the popularity of Indian films is often linked to the screening of the Indian television series *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*, whose success laid the foundations for the current Bollywood boom in the Indonesian media. TPI continued broadcasting Indian films after 1991, targeting those film fans who had traditionally watched Bollywood films in lower-class cinemas.⁸ In 1996, a second television station, Indosiar, began broadcasting Indian films over the weekend. Both television stations were also among the first to broadcast live *dangdut* shows as well as *dangdut* music videos, which they have been doing since the late 1980s and early 1990s. This development owes much to the spread of television in Indonesia in the 1990s. Although still a major luxury item, television now reaches over 90 percent of the population. These drastic demographic changes account for the inclusion of "low-class" entertainment forms in television programming. Thus TPI, among the first channels to promote *dangdut* and Hindi films, is often mockingly referred to as "Indonesian Housemaid Television" (*Televisi Pembantu Indonesia*) or even "Indian Film Television" (*Televisi Pilem India*), reflecting the anxieties of class evoked by a more democratic mass medium. Though Hindi films were being shown on television, it was *KKHH*'s enormous box-office success that launched Bollywood as a major phenomenon in Indonesia's rapidly globalizing mediascape. At the end of July 2001, *KKHH* was aired by Indosiar at prime time and inaugurated what the prestigious national newspaper *Kompas* called "Indian film fever" and "Shahrukh Khan fever."⁹

In reaction to the *KKHH* craze, most television stations followed Indosiar's lead and began broadcasting Indian films and Bollywood infotainment shows. New programs were created as television stations vied with each other to capitalize on the Bollywood craze. The moderators/VJs often displayed some "Indianness," mostly by wearing Indian-style costumes and makeup.¹⁰ "Exotic" Indian fashion became one of the latest trends, ranging from silk saris and salwar kameezes to Indian-style anklets and bracelets and, of course, the obligatory bindi. In January 2003, the newspaper *Republika* stated that "Bollywood films are now shown almost around the clock on national television channels: not only in the mornings, but also in the afternoons and evenings."¹¹ In February 2002, the first issue of the new tabloid *Bollywood Indonesia* came out in Jakarta with thirty-five thousand copies and had to be reprinted.¹² In mid-2004, its circulation reached sixty thousand.¹³ The World Wide Web is another source for information and interactive discussions about Bollywood. Indonesian fans are served with the latest gossip, film reviews, and song lyrics at *Taman Bollywood* (Bollywood garden). The postings in the guestbook, most of them written by Indonesians (the site is bilingual, English and Indonesian), use an English replete with hip slang and spellings characteristic of Internet and chat-room youth language. This suggests that users are consciously positioning themselves in a globalized form of modernity that is both highly Americanized and draws on characteristic local cultural influences. Though this relation to Bollywood is clearly mediated by global consumer culture and new technologies such as cheap and easily reproducible video compact discs (VCD) and the World Wide Web, Bollywood's resurgence in Indonesia owes much to ongoing regional cultural dynamics. Indonesians are usually not aware of Bollywood's salience in the West. For them, Bollywood still seems to represent something similar to their own culture in being distinctively non-Western.

The sense of a deep familiarity with Indian films goes back to the very beginnings of the cinema industry and leisure culture in postindependence Indonesia, where Indian films together with *dangdut* music have been associated with the uneducated urban working classes and the people of the *kampung* (village or slum) and their "backward" (*kampung*, "in the style of the *kampung*") way of life. Although Bollywood as well as *dangdut*, as nontraditional mass culture genres, were clearly "modern," they were perceived as a failed, distorted attempt to be "modern" by uneducated, "backward" people. This "bastard" modernity of

Bollywood and *dangdut* was highly embarrassing to the more educated, Western-oriented elite. But the new Bollywood film of the *KKHH* variety excised these associations. In eschewing the slum aesthetics that the aspiring, upward mobile new middle classes want to distinguish themselves from, films such as *KKHH* and *Kabhi Khushi Kabhie Gham ...* (Sometimes happiness, sometimes sadness, Karan Johar, 2001) represent in fact a new kind of familiarity. *KKHH* exemplifies the new “romantic family drama.”¹⁴ A “clean” film, it was a far cry from the brutal action scenes of the typical *masala* film of the 1970s and 1980s. It depicted affluent characters, surrounded by Western status symbols and international designer fashion, but well attuned, nonetheless, to traditional values such as arranged marriages and the central role of the family. The highly modern and fashionable, yet thoroughly “Indian” and melodramatic, world of films such as *KKHH* might have addressed the deep desires, anxieties, and fantasies of its Indonesian audience, especially the newly emergent urban middle classes who are still searching for a distinct identity as they try to reconcile Western-style consumer modernity with local concerns over family, sexuality, morality, and tradition. Indian films like *KKHH* assure viewers that they can be Western-educated, at home in the globalized world of modernity and consumerism, yet still distinctively “Indian” (and as such, “Indonesian”) in their loyalty to local traditions and non-Western standards of morality. In this message lies the potential of these “new” Bollywood films to appeal to cross-class audiences and in particular to capture the emotions, desires, and fears of the newly emerging middle classes. This affinity is rhetorically captured in an article in *Kompas* entitled “Our Intimate Neighbour Called ‘Indian Films,’ ” which claims that “Indian films are now just about to become our ‘neighbours’, who are going to be our intimate friends.”¹⁵ However, there are two kinds of neighbors in Indonesia, especially if seen from middle- and upper-class perspectives: those you explicitly “recognize” as equals and the “masses” that are just out there, the poor, who live across the street or behind one’s house. While many Bollywood films of the 1970s and 1980s reminded one of these “unacknowledged” neighbors, clean family films like *KKHH* can easily be seen as “equals,” respectable neighbors dwelling in one’s own “imagined community”—worlds away from the slum. These trends and events point toward mostly local dynamics in the ongoing relationship between Bollywood films and their Indonesian audience, as

the preference for melodramatic family romances suggests that it so easily appeals to local emotional aesthetics.

Bollywood Film Songs and the Emergence of Indonesian *Dangdut* Popular Music

Dangdut can be considered a hybrid musical genre that incorporates influences from traditional Malay tunes and popular Hindi film songs, as well as Arab and Middle Eastern elements and Western popular music styles.¹⁶ Sen and Hill characterize *dangdut* as “an instance of a particular localisation of codes circulating in global cultural markets.”¹⁷ *Dangdut* eventually emerged in the early 1970s from the so-called *orkes melayu* (Malay orchestra, often abbreviated to OM) that played tunes popular among their multiethnic audiences in the urban centers of Java and Sumatra. These ranged from traditional Malay folk tunes to adaptations of Western songs, popular Chinese melodies, and Hindi film songs.

One of the first *dangdut* songs “Boneka dari India” (“Doll from India,” 1956) by Jakarta-born star Elly Khadam (born 1938) dates back to a time when the term *dangdut* as referring to a distinct genre was yet to be created. The title of the song already points toward India as a major referent. It is a cover of the Hindi film song “Samay hai bahar ka” (“Time of spring,” *Ashiana*, T. Trilochan, Nest, 1952).¹⁸ Elly Khadam developed what is usually referred to as a “very Indian” style of performing—imitating the costumes, dancing styles, gestures, and facial expressions typical of Indian film song sequences at that time. She acted in musical films and did stage shows and radio broadcasts. Her melodramatic facial expressions and flirtatious gestures taken from Indian film song and dance sequences resonated deeply with a fan base comprising mostly migrants to the city and the urban working classes. In 2000, Elly Khadam was awarded the TPI Dangdut Award by the television channel TPI for her major role in the development of *dangdut* as a newly emerging musical genre.¹⁹ An article about her on the Indonesian music Web site www.tembang.com is entitled “Elly Kadam: The Real Dangdut Diva!”²⁰ and she is justly regarded as the “grandmother” of *dangdut* by many of *dangdut*’s senior stars. Elvy Sukaesih (born 1951), who began as a child singer in the 1960s and who is often referred to as the unrivalled

“Queen of Dangdut” since the 1970s, told the readers of the newspaper *Suara Merdeka* that “Tante Ellya” considered her a rightful successor. Elvy Sukaesih also pointed toward the “Indian” inspiration that lay behind her later career as a *dangdut* singer:

Actually, I did not only like to sing, I also enjoyed dancing. Near my home, there was the cinema “Gembira” that screened Indian films. I loved to sing Indian songs. My mother said, “when you were a child, you often draped a towel around your head, so that it would look like long hair, or you put on a sarong and danced like in those Indian films.” The sarong was said to be an Indian sari.²¹

Since the early days of Ellya Khadam’s *orkes melayu* hits, *dangdut* music has continued to incorporate various new influences while, developing its own distinct character as a form of Indonesian popular music that was eventually, around 1972 or so, labeled *dangdut*—named rather derogatively on account of the distinct syncopated drum beat of the *gendang* (a tabla-style drum): dang-dang-dut.

In the early 1970s, Rhoma Irama (born 1947) transformed the older-style Malay orchestral music into a more up-tempo sound by incorporating, among other elements, Western rock music. Rhoma soon emerged as the unrivalled superstar of this new genre and is regarded as the “creator” of *dangdut* in its current form.²² His career began in 1973 with the formation of his band *Soneta*. He proclaimed *dangdut* as “The Sound of Islam,” explicitly positioning the music within a religious framework. In fact, many of his songs are commonly labeled *dangdut dakwah* (proselytizing *dangdut*). From 1976 onward, he also had huge box-office successes with his *dangdut* films that might be called “musical films” similar to Bollywood films.²³

Though Islamic in “flavor,” some of Rhoma’s greatest hits include adaptations of Hindi film songs—the song “Sifana,” for example, draws on “Jeeye to jeeye kaise” (“How am I to live under these conditions”) from the film *Sajaan* (Beloved, Lawrence D’Souza, 1991).²⁴ He even collaborated with Indian diva Lata Mangeshkar in an album featuring Indonesian covers of Hindi songs.²⁵

Rhoma’s role in publicizing *dangdut* cannot be underestimated. *Dangdut* became, after *kroncong*,²⁶ the second “national” popular music genre that was neither a pure adaptation of foreign influences (like the genre called *pop Indonesia* that is usually totally “Western” in musical terms) nor restricted to local ethnic idioms (like some forms of local

ethnic pop music styles, *pop Sunda* and *pop Jawa*). Sung in the national language, Bahasa Indonesia, *dangdut* uses a simple, direct (and at times even vulgar) style of lyrical language. In particular, it has been its lively rhythm that, as people say, automatically makes one *goyang* (swinging one's hips) that has made *dangdut* the most popular Indonesian dance music.

Through the 1980s, Hindi film songs continued to be one of the major melodic sources for the creation of "new" *dangdut* songs. Particularly, senior stars such as Ida Laila, Meggi Z., Hamdan ATT, Muchsin and Ali Alatas, and Mansyur S. have quite regularly adapted Hindi film song melodies without necessarily acknowledging the original source. Many of the male *dangdut* singer-songwriters such as A. Rafiq, Latief Khan, Fazal Dath, and Tommy Ali are part of the wider Arab-Indian diaspora in Jakarta, where Indian films have always played a significant role.²⁷ Camelia Malik, one of the "senior stars," is in fact the daughter of early Indonesian film director Jamaluddin Malik who produced local imitations of popular Bollywood films in the 1950s.

With the emergence of the music video and special television programs featuring *dangdut* music videos in the late 1980s and early 1990s, the "Indian" element associated with this genre found new expression. In some music videos, an exoticized "Indian" element is mixed freely with what could be called "Arabian" styles closely resembling oriental "1001 Nights" fantasies. However, this visual reference to an imaginary "Indian" or "Oriental" setting is not necessarily connected with the lyrical content of the song. In terms of its musical as well as visual practice, *dangdut* is "citational," constituting an Indonesian version of what Homi Bhabha terms "vernacular cosmopolitanism," characterized by "performative, deformative" translations.²⁸

In the late 1990s, *dangdut* and the *KKHH*-inspired Bollywood fever came together when Kerala-born *dangdut* star Ashraff's duet of the theme song to *KKHH* with Iis Dahlia, sung in Hindi, became one of the top-hit *dangdut* songs of the new millennium. Ashraff and Dahlia went on to re-record the entire sound track in Hindi. Yet the media, now familiar with the original, mocked this exercise as inauthentic. In an article about the widespread practice of "pirating" foreign music, especially with regard to *dangdut*, the author notes:

Recently some singers were not even ashamed of imitation, singing Indian songs that are currently popular. Iis Dahlia, for example, sings

the soundtrack of “Kuch Kuch Hota Hai” in her own way, although her pronunciation of Hindi is still very faltering. Ah, there still seem to be singers in our country who feel more proud if they can imitate the work of other people, instead of creating their own original work.²⁹

The “KKHH” song was also covered in numerous local cover versions and adaptations, sung in different Indonesian versions and in regional languages such as Javanese, Sudanese, and Buginese of South Sulawesi.³⁰ Although these cover versions clearly attempt to capitalize on the massive popularity of the “KKHH” tune, open adaptation and covering is, nevertheless, usual practice in Indonesia and a song’s popularity can be measured by the various cover versions of it.³¹ In most cases of the *dangdutization* of Hindi film songs, the original source and composer are not mentioned on the cassette covers. For example, on Ashraff’s cassette



A typical VCD karaoke compilation of pirated *dangdut* video clips from other albums. The album by Tommy Ali and Anita features the song “Anita Namaku,” one of the Indonesian cover versions of the “Kuch Kuch Hota Hai” theme song. Ashraff’s song “Sarmila” is the *dangdut* cover version of “Aankh Milate Dar Lagta.”

and VCD “Best of the Best Ashraff,”³² most of the ten songs are clearly Indonesian cover versions of Hindi film tunes, yet it is Ashraff who is cited as the composer of the songs. In quite a few cases, the Indonesian audience is not aware that a particular *dangdut* song has a foreign source. The melody of the hit disco *dangdut* song of the early 1990s, “Mabuk dan judi” (“Alcoholism and gambling”), for example, is—unknown to most Indonesians—taken from the Bhangra hit “Gurh nalo ishq mitha” (“Love is sweeter than sugar”) by Malkit Singh.³³

Another very important development is the omnipresence of Hindi song-dance sequences in the Indonesian music video landscape. In particular, *Bollywood Hits*, broadcast by television station Lativi since May 2002, is dedicated to music videos while also offering information about playback singers. Even Jakarta-based MTV Indonesia (launched in May 2002) started showing four to five music videos of Bollywood song and dance sequences per day in the programs *Nonstop Hits* and *MTV Land*.³⁴ Furthermore, in 2001, the recording company Duta Cahaya Utama Records obtained the audio license for Indian music from four Indian recording companies.³⁵ Hindi film songs are also increasingly played on special private radio stations. The song-dance sequence as an autonomous source of viewing pleasure is underscored by Rahmat Suardi of TPI:

The audience seems never to be bored. If they already know the story of the film, they still enjoy watching the film again and again because they like to see the dances and to hear the songs of the film. That's the reason why films like *Milan* and *Boby* [*sic*], starring Raj Kapoor and Rishi Kapoor, are still popular, even if they have been rerun several times. Its songs like *Sawan Ka Mahina Sawane Ka Re Sor* [*sic*] are hits, as well as *Kabhie Kabhie* [*sic*] that was presented by Amitabh Bachchan.³⁶

This new widespread visibility in the mass media of Bollywood films might well enhance the Indonesian audience's awareness of the origin of some *dangdut* songs in Hindi films. But this exposure does not necessarily protect these songs from reproduction. The Hindi original version will have to share its position with countless localized cover versions and adaptations in different music genres. For in Indonesia, songs are not only there to be listened to but also there to be sung. Karaoke is a hugely popular leisure activity, and new technologies, such as karaoke VCDs, are adapted to deep-rooted oral orientations typical for many non-Western

collective cultures. Thus, songs are reformulated and recreated to become part of a collective repertoire. However, Western-educated Indonesians are increasingly sensitive to notions of “authorship” and “copyright,” giving rise to an uneasy awareness of the distinction between the original piece and “cheap” and “bad-quality” imitations like Iis Dahlia’s version of the “KKHH” song. With Bollywood’s new popularity in Indonesian television and the commercialization of all things Bollywood, “traditional” citational practices are increasingly confronted with the global dynamics and rules of commodity culture. The current Bollywood trend is thus changing *dangdut*, both in practice and in location, within the Indonesian mediascape. Indonesian music critic Bre Redana, writing in *Kompas*, stated that after the success of *KKHH*,

[t]he situation has already changed. Indian songs are now entering the Indonesian market through networks of big companies, bound to clear legal conditions. This means that piracy is not as easy as it was before, if one does not want to get into legal problems. In the era of Kuch Kuch Hota Hai, the presence of Indian songs thus shifts the goalposts for the local music industry, not only regarding the legal aspects, but also regarding creativity. The latter is particularly challenging for *dangdut* music as it has to find its own colour, originality, identity and character. *Dangdut* cannot indulge in just dancing away.³⁷

Goyang India, Goyang Dangdut

The rather “intimate” relationship between Bollywood films, its music, and *dangdut* is materialized by the close and, at times, overlapping position that both occupy in Indonesian mainstream media discourse. Here they are in fact “neighbors,” inhabiting the same “district.” For example, the monthly magazine *Dangdoet Plus* covers the usual gossip about *dangdut* stars and music, but under the rubric *Goyang India* (Indian hip-swinging), it offers star gossip and news about Bollywood films. This affinity between both Bollywood music and *dangdut* is also apparent in the infotainment show *Gondangdia*, that is, *gossip, dangdut, and India*, on the private television station SCTV. In an advertisement for this show in the tabloid *Bollywood Indonesia*,³⁸ presenter Anya Dwinov sports a stylized bindi and henna decorations. The byline tells readers that *Gondangdia* is about “Gosip India [sic], Gosip Dangdut [sic], Making Film Bollywood.”³⁹



Advertisement for the infotainment show *Gondangdia* with presenter Anya Dwinov.

This discursive allocation of both *dangdut* and Bollywood as adjacent in the Indonesian collective imaginary needs further examination. What are the assumed “similarities” of both genres that make this “intimate neighborhood” so seemingly “natural” to Indonesians? Bollywood films and their music are “freely mixed” with *dangdut* in musical and discursive terms. Both have been historically stigmatized as lowbrow, cheap, and escapist entertainment. *Dangdut* has long served as a shorthand for *kampungan*. The tasteless aesthetics that upper-class Indonesians ascribe to *dangdut*, particularly with regard to the stage shows, evoke Ashis Nandy’s identification of the urban slum as the right metaphor for Indian popular cinema. His characterization of Bollywood aesthetic of excess as a “mix of the comic and the tragic, spiced with elements borrowed indiscriminately from the classical and the folk, the East and the West”⁴⁰ might well describe the stage shows of Rhoma in the 1970s and 1980s, which might appear kitschy, and yet, as Frederick points out, neither Rhoma

nor his audiences viewed the various elements being melded together as anything but complementary. Reality and fantasy carried and strengthened each other, and the impetus they built together moved

dangdut beyond music in the narrow sense. Theatrics seemed, in short, to fit the dynamism of dangdut and make of it a comprehensive whole that was somehow larger than its parts.⁴¹

This slum aesthetic of excess—in its musical mix of genres, in the tragic pathos of many a song lyric, in the display of the erotically dancing female body on stage, in its costumes and accessories, and in the audience's pleasure in letting itself be totally absorbed by the irresistible rhythm and the sensually charged atmosphere—conveys contradictory meanings on various levels of signification.⁴² Thus, *dangdut's* appeal to the masses, crossing ethnic and, increasingly, social barriers, and as such representing a highly integrating potential with regard to the politics of the nation-state, led to its conscious incorporation into populist national politics. In election campaigns, the performances of national *dangdut* stars are one of the highlights. *Dangdut's* mass appeal was acknowledged in 1995 by former Secretary of State, Moerdiono, who proclaimed *dangdut* as being “very, very Indonesian” music: “This country [is] of the people, by the people, for the people. And so is dangdut of the people, by the people, and for the people.”⁴³ At the same time, as *dangdut* migrated to television, the media predicted that it would become acceptable to the upper classes and would “go international,” especially after the success of *dangdut* concerts in Japan.⁴⁴ *Dangdut*, if cleansed of the “vulgar” erotic dancing style typical for the female singers on *kampung* stages and given more “sophisticated” lyrics, would be Indonesia's answer to internationally acclaimed genres such as reggae and salsa. Yet, even today, most educated urban Indonesians seem to remain uneasy about *dangdut*—they are reluctant to admit that they like it, but they also insist on its gentrification.⁴⁵ *Dangdut* has in fact been entering upper-class hotel bars and clubs, yet social stigma is still quite pervasive if one considers *dangdut* in general. It retains the taint of the masses.

Additionally, *goyang* as an essential feature of both Bollywood (especially in the form of the song-and-dance sequences) and *dangdut* accounts for the overlapping position that both occupy in modern Indonesia and the rather ambiguous pleasures they offer—at once “low-class” and “cheap” but, nonetheless, highly seductive. The shared rhythmic pleasure of both genres as well as the dynamic of imitating and at the same time creatively localizing foreign influences is readily apparent from the lyrics of an early *dangdut* song that was extremely popular in the 1970s entitled “Terajana,” sung by Rhoma Irama. In its lyrics, it refers to the Hindi film song “Tera jana” (“Your departure”), sung by Lata Mangeshkar in the film

Anari (The Simpleton, Hrishikesh Mukherjee, 1959), but at the same time, it is said to be a typical *dangdut* song, praising the distinct pleasure that *dangdut* music offers its audience: its irresistible seducing rhythm that automatically makes people swing their hips:

Tera jana

pernah aku melihat, musik
di Taman Ria
iramanya melayu duhai
sedap sekali
sulingnya suling bambu,
gendangnya kulit lembu

dangdut suara gendang

rasa ingin berdentang

Ref:

terajana . . . terajana . . .
ini lagunya, lagu India
hai merdunya . . . hai
merdunya . . .
merdu suara hai penyanyinya
serasi dengan lincah gayanya
karena asiknya aku,
hingga tak ku sadari
pinggul bergoyang-goyang,
rasa ingin berdentang

Tera jana

Once I saw a music performance
in a public park
the Malay rhythm oh so nice
to listen to
the flute the bamboo flute,
the gendang drum made of cow
skin

the gendang drum sounding
“dangdut”

I feel like singing along

Ref:

terajana . . . terajana . . .
this is the song, the Indian song
oh how sweet and melodious . . .
the melodious sound of the
singer's voice
in harmony with her lively
performance
I am so absorbed in fascination
that I just find myself
with hips swinging to and fro
I feel like singing along

Goyang—long associated with *dangdut*—became the subject of a fierce national debate in 2003 when the scandalous drilling hip gyrations (labeled *goyang ngebor*, “drilling *goyang*”) of *dangdut* shooting star Inul Daratista seemed to test the limits of publicly acceptable behavior. While orthodox Muslim clerics together with Rhoma Irama declared Inul's *goyang* as transgressing the limits of proper morality and thus as *haram*, calling for a ban, others stressed the fact that “dangdut tanpa *goyang*, ibarat sayur tanpa garam” (“*dangdut* without *goyang* is like a vegetable dish without salt”). In *Kompas*, an article dedicated to the evolution of “*goyang* through the times” repeatedly stressed the link with “Indian” (that is, Hindi film) style of dancing. It quoted Munif Bahasuan of

Orkes Melayu Kelana Ria as saying that *goyang* became popular after people had watched dancing scenes in Indian films.⁴⁶

Similar to the *KKHH* boom, which led to the creation of all sorts of infotainment around Bollywood, Inul became the television superstar of 2003, with numerous new programs created especially for her and her dancing style, as well as featuring infotainment regarding her and *dangdut*. The “slum” had returned onto the national stage, both in a tamed and cleansed form (a “clean” *dangdut* as well as “clean” Bollywood films) and in the shocking “drilling” buttocks of Inul and the erotic song and dance sequences that are a part of the otherwise “clean” Bollywood films. While sexuality in Hollywood films is often criticized as “amoral” and deemed unacceptable to Indonesian moral standards, the acceptance of the sensual song and dance sequences, even among fans who often wear the Islamic headscarf as a sign of their new pious Muslim consciousness, is interesting. I suggest that it is precisely the relegating of the erotic dimension into a special domain, that is, the song and dance sequences, that makes them more acceptable. Eroticism is an important part of the visual and emotional spectacle Bollywood films offer their audience, but it does not threaten the overall patriarchal family-oriented moral framework of the film narrative as such. In contrast to Hollywood films, Bollywood song and dance sequences simultaneously communicate the excitement of female sexuality and formally contain it. Through this relegation into a distinct realm, it does not threaten the wider sociosymbolic order of society. However, Inul represented such a threat, as she transgressed the border and “drilled” her buttocks outside the usual *kampung* stages on national television, leading to fierce debates and contestations about *dangdut*’s proper position within Indonesian national culture.

Dangdut, Bollywood, and Indonesia’s Globalizing Mediascape

The highly emotional controversy surrounding Inul and the “proper” form of *dangdut* has been the climax so far in *dangdut*’s transition from the shadows to the limelight in Indonesia’s mass-mediated hegemonic public culture. The reception of Bollywood cinema has a similar timeline—it was not until *KKHH*’s phenomenal success that Bollywood

became an explicitly acknowledged feature of Indonesia's mediascape. Particularly after former president Soeharto's fall in 1998 and the end of his so-called New Order regime that had regulated public expression for more than thirty years, Indonesia has increasingly opened itself up to the globalizing dynamics of transnational cultural flows. The same holds true for internal processes as hegemonic culture is increasingly faced with the challenge of incorporating its other. The recent phenomenon of both Bollywood films and *dangdut* becoming an integral part of Indonesia's public culture has to be seen within the wider context of the ongoing diversification of the globalizing influences on Indonesia's contemporary mass media landscape. Besides Hindi films, Brazilian telenovelas have been very popular, and recently there has been a boom in East Asian television dramas, such as the extremely popular Taiwanese serial *Meteor Garden* in 2002 and 2003, which had a great deal of influence on local metropolitan youth culture. The Indonesian film industry, barely alive in the mid-1990s with an average production of about five films per year,⁴⁷ has apparently profited from these fresh new impulses in the post-Soeharto mediascape. With charming, upbeat films whose storylines often evolve around the life and problems of well-off urban high-school students, a new generation of young directors succeeded in making local productions attractive even to upper-class Indonesians. *Ada Apa Dengan Cinta?* (What is up with love? Rudy Soedjarwo) was a huge success in 2002 and broke box-office records. Another powerful and increasingly dominant force has been the widespread appeal that new orthodox readings of Islam exert on Indonesian Muslims, especially students and the new middle classes, reshaping Indonesian public life as can most clearly be seen in the growing number of mostly middle-class women and female students who consciously choose to wear the Muslim headscarf. This dynamic globalization of non-Western cultural images and narratives points toward the emergence of new local identifications that imagine communities beyond the nation-state, such as the Southeast Asian pan-Islamic identity associated with the new trend of the so-called *nasyid* music and the "East Asian" form of trendy urban youth culture propagated by serials such as *Meteor Garden*. Contemporary Indonesian public culture increasingly reorients itself, looking to other non-Western social, cultural, and religious forms as alternatives in the struggle to define a modern identity without becoming totally "Westernized."

Bollywood films, while usually experienced as representing a world that bears great "cultural similarity" to Indonesia, are still foreign

enough that their visual images and narratives, evolving around the key issues of modernity, love, sexuality, and the family, can function as unthreatening projections that enable Indonesians to view some of their own anxieties, fantasies, and desires screened in new ways. Larkin has argued similarly for the Nigerian context, linking the popularity of Indian films in Hausa society with the “parallel modernity” these films offer: “a way of imaginatively engaging with the changing social basis of contemporary life that is an alternative to the pervasive influence of a secular West.”⁴⁸ Both Bollywood and *dangdut* music, having constituted a central feature of Indonesian “popular culture” (with all its original low-brow connotations) for a long time, have now found their way into Indonesia’s modern, mass-mediated hegemonic television landscape, where they reach far wider audiences than ever before in their history. They are now acknowledged as occupying legitimate positions within the dynamics of a “national” and at the same time increasingly globalizing Indonesian public culture, thus taking an active part in the ongoing public contestations about different notions of what it means to be “modern,” “Indonesian,” “Asian,” and “Muslim”. Music plays a crucial role in these processes of identification, as has been stressed by Anderson who pointed out the “special kind of contemporaneous community” constituted by language, in particular in the forms of poetry and song:

No matter how banal the words and mediocre the tunes, there is in this singing an experience of simultaneity. At precisely such moments, people wholly unknown to each other utter the same verses to the same melody. The image: unisonance.⁴⁹

The “KKHH” theme song was heard and sung virtually everywhere in Indonesia. One gets the feeling that there does indeed seem to be “something happening” in today’s Indonesia. At least, the newspaper *Kompas* proudly entitled interviews with young Indonesians regarding the question of their participation in the Bollywood fashion trend at the height of the *KKHH* craze: “We are already able to choose.”⁵⁰

Notes

I would like to thank Sangita Gopal and Sujata Moorti for providing valuable comments on earlier versions of this essay. I am also very grateful to Keith Snailham, who checked the language.

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- 2 Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimension of Globalization* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996).
- 3 Arjun Appadurai and Carol A. Breckenridge, "Why Public Culture?" *Public Culture* 1, no. 1 (1988): 5–9.
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- 5 For a detailed history of the Indonesian film industry, see Karl G. Heider, *Indonesian Cinema: National Culture on Screen* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1991); Salim Said, *Shadows on the Silver Screen: A Social History of Indonesian Film* (Jakarta: The Lontar Foundation, 1991); and Krishna Sen, *Indonesian Cinema: Framing the New Order* (London: Zed Books, 1994).
- 6 *Shadows*, 41–2.
- 7 *Ibid.*, 102.
- 8 CP/BRE, "Tetangga Dekat Bernama."
- 9 CP, "Sekarang Masanya Shahrukh Khan," *Kompas*, November 3, 2002, <http://www.kompas.com/kompas-cetak/0211/03/hiburan/seka19.htm> (accessed April 5, 2003).
- 10 CP, "Videoklip Lagu India: Pokoknya Sang Bintang Mesti Bergoyang," *Kompas*, May 11, 2003, <http://www.kompas.com/kompas-cetak/0305/11/hiburan/306369.htm> (accessed January 15, 2004).
- 11 *Republika*, "Bollywood Merambah Dunia," January 10, 2003, http://www.republika.co.id/cetak_berita.asp?id=109720&kat_id=145&edisi=Cetak (accessed March 31, 2003).
- 12 Pantau, "Menjual India," *Tahun III*, no. 033 (January, 2003), <http://www.pantau.or.id/txt/33/18.html> (accessed January 15, 2004).
- 13 Zoel Fauzi Lubis, e-mail, July 28, 2004.
- 14 Patricia Uberoi, "Imagining the Family. An Ethnography of Viewing *Hum Aapke Hain Koun . . . !*" in *Pleasure and the Nation: The History, Politics, and Consumption of Public Culture in India*, ed. Rachel Dwyer and Christopher Pinney (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2001), 309–51.
- 15 CP/BRE, "Tetangga Dekat Bernama."
- 16 For a detailed description of *dangdut's* historical origins, see William H. Frederick, "Rhoma Irama and the Dangdut Style: Aspects of Contemporary Indonesian Popular Culture," *Indonesia* 34 (October 1982): 103–30.
- 17 Krishna Sen and David T. Hill, *Media, Culture, and Politics in Indonesia* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 2000), 176.
- 18 Bre Redana, "Goyang India di Mana-mana," *Kompas*, November 5, 2000, <http://www.kompas.com/kompas-cetak/0011/05/latar/goya13.htm> (accessed April 28, 2005).
- 19 Joko, "Ellya Kadam: Diva Dangdut Yang Sesungguhnya!" *Tembang*, <http://www.tebang.com/profil/default.asp?i=139> (accessed November 19, 2003).
- 20 *Ibid.*

- 21 Tresnawati, "Elvy Sukaesih: Sudah Lama Jatuh-Bangun," *Suara Merdeka*, May 5, 2002, <http://www.suaramerdeka.com/harian/0205/05/bincang1.htm> (accessed November 25, 2003).
- 22 For a detailed description of Rhoma Irama's role in the emergence of *dangdut* and his position as one of Indonesia's first popular culture "super-stars," see Frederick.
- 23 For reasons unknown, Sen in her analysis of post-1965 Indonesian cinema does not mention Rhoma Irama's hugely popular musical films.
- 24 *Denpasar Post*, "Hau Siang Hau Siang Jadi Lagu Dangdut Jawa," May 8, 2002, <http://www.denpasarpost.tv/2002/05/08/hiburan1.htm> (accessed June 24, 2003).
- 25 Ibid.
- 26 See, for example, Judith Becker, "Kroncong, Indonesian Popular Music," *Asian Music* 7, no.1 (1975): 14–19.
- 27 Zoel Fauzi Lubis, e-mail, July 30, 2004.
- 28 Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994), 241.
- 29 *Denpasar Post*, "Hau Siang Hau Siang."
- 30 I am grateful to Andy Sutton for sharing his Buginese version with me. The "KKHH" theme song has also, among others, been incorporated into local comedy recordings, for example, in a recording entitled "Kuch Kuch Hota Hai (Versi Cirebon: Dikuchek-Kuchek Matae)" in the local Cirebon dialect of northwestern Java. The Cirebon song lyrics are in a humorous style about poor people's problems to get the delicious meal they are dreaming of. On the same comedy recording, Ashraff's already dangdutized version of "Aankh milate darr lagta," "Sarmila," has been further Cirebonized in a song called "Saritem" (a traditional Javanese female name with strong rural and low-class connotations) (Dian Records, 20056-105).
- 31 Shown by Yampolsky's study of the pop Indonesia hit "Hati yang luka" ("Wounded heart," 1988) and its subsequent numerous adaptations into other Indonesian pop genres. See Philip Yampolsky, "Hati Yang Luka, an Indonesian Hit," *Indonesia* 47 (1989): 1–18.
- 32 HP Record.
- 33 *Denpasar Post*, "Hau Siang Hau Siang."
- 34 CP, "Videoklip."
- 35 CP, "Videoklip." The recording companies are T-Series, Tips, HMV Saregama, and RPG.
- 36 CP, "Sekarang Masanya."
- 37 Bre Redana, "Goyang India."
- 38 "Bollywood," *Edisi* 63, April 21–27, 2003, 21.
- 39 Like the other Bollywood infotainment shows that were produced in the midst of the Bollywood craze, *Gondangdia* is not shown anymore. It was broadcasted weekly fifty-two times until it ended on July 6, 2003 (Zoel Fauzi Lubis, e-mail, July 28, 2004).
- 40 Ashis Nandy, "Introduction: Indian Popular Cinema as a Slum's Eye View of Politics," in *The Secret Politics of Our Desires: Innocence, Culpability, and Indian Popular Cinema*, ed. Ashis Nandy (London: Zed Books, 1998), 2.
- 41 Frederick, 112.

- 42 For a detailed account of the erotic spectacle at kampung-style *dangdut* performances, see Ceres Pioquinto, "Dangdut at Sekaten: Female Representations in Live Performance," *RIMA* 29 (1995): 59–89; and Susan Browne, "The Gender Implications of Dangdut Kampungan: Indonesian 'Low-Class' Popular Music" (Monash University Working Paper 109, Monash University, Melbourne, Victoria, 2000). For a culture-sensitive analysis of the Javanese audience's distinct pleasure in dancing away to sad lyrics sung by erotic female singers, see Bettina David, "The Erotics of Loss: Some Remarks on the Pleasure of Dancing to Sad Dangdut Songs," in *Sonic Modernities: Popular Music and New Social Formations in the Malay World*, ed. Wim van Zanten and Bart Barendregt (Leiden: KITLV Press, forthcoming).
- 43 Lana Simatupang, "The Development of Dangdut Music and Its Meanings: A Study of Popular Music in Indonesia" (master's thesis, Department of Anthropology and Sociology, Monash University, 1996), 58.
- 44 See, for example, the interview with senior *dangdut* singer Camelia Malik, "Saya Ingin Dangdut Go International," *Republika*, December 24, 2000.
- 45 Browne, "The Gender Implications of Dangdut Kampungan."
- 46 LOK/XAR, "Goyang dari Masa ke Masa," *Kompas*, February 9, 2003, <http://www.kompas.com/kompas-cetak/0302/09/latar/121501.htm> (accessed April 28, 2005).
- 47 Marselli Sumarno, "Menuju Sinema Indonesia Baru," *Kompas*, April 2, 2000, <http://www.kompas.com/kompas-cetak/0302/09/latar/121501.htm> (accessed April 28, 2005).
- 48 Brian Larkin, "Indian Films and Nigerian Lovers: Media and the Creation of Parallel Modernities," *Africa* 67, no. 3 (1997): 434.
- 49 Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities* (London: Verso, 1983), 132.
- 50 Lala Amalia, "Kita Sudah Bisa Memilih," *Kompas*, December 20, 2002, <http://www.kompas.com/kompas-cetak/0212/20/dikbud/kita41.htm> (accessed March 31, 2003).