



# **Mapping the Politics of Indonesian Hip Hop**

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## **Declaration**

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William Yanko / 24 February 2022

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## **Abstract**

This thesis maps the politics of Indonesian hip hop in the Reform era (1998–present). It does so by analysing rappers and other hip hop enthusiasts using the concept of sociopolitical brokers (Bräuchler 2019) who can influence the political discourse of their local communities through their music and actions. The differing ideologies that emerged following the fall of Soeharto’s New Order regime, including conservatism, Marxism, capitalism and fascism, are reflected in Indonesia’s popular culture (Heryanto 2018a). My fieldwork finds that this trend holds true for Indonesian hip hop scenes as well, with the actions of scene participants informing and shaping the politics of their communities.

This thesis first traces the history of Indonesian hip hop, mapping its growth from an outlaw subculture to something of much deeper complexity (Chapter 4). Building upon this framework, it then explores the peer politics of Indonesian hip hop, arguing that contests for authenticity among rappers were first confined within local scenes before growing outwards (Chapter 5). I then probe the way rappers in Bandung used activism in music and performances to fight the rise of conservatism in the region in the early 2000s (Chapter 6). While Bandung rappers adopted leftist politics to fight conservatism, some Jogjakartan rappers instead turned to traditionalism in their fight against capitalism, seeking to erect borders and create an exclusive zone for those they deem as ‘authentic Jogjakartans’ (Chapter 7). Chapter 8 maps how a group of young migrant rappers from various Eastern Indonesia areas became political brokers for their fellow migrants by promoting regionalism, anti-prejudice and cultural preservation in Western Indonesia, in opposition to the exclusivist politics of some Jogjakartan rappers.

My thesis locates these articulations of politics within current debates in Indonesian popular culture (Heryanto 2018a; Baulch 2014; Wallach 2014), global hip hop studies (Price 2006; Chang 2007; Nasir 2020; Golpushnezhad 2018), broker studies (Bräuchler et al. 2021) and related fields, including popular music studies, sociology, anthropology and Indonesian studies. I show, through Chapters 4 to 8, that the current debate about Indonesian hip hop relates to larger concerns about identity politics in cultural production. The thesis reveals specific sites of politics where differing ideologies were embraced and resistance movements created. By analysing these dynamics during a period of unstable sociopolitical climate, this thesis seeks to contribute to our current understanding of Indonesian hip hop.

## Chapter 1 Introduction

In recent years, there has been an increase in research on the politics of hip hop. Many studies found that both left- and right-wing political ideologies have made this subculture their home. From countries in Europe (Reitsamer & Prokop 2017; White 2019)<sup>1</sup>, Asia (Condry 2006; Golpushnezhad 2017), Africa (Gabsi 2020; Williams 2012) and South America (Martinez 1997), hip hop has become an increasingly radicalising space. While some hip hop practitioners have used their music to embrace changes, some have also used their crafts to maintain the status quo.

Take China for example. Zou (2019) argues that patriotic rappers in China have used their music to help spread government propaganda, finding that mainstream hip hop in the country has been localised and sanitized as a cultural medium for the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) and its followers. In his research, Zou points to the Communist Youth League-sponsored rapper CD Rev, who released the song ‘This is China’ to help strengthen CCP’s grip on the country’s youth. However, while the CCP has used mainstream hip hop to spread its political agenda, hip hop has also been used to bypass government censorship. For instance, Flew et al. (2019) argue that the web series *The Rap of China* gave Chinese youth a way to publicly consume a “Western” product without fear of prosecution. The show encouraged Chinese youth to “keep it real” and “speak your mind”. This method was perhaps too successful; the show’s success led to increased government scrutiny and the cancellation of its second season.

Hip hop and rap scenes are important spaces in which politics and sociopolitical struggles are played out (Rose 1994, 1991). For instance, rappers in South Korea use rap songs to protest their “increasingly pessimistic” future in a “disenchanted manner” (Kim & Sung 2019, p. 2). These disenfranchised youths use rap to negotiate their futures in Korea’s fast paced society. Similar processes are seen in Europe. For instance, Senger (2018) contends that MC Solaar, a French rapper, offers a form of resistance against capitalism by invoking personal and cultural history. Senger (2018, p. 226) also argues that Francophone rappers stimulate French society’s awareness of the impact of capitalism by connecting it to French colonialism. Similarly, Scarparo & Stevenson (2018) found that hip hop has been adopted as a vehicle for sociopolitical protest against right-wing fascism in Italy. They found that the combination of

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<sup>1</sup> This thesis follows the RMIT Harvard style and convention: <https://www.lib.rmit.edu.au/easy-cite/>.

hip hop and reggae was useful in promoting intercultural dialogue to combat xenophobic ethnic nationalism in Europe.

Apart from this left- and right-wing dichotomy, hip hop politics also revolves around the issue of capitalism and traditionalism. Hip hop becomes a space where participants embrace their cultural connections and heritage to combat capitalist expansion. For instance, instead of promoting and following US rap culture, rappers from other countries use their music to promote local cultural values and art forms. An illustrative example comes from Elizabeth Bell's research on Mayan rappers in Guatemala. Bell (2017, p. 169) notes that these rappers position themselves as "highland rappers" instead of underground rappers. This means that instead of altering their politics to suit the mainstream, these rappers display their own culture's "reflexivity and resilience". In doing so, they offer an "intertextual critique of Guatemalan history", a history that has traditionally excluded "indigenous myth-history, disenfranchised Maya peoples and undereducated Maya youth" (Bell 2017, p. 169).

Belonging and identity have long been essential themes for many rappers. Researchers have long examined hip hop and rap as a direct product of racial discrimination in the United States (Chang 2007; Price 2006; Rose 1994). As "vehicles of protest" (Alwakeel 2010), rappers worldwide have tackled racism and discrimination, as discussed in Chapter 8 of this thesis. Ratner's (2019) analysis of the mediation of Israeli-Ethiopian youths in Israel best sums this up: for Ratner (2019, p. 101), these young people use rap to define and assert their identities and make themselves visible to their local community. In this regard, their political protest connects them to "the historical narratives of the African trans-Atlantic diaspora, and draw inspiration from them" (Ratner 2019, p. 106-107).

In Indonesia, where sociopolitical protests are often prosecuted through both legal and illegal means (such as hired thugs, as cited in Wilson 2006 & 2015), hip hop has become an increasingly important protest subculture. Given that Indonesian citizens from various backgrounds and occupations, including farmers, civil servants, stand-up comics, artists, activists, journalists and academics, have been arrested for voicing their concern about the state's conduct of governance (for instance Bland 2021; Mudhoffir 2017), this research has become increasingly significant.

As Bland (2021) and Heryanto (2018) argue, Indonesia is currently neither a democracy nor an autocracy. Between 1998 and the present (2022), Indonesia has undergone drastic



changes. Soeharto, the late dictator who ruled Indonesia for 32 years through his New Order regime, was overthrown in 1998, making space for Abdurrahman Wahid, a prominent populist Muslim leader, to be elected by the People's Consultative Assembly (*Majelis Permusyawaratan Rakyat*)<sup>2</sup> in 1999. This was the start of the political religious movement in Indonesia (Elson 2010). Two years later, Wahid was impeached and removed from the president's office by the Assembly. He was replaced by Megawati Soekarnopoetri, the daughter of Soekarno, Indonesia's first president, in 2001. This reform process brought Indonesia to an era where the internet (Lim 2014) has heavily shaped popular culture (Heryanto 2018a).

This turbulent era is represented in Indonesia's popular culture. For instance, Weintraub (2010) focuses on the politics of *dangdut*, Indonesia's most popular musical genre. His research shows that *dangdut* music has been a protest outlet since the peak of the New Order era in the 1970s and 1980s. Similarly, Baulch (2014) and Wallach (2014) argue that punk, metal and hardcore scenes are important sites where sociopolitical protests are enacted. They both argue that these "underground" scenes are the home of protest movements. Interestingly, Saefullah (2017) notes that the Islamic turn (*hijrah* in Indonesian) is now common amongst the older underground musicians.

Some hip hop scholars, most notably Michael Bodden, have also written about the politics of Indonesian hip hop. Bodden's (2005) foundational study on Indonesian hip hop in the 1990s and early 2000s argues that hip hop was perceived as an "outlaw" genre by its performers. Since then, scholars such as Varela (2014) and Riyanto (2016) have expanded our understanding of Indonesian hip hop by examining the ways hip hop and rap are utilised by traditional music performers. Riyanto analyses Juki, the leader of the Jogja Hip Hop Foundation, and his rise to stardom. Varela studies Ki Catur Beyek, a Jogjakarta-based *dalang* (leather puppeteer), and his hip hop-infused *gamelan* show.

This field was then expanded further when other scholars approached it from a religious perspective. Key scholars in this field are Kamaludeen Nasir and Elham Golpushnezhad. Nasir (2020) argues that the 9/11 attacks in the US created what he calls a "September 11 generation" in Southeast Asia. His research explores the ways young people in Muslim-

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<sup>2</sup> Throughout this thesis, the Indonesian terms and phrases will be translated into English by the author following *Kamus Besar Bahasa Indonesia* and the author's interpretation. If the original Indonesian terms and phrases are longer, they will be kept in the footnote.

majority countries like Malaysia and Indonesia negotiate their identities amid Western prejudice. Similarly, Golpushnezhad compares Muslim rappers in Indonesia, Iran and the United States, arguing that hip hop and rap have become a space for young people to push the boundaries of their religious norms. For instance, young women in Jogjakarta use hip hop lessons as a way to avoid wearing the hijab (Golpushnezhad 2017, p. 106). I wish to engage with the research of the scholars I have previously mentioned and develop our understanding of Indonesian hip hop further. To do so, the following sections will set out a definition for the term brokers, as well as my approach to the concept of politics. Before that, however, I will first explain the main research problem that drives this study.

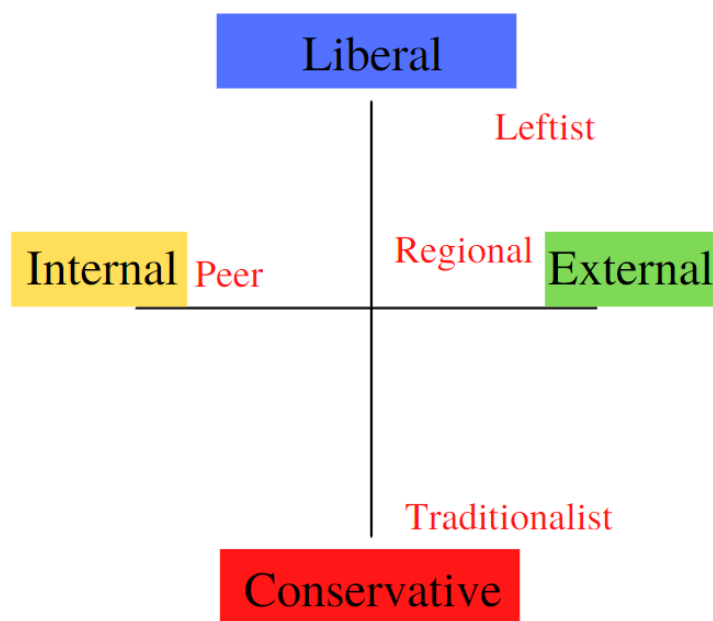
### **Research problem and question**

This PhD project is an inquiry into the politics of Indonesian hip hop. It responds to the research question: *how and why do Indonesian rappers perform their politics?* In this project, I observe how Indonesian rappers become socially-influential figures and I analyse them using the concept of “sociopolitical brokers” (Bräuchler 2019, p. 456, see below). These people are political actors who can influence the political discourse of their local communities through their music and actions. My research investigates how these people not only bridge the issues of their communities but also create networks of independent and autonomous agents of change across the country. I focus on instances where research participants perform as a part of “interconnected networks” (Martin-Iverson 2012, p. 391) who manage to negotiate Indonesia’s various political and cultural norms.

To answer the research question, this thesis will first explore the sociohistorical context in which Indonesian hip hop culture emerged during the late 1980s and 1990s to present. This step is essential for two reasons. First, it will help set the “scene” of this research, providing the necessary historical background to understand this growing field. To the best of my knowledge, there have been no studies that historically document this subculture. To do this, I interact with and build on the important works of other Indonesian hip hop scholars, for instance, Bodden (2005), Golpushnezhad (2017), Nasir (2018, 2020), Riyanto (2016), Varela (2014) and more, connecting this research diachronically. Secondly, this background will help readers and future Indonesian hip hop scholars understand how Indonesian hip hop has shifted from an “outlaw” culture to something more complex. For instance, while Bodden’s (2005) interpretation of Indonesian hip hop as an outlaw subculture was correct, many Indonesian rappers and enthusiasts no longer see themselves this way. Nasir’s (2020),

Riyanto's (2016) and Varela's (2014) research, for instance, show that hip hop has been absorbed into Indonesian popular culture. It has become inherently Indonesian and those involved in it no longer see themselves as rebels or outlaws.

After establishing this transition, I then examine four spaces of Indonesian hip hop politics. I propose that these four spaces are good starting points from which future researchers in the field can build. My four spaces are peer politics, leftist politics, traditionalist politics, and regional politics (see Figure 1.1). The colour choice of the four boxes is random. They do not mean anything but to help clarify the distinction between these polarities. The positionalities of these sites will be explained below.



**Figure 1.1** Map of Indonesian hip hop politics covered in this thesis

These four examples are pinned to four different axes (see Figure 1.1 for their locations within my map of Indonesian hip hop politics). The four points of my model of hip hop politics are internal, external, conservative and liberal tendencies. Let us start with the vertical, or ideology, axis. This axis spans liberal and conservative ideologies. These two poles signify the political tendencies of these rappers and their fans. If they are located towards the top pole, they adopt a more liberal approach to their politics. On the other hand,

if they are located closer to the bottom pole, they adopt a more conservative approach to their politics.

The horizontal axis refers to the way rappers and their fans express their politics. A political approach located closer to the left side of the diagram (for instance, peer politics) indicates a concentration on internal politics. That is, issues and fights are contained within the scene itself. Concerns of those outside of the scene have little bearing on the internal politics. On the other hand, a political approach located on the right axis indicates that politics are directed towards communities outside of the Indonesian hip hop scene. In these case studies, the concerns of their politics are impacted by their surroundings. Simultaneously, the actions of these rappers, hip hop enthusiasts and their fans also brought forth differences in their communities.

In this thesis, the word Indonesia means the country of Indonesia. The term Indonesian means the citizens of Indonesia and people who reside in the archipelago. While the term usually includes citizens in diaspora, I do not use it this way in this research. Following Heryanto (2018b), my use of the term Indonesia in this thesis does not include the “imaginary ideas” of Indonesia, nor does it follow the propaganda of the “ideal Indonesia” by the Indonesian government.

The term hip hop in this thesis refers to the culture. As Rose (1991) argues, hip hop culture encompasses MCing, DJing, graffiti and breakdancing. Though this thesis focuses on MCing and rapping, I will also mention the other elements. I will discuss this further in Chapter 2.

Mapping in this thesis means “to map”. Similar to Webb and Webb-Gannon (2016), I use this term as a way to investigate and chart this previously undocumented space. Following Gibson’s (2014, p. 334) use of “mapping”, the term is also used to measure the “space” and “place”, both figuratively and literally. As such, mapping in the context of this thesis is to find and locate how these sites of politics sit within the larger socio-political ecosystem in Indonesia.

Before we discuss these four spaces, I will introduce and define the concept of politics that I use in this thesis.

### Key concept “politics”

As one of the first scholars to use politics to analyse Indonesian hip hop, I will be borrowing from other areas of scholarship where the term politics has been employed, both explicitly or implicitly.

The first is from studies of *dangdut*, Indonesia’s most popular music genre. Weintraub (2010) uses the term politics to contextualise interpretations of *dangdut* lyrics by their listeners. For instance, in his study on the rise of Rhoma Irama as a political pop star, Weintraub (2006, p. 418) argues that Irama’s *dangdut* songs were political because they were tools to interpret and facilitate the sociopolitical discourses of his communities. Weintraub also views the use of *dangdut* music in Indonesia in the 1980s as political opposition the New Order regime, because of the genre’s Western-influenced clothing and musical styles. Weintraub (2006, p. 420) argues that Rhoma Irama was a political figure because he wrote lyrics that expressed “the emotional reality of ordinary people”, which was considered a rebellious act against the New Order regime’s propaganda. This thesis builds on this interpretation of politics because my case studies reinforce this conclusion, albeit in a different time period and sociopolitical context.

Second, I also borrow the interpretations of politics in global hip hop from Bennett (1999), Nasir (2018) and Price (2006). According to Price (2006, p. 143), hip hop politics stemmed from its creation as a ceasefire method between gangs in South Bronx, New York. In the 1980s, hip hop was a space for youths to make peace between the warring gangs.<sup>3</sup> Like the US, hip hop in Southeast Asia is political because hip hop scenes provide arenas to discuss and resolve local sociopolitical issues. For instance, in Singapore and Malaysia, hip hop politics refers to its use to spread the teaching of Islam to youth in the region (Nasir 2018, 2020) as an alternative to the conventional *dakwah*, a process of Islamisation, conducted by local preachers in mosques (most commonly done by preachers, but anyone can do it). As Nasir (2018) argues, hip hop was a tool to help negotiate their identities following the 9/11 terrorist attack.

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<sup>3</sup> This process of peacemaking was shown in the transition of the Black Spades gang by Afrika Bambaataa, the warlord of the group, into the Universal Zulu Nation, an organisation devoted to promoting four messages in the gang-ridden neighbourhoods: peace, love, unity and having fun. This organisation was created by the unification of several major street criminal enterprises in the city.

Alim, Ibrahim & Pennycook (2009) see the politics of hip hop as the difference between interpretations of authenticity in various countries, following its diffusion from the US. Here, hip hop politics refers to the transformation of meanings and ideas from hip hop's place of origin in the South Bronx to other countries worldwide. In her study of Iranian rappers, Golpushnezhad (2018) does not define her concept of politics. However, she implies that hip hop politics are the dynamics and tensions between independent and mainstream scenes—specifically, the tension between interpretations of identity and authenticity between those who follow the Iranian government's strict music regulations and those who produce and released their music in a DIY manner.

For his part, Mitchell (2001) argues that Australian youth use hip hop to solidify their interpretations of identity as a part of their internal politics. The politics in Mitchell's case study arose when scene participants tried to justify their “ghetto-ness” despite their middle and upper-middle classes upbringings. In this context, politics can be interpreted as a discussion about issues important to the specific communities where hip hop scenes lives, for instance, authenticity, locality and identity. Politics do not always provide the answers in the case studies of the projects I mentioned above. Instead, politics refer to the *process* of finding solutions to problems.

The third interpretation of the term politics informing this thesis comes from the field of Indonesian political science (for instance, Hadiz 2018; Robison & Hadiz 2017; Setiarsih & Suharno 2018; Wilson 2015). In these studies, politics refers to the laws, rules and regulations enacted by official governments or non-governmental organisations and the ways citizens of the region interpret them. This thesis' interpretation of politics concerning this area stems from Wilson's and Hadiz's studies. For instance, Wilson (2015) writes about Indonesia's protection racket politics following the New Order military regime. In his work, Wilson uses the term “street politics” (*politik jalanan*), to define his interpretation of the politics of street thugs (*preman*) amid the sociopolitical and ideological upheaval following the fall of the New Order regime.

Although Hadiz works in the field of Asian studies and not popular music, his work is also relevant to this thesis. The understandings of politics in this thesis also involve the *state of moving* from one ideology to the other. For instance, the nation's political manoeuvre from Pancasila (Indonesia's core ideology) towards a hard-right autocratic conservatism (Bland

2021). In their study of the rise of conservative politics in Indonesia after the New Order regime, Alamsyah & Hadiz (2017) use the term “politics” to describe the process of social transformation, in this case from the conservative *priyayism* (Javanese aristocracy) of the Soeharto era to the conservative Islamism of the current Reform era. Following these scholars, I see politics as the *process* from one sociopolitical state to another. It is an unstable state of change between two ideologies that could be pulled in either direction. For example, Chapter 6 investigates the leftist politics of Bandung rappers combatting the rise of right-wing conservatism in their city after the fall of the New Order regime. On the contrary, Chapter 7 argues that Jogjakartan rappers orbited around conservative ideology to build an invisible wall around the region. Chapter 8 then investigates how ideas of conservatism and leftist ideologies impact the regional politics of Eastern Indonesians who have migrated to Western Indonesia.

Lastly, my thesis follows Heryanto, in that I do not want to indulge “...in the delusion of the past glory of the ostensibly authentic traditions of the various ethnic groups” (Heryanto 2018a, p. 360). Instead, I am interested in how politics changes popular culture products intended to be apolitical as their meanings are transformed by their listeners. This *transformation process* by the listeners could also be another form of politics of Indonesian hip hop.

Hannah Arendt’s *The promise of politics* (2009) works well in summarising the complexity of the politics of rap music and hip hop culture in Indonesia. For Arendt, politics is about coexistence and the discrepancies between men. More specifically, it is the way in which humans organise themselves that shapes politics. She writes:

Man is apolitical. Politics arises *between* men, and so quite outside of man. There is, therefore, no real political substance. Politics arises in what lies between men and is established as relationship (Arendt 2009, p. 95).

As a result, politics often deals with “freedom” (Arendt 2009, p. 108), including the freedom not to be oppressed, to exist equally, and the freedom to trust that something will be done to make a difference. The politics of rap revolves around warring for positions and social power. Both of these dimensions of politics are reflected in the case studies of this present thesis.

In the US, rap songs are “...discursive wars of position within and amongst dominant discourse”, and they are “...not staged debate team dialogues; they are crucial battles in the

retention, establishment, or legitimation of real social power” (Rose 1994, p. 102). Similarly, Trapp (2005, p. 1484) argues that “musicians give voice to silenced segments of society and the hip-hop artists are leaders whose voices are a clarion call to other African Americans that social injustice not only exists but can also be fought”. Bynoe (2004, p. 22) contends that any use of hip hop as a political movement must be bold if they are to “conceive of a new America. Whatever political vantage they emanate, whatever causes they choose to champion, these groups will articulate an alternative social and economic vision for this country”. Rap’s politics demands a space to discuss, challenge and find a solution to the issues of inequality, power relationships and the meanings or interpretations of rap’s lyrics. Rose (1994, p. 124) sums this best when she says that “[r]ap’s cultural politics lies in its lyrical expression, its articulation of communal knowledge, and in its context for its public reception...The struggle over context, meaning, and access to public space is critical”.

Since rap’s politics lies in its lyrical expression, some rappers are considered raptivists (see Chapter 2). These people have the power to utilise their lyrics as conscious rap forms that express their communities’ concerns. Bynoe (2004, xiv) defines raptivists as rappers “who dabble in activism on the side”. The latter part of the definition troubles Bynoe because, far too often, rappers are just part-time activists who are not fully engaged in making a difference (Bynoe 2004, xii). However, in his rebuttal, Michael Eric Dyson states that “socially conscious rappers tackle thorny social problems and perhaps inspire those who engage in action. Such a role for the artist should not be downplayed, underestimated, or even undervalued” (Dyson 2008, p. 70). Therefore, rap music “...can give us the mirror to the ills of society and to tap that potential we need to look in that mirror and work to change the things that we see” (Pough 2004, p. 288). Dyson supports this argument thus:

Hip hoppers have the potential to raise people’s awareness...if it will challenge and renew itself in the cycles of history and social struggle, can continue to play a vital role in inspiring young folk to become politically astute human beings and citizens...Yet hip hoppers can find noble cause in preserving the quest for freedom by extending its reach in their lyrical and aesthetic visions (Dyson 2008, p. 86).

For this reason, I argue that the politics of rap demands a vocal expression of the social issues affecting both the rappers’ and the listeners’ communities. It provides a mirror to reflect these issue and inspire people to be part of a movement for change (Golpushnezhad 2018).

Gathering from these studies, this thesis will move forward with the assumption that the politics of Indonesian hip hop are *processes* to create new meanings and changes between



different groups of people, in this case, rappers and other hip hop enthusiasts, their fans, their community members and others around them. Therefore, this thesis will examine the idea of politics, focusing on how politics arose from rappers or hip hop collectives and were disseminated to wider audiences. Following this framework, the politics that I cover in this thesis are the steps taken from *problems* to *possible solutions* by “brokers” (as per Bräuchler 2019, 2021). As my understanding of politics in this research also builds upon the process of transferring meanings by the inhabitants of Indonesian hip hop, the next section will explore this notion of brokers who connect them.

### **Key term “sociopolitical brokers”**

In this thesis, I adapt Boissevain's (1974) and Bräuchler's (2021) definitions of brokers and brokerage. Boissevain (1974) defines four criteria of brokers. The first is the independent nature of the brokers. According to Boissevain, brokers work and move on their own and exist as independent third parties. Second, the process of brokerage implies a two-way process. The broker is the gatekeeper between competing political ideologies. Third, brokers have their own intentions in performing this role. In most scenarios, brokers are looking for profits or commissions. Lastly, brokers usually have immaterial assets that allow for such a role, such as knowledge, networks and language skills. As such, to be an accomplished broker capable of ensuring successful negotiations and mediations, brokers are required to impress, persuade and sometimes manipulate people (Boissevain 1974, p. 154-159).

Building on Boissevain's work, Bräuchler defines brokers as those who are able to:

mediate internally, within groups or local communities, to overcome dissonances and forge coalitions for the broadest possible mobilisation against a common adversary (Bräuchler 2021, p. 384).

Bräuchler (2019, p. 465) argues that brokers are key figures in contemporary Indonesian protest movements and that brokers may be “indigenous people, artists and human rights activists”. These people are able to become brokers because of their previously established networks of activism and trust. This positionality gave them the social capital (Smart 1993) to navigate between and inside various social circles.

This is where the present thesis contributes to the current hip hop politics literature. As my research will show, Indonesian rappers and other hip hop enthusiasts sometimes did not have established networks or a high social standing. Instead, their communities and fans elevated

them into these positions (see Chapter 5, 6, 7 and 8). A broker is an individual who innovates and takes risks (Röschenthaler & Schulz 2016), or as Boissevain (1974, p. 146-148) notes, a “professional manipulator of people and information who brings about communication for profit”. This, I argue, fits the case studies of this thesis. As Rose (1991) demonstrates, hip hop stems from the tradition of “dissing” and being a master of ceremonies, for example, by being able to cleverly navigate an audience needs and manipulate their response. Leynseele (2018, p. 3) even argues that brokers can be “double agents” with “morally ambiguous” characters. In that sense, they could be looked at actors operating in “local political arenas” (in Bierschenk et al., 2002, p. 6).

Although brokers can be useful in building a protest around a given issue or enemy, Stovel and Shaw (2012, p. 140) argue that they also have a paradoxical effect. While brokers can ease the interaction between differing parties, and enhance economic development and political action, they can also work against those same goals. In other words, they can either bridge or divide groups and communities. Stovel and Shaw also found that brokers can encourage corruption and exacerbate local inequalities. Faist (2014) found that brokers in Germany and Romania help the parties for which they work while simultaneously being out for profit. This, he found, could potentially create problems as it serves as the basis of mistrust towards brokers and their moral integrity. In his Ghanaian case study, Southall (1978) differentiated between the positive image of brokers as an emanation of civil society and the negative image as a parasite and source of mismanagement. As such, brokers can potentially be either admired innovators or hated leaders (Press 1969).

Now that we have established the key terms and key concepts, namely “politics” and “sociopolitical brokers”, I will explore the sociopolitical context of Indonesia in the current Reform era and how this sociopolitical turmoil has turned Indonesian rappers and other hip hop enthusiasts into brokers.

### **Political background: Indonesia’s democratic downturn**

In May 1998, thousands of students flooded the streets cities across Indonesia in protest of Soeharto’s authoritarian regime (Muhtadi 2015). Few could have predicted this would mark the beginning of a new political period in Indonesia: the Reform era (Heryanto & Hadiz 2005). The regime that had ruled Indonesia for more than 32 years had fallen. Regarding this period, Bland (2021) writes that Indonesians were about to witness a new form of social and

political oppression, perhaps even more extreme than that of the previous regime. While working- and middle-class Indonesians were busy celebrating their “victory” against Soeharto’s corrupt and violent regime, multiple simultaneous powerplays were happening among Indonesia’s political elites (Hadiz 2000).

The fall of Soeharto left an empty throne with no clear successor (McLeod 2011). The favourite candidate was Megawati Soekarnopoetri, the eldest daughter of the late dictator and president Soekarno. However, her political party, PDI-*Perjuangan* (PDI-P, translated as the Indonesian Democratic Party of Struggle), was not yet strong enough to support her contention and she lost the parliamentary vote against Abdurrahman Wahid, or Gus Dur, the well-beloved populist Islamic leader of the conservative Sunni Islamic group Nahdlatul Ulama (Arif 2009). This loss did not waver her ambition. She joined Gus Dur’s cabinet, becoming Indonesia’s first female vice-president and later becoming the country’s first female president after the House of Senate removed Gus Dur with the support of Amien Rais, a political leader of Muhammadiyah, the largest conservative Sufi group in Indonesia (Wilson 2006). Far from the beginning of Indonesia’s democratic dream, this was the start of a soft authoritarian governance system (Heryanto & Hadiz 2005). Three major bases of power competed by championing different visions of the same aristocracy disguised as democracy: the descendants of Soekarno (PDI-P and its coalitions), the descendants of Soeharto and the military elites (Prabowo Soebianto and his coalitions) and the religious elites (NU, Muhammadiyah, PAN and their coalitions) (Alamsyah & Hadiz 2017; Bland 2021; Hatley 2012; Heryanto 2018a).

Despite being portrayed as “the man of the people”, Bland (2021) argues that Indonesia’s current president, Joko Widodo, or Jokowi, is also a part of this system. However, unlike his predecessors, who were often seen as distanced from their supporters, Jokowi portrays a populist and down-to-earth president.<sup>4</sup> He is by far the most popular president among working-class Indonesians (Walden & Renaldi 2019). From mayor of Solo to governor of Jakarta to president of Indonesia, his rise to power was orchestrated and supported by the same old power structures that he claimed to opposed (Aji 2021). Bland (2021) argues that

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<sup>4</sup> Jokowi is famous because of his *blusukan* (random field inspections) to various areas in Indonesia.

Jokowi's presidency has seen a more extreme consolidation of power among Indonesian political elites than all previous Reform era presidencies.<sup>5</sup>

During my 2019 fieldwork in Indonesia, many activists I met told me that the present situation in Indonesia was even worse than it was under Soeharto. While the previous era of authoritarianism enforced censorship of materials via illegal manners (for instance, Wilson 2015), Jokowi's era has revolutionised methods of state censorship. For instance, a Twitter user was arrested for tweeting "What does [Gibran, Jokowi's eldest son] know about football? He was given his position". According to a newspaper outlet (Berita Solo 2021), this happened after Gibran was elected mayor of Solo, Central Java. It is important to note that this is not a one-time event. Because of Indonesia's problematic Internet Transaction Law (*UU ITE*, see Postill 2018a), dissident voices critical of the government are increasingly silenced.

Although he was portrayed as a local businessman turned president, as a "good guy", Bland (2021) argues that Jokowi's presidency saw an enactment of stricter rules for journalists and academics. During his presidency, *UU ITE* has been used to silence those critics (Aji 2021). In an article published in *Tempo*, Aji (2021) reports that more than 47.7% of the magazine's readers note the increase of censorship and public fear of criminal prosecutions if they want to criticise the government. More than 21.9% of readers said that they were terrified of protesting because of the possible consequences. As Robison and Hadiz (2017) suggest, Indonesia is approaching an authoritarian governance system. From my fieldwork, as shown

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<sup>5</sup> One reader of this thesis suggested that, "there are problems with portraying Jokowi as a conservative villain. Most scholarly appraisals of the Indonesian president (other than Hadiz's and Bland's) depict him as a pragmatic realist in the mould of Barack Obama or Joe Biden (albeit one in charge of a struggling developing nation), rather than a democratically-elected authoritarian like Rodrigo Duterte, Narendra Modi, or Donald Trump. In addition, there is little doubt that Jokowi is far better than the murderous Prabowo Subianto, the opponent he faced in the last two elections. His government certainly should not be conflated with Islamic domestic terrorist groups, which he opposes, even if he has failed spectacularly to bring them under control". I am grateful for this comment. I did not intend to conflate Jokowi's government with Islamic domestic terrorist groups. My aim was to point out that his government may have been complicit in allowing these extremist groups roam somewhat freely (which I attempted explain in [Chapter 6](#)). This is supported by Bland (2021), Berita Solo (2021), Wilson (2015), Aji (2021), Robison & Hadiz (2017), Tapsell (2015), Mujani & Liddle (2021), Muhtadi (2015), Walden & Renaldi (2019) and Hatherell & Welsh (2017). I have also provided evidence where both the president and vice-president were photographed attending FPI and Pemuda Pancasila's events, even went so far as wearing their uniforms (see page 112).

in this thesis, Indonesia is experiencing a democratic downturn where a few oligarchs hold all the nation's power (these findings are similar to Bland 2021).

My research will show that popular culture and popular music are filling the vacuum once filled by government critics, journalists and academics, becoming increasingly influential in building and accommodating protest movements in present day Indonesia. While the central government in Jakarta has attempted to suppress the circulation of protest and counter-discourses in the mainstream market<sup>6</sup>, various underground scenes in Indonesia have become the basis of growing resistance movements. Because of the nature of their underground movements, primarily based on do-it-yourself work ethics and the avoidance of official laws and regulations, these artists and musicians have been able to fly under the government's radar.<sup>7</sup>

As of this time of writing, artists and musicians have avoided direct prosecution for their sociopolitical activism. However, this is not to say that they will be safe in the future. For instance, Sanusi (2019) reports that Ananda Badudu, the singer of a popular, now-defunct, indie band called Bandar Neira was arrested for his role in helping distribute funds to help injured Indonesian protesters during a wave of student protests in 2019. Although he was later released, the article mentioned that Ananda was illegally arrested in his house without a warrant. He was then intimidated by police investigators, who illegally refused Ananda's right to contact his lawyer. This story displays the power of popular musicians in helping broker the sociopolitical protests in Indonesia. Ananda is the latest in a long-standing tradition of protest brokers among Indonesian musicians and artists. The next section will trace the way these people have helped build and broker protest movements in Indonesia.

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<sup>6</sup> Dandhy Laksono, pers. comm., 9 September 2020.

<sup>7</sup> Underground musicians and scenesters play a crucial role in the anti-Soeharto movement. Space limits me from unpacking this further, but I draw the reader to other parts of my thesis where I highlight the role of underground musicians. For instance, page 16 (subheading Popular music, politics and protest: background), page 54 (subheading Imagining the underground), page 79 (subheading hip hop authenticity) and page 103 (subheading Leftist rap in Indonesia).

## Popular music, politics and protest: background

In a country where activists are prosecuted for their actions, music becomes an important site for dissident voices. This concept is not new. Music was an essential medium for Indonesian revolutionaries' protests against Dutch, Portuguese, British and Japanese imperialists. It has been used as a vehicle of protest. For instance, Yampolsky (2014) argues that gramophone recordings of earlier versions of *kroncong* (an Indonesian popular music genre) songs were used by Indonesian freedom fighters against the Dutch East India Company. He notes that these recordings were one of the first media where the nation's consciousness was developed. The politics of these *kroncong* musicians varied. For instance, the genre was first developed when Indonesian natives copied Black Portuguese imperialist music, blending with their local messages and contexts (Yampolsky 2013, p. 27).

During the revolutionary era, both before and after Indonesia's independence in 1945, music was a medium of protest, used to rouse Indonesians' fighting spirit. Songs such as '*Halo Halo Bandung*', '*Gugur Bunga*', '*Tanah Air*', '*Padamu Negri*', '*Maju Tak Gentar*' and '*Indonesia Raya*' were influential in building a sense of cohesion between freedom fighters and everyday Indonesian citizens. These songs were influential because they "reminded us [Indonesians] of who we are"<sup>8</sup> while "pointing out who our true enemies are"<sup>9, 10</sup>

During the New Order regime, music was also a vehicle of protest for Indonesian artists and musicians. Two important musicians led the protest of the era: Rhoma Irama (see above) and Iwan Fals (Murray 1991). During the height of Soeharto's regime in the 1980s, *dangdut*

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<sup>8</sup> Tono, pers. comm., 12 March 2019.

<sup>9</sup> Sari, pers. comm., 12 March 2019.

<sup>10</sup> While Indonesians were using music and songs to fight their oppressors, music was also used against them. When Japanese imperialists took over Indonesia in 1942 from the Dutch, they portrayed themselves as the region's liberators from European occupation. The Japanese empire created the Commonwealth of Glorious East Asia<sup>10</sup> as their power hub. In April 1942, the Japanese government worked with Indonesian officials to release three missions of the federation: Japan the leader of Asia, Japan the protector of Asia and Japan the light of Asia<sup>10</sup>. To further spread this propaganda, the Japanese government mandated that Japan's official anthem, '*Kimigayo*', be played in all radio stations before any shows and songs. The official flag '*Hinomaru*' was enacted in all government buildings to reinforce their propaganda materials<sup>10</sup>. Additionally, Mintargo (2003, p. 109) argues that the Japanese government employed Indonesian songwriters to create many propaganda songs. For instance, destroy our enemies, let's plant cotton, let's build ships, let's work, let's save, let's unite, combating illiteracy, dawn, my train, darling, asia is awake, for you my country, march forward Indonesian youths and let's plant corns (*Hancurkan musuh kita, Menanam kapas, Bikin Kapal, Bekerja, Menabung, Bersatu, Buta huruf, Fajar, Kereta apiku, Sayang, Asia sudah bangun, Bagimu negri, Maju putra-putri Indonesia, Menanam jagung*).

music was the protest genre of the era. Rhoma Irama was the genre's biggest superstar, as well as its most vocal dissident. *Dangdut* was a "vulgar and over-the-top" genre, where the singers and artists could "express what cannot be expressed in other public arenas" (Weintraub 2013, p. 181). *Dangdut* fans liked the songs because of their simple lyrics and appealing rhythms. Rhoma Irama's lyrics were accessible, able to be enjoyed with only a basic understanding of the Indonesian language. In fact, *dangdut* lyrics in general were sung in informal Indonesian, setting them apart from imported songs from overseas. Most importantly, the content of *dangdut* songs appealed to working-class Indonesians. For instance, Rhoma Irama would sing about alcohol consumption, financial woes and unemployment.

While Rhoma Irama appealed to low-income Indonesians, Iwan Fals was a hero to many middle-class Indonesians and university students. He was perhaps the most famous artist censored, arrested and imprisoned by the New Order regime (Wirayudha 2017). Iwan was famous for his "populist style" and "everyday language" (Bodden 2005, p. 4). Bodden (2005, p. 4) also notes that his lyrics were full of "criticism[s] of the government's corruption, human-right abuses, and the growing gap between rich and poor". His song '*Bongkar*' was one of the anthems of the Reform movement in 1998 (Baulch 2002a).

Despite this tradition of protest through music, few musicians and artists have helped channel the political aspirations of marginalised Indonesians. Following the fall of Soeharto and his New Order regime, many Indonesian bands and artists started to release more mainstream songs to satisfy their record labels (Baulch 2002a). Iwan Fals and Rhoma Irama were no exception. After his stint as the 1998 reform movement's icon and a prominent Soeharto critic, Iwan became friends with high-ranking army officials. He is now one of their icons and mouthpieces, often touring and performing with the military's support. He has also ceased to perform his revolutionary protest songs.

Similarly, Rhoma Irama has moved away from his populist lyrics and focused on expanding his label and group. While he still performs live, he has stopped playing his political songs and now works with Indonesia's political elites. He was a supporter of right-wing presidential and vice-presidential candidates and business moguls, Prabowo Subianto and Sandiaga Uno, during their 2019 presidential campaign. Rhoma Irama is now one of the loudest conservative

Islamist mouthpieces in Indonesia, acting as the Indonesian music industry's moral police (Weintraub 2008).

In contrast to the conservative turns of Rhoma Irama and Iwan Fals, there has been an increase in politically minded musicians and artists in Indonesia. Underground bands such as Superman is Dead, Marjinal, Taring Babi, Efek Rumah Kaca and Seringai are leaders in their scenes (Martin-Iverson 2012; Saefullah 2017). Baulch (2002b, p. 155) notes that Indonesian underground bands “bridge” the “yawning gap between the media fantasy of alternativeness and local realities”. These underground bands are politically savvy, portraying the actualities of working-class Indonesians in areas other than Jakarta.

This is a direct challenge to the portrayals of peaceful and bountiful working-class Indonesians at the time.<sup>11</sup> Baulch's research participants, infamous Balinese punk band Superman Is Dead, did live up to their sociopolitical lyrics. For instance, Baulch (2002b, p. 165) observes how the band built communities and provided food for the homeless around them. This grassroots activism continues to this day, as reported by Alamsyah (2021).

Indonesian underground musicians have built autonomous networks (Martin-Iverson 2012, p. 393) that encourage real-life action to help Indonesians in need. However, in the Indonesian punk scene, Martin-Iverson (2012, p. 390) argues that these DIY musicians are using their underground networks to turn this autonomous youth culture into a “commodified lifestyle”, focusing on profit instead of helping the marginalised. As this thesis shows, especially in Chapters 4 and 5, this was not always the case for Indonesian rappers. However, as the millennials entered the scene, things changed. Issues of monetisation and commercialisation became sensitive, to raise one example of conflicting politics of younger and older rappers in Indonesia. For instance, Chapters 4 and 5 examine the conflict between Xaqhala and Ben Utomo because of the latter's decision to monetise their event.

In the early 2000s, while the Indonesian punk scene consisted primarily of young working- and middle-class people (Martin-Iverson 2012; Saefullah 2017; Baulch 2002b), the Indonesian hip hop scene consisted mostly of upper-middle class youth (Bodden 2005). In his research into the rap scene of the 1990s and early 2000s, Bodden (2005, p. 17) found that Indonesia's pioneering rappers were university graduates from Jakarta, Bandung and

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<sup>11</sup> Laksono, pers. comm., 9 September 2020.



overseas. These affluent youths could import banned materials and possessed the capital to avoid prosecution for doing so. As such, they were leaders of the scene during this era (Bodden 2005). Working- and lower-middle-class youth did not have the financial clout to afford US rappers' official albums.<sup>12</sup> Furthermore, even if they had the capital to afford the album, many did not have CDs or tape players.<sup>13</sup>

Bodden's observation was correct for Jakartan rappers. However, this thesis expands on his research and finds that the reality was, in fact, more complex. While affluent young people in Jakarta were indeed the ones who could afford CDs and tapes from the US, working- and lower-middle-class young people were participating in the scene by bootlegging these materials.<sup>14</sup> By building and using their communities, similar to the network of youths that Martin-Iverson identifies, Indonesian hip hop enthusiasts built a network of rappers and hip hop fans across the country from the early 1990s. It is correct that Jakartan rappers were indeed the first to create a hip hop scene.<sup>15</sup> These Jakartan youths gathered weekly to perform, share, and teach each other. But as this thesis shows, the rest of the country was not far behind.

The next section discusses my own background that inform how I approach this project.

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<sup>12</sup> Ucok, interview, 20 March 2019.

<sup>13</sup> Gerry, interview, 16 April 2019.

<sup>14</sup> Kojek, interview, 29 January 2019.

<sup>15</sup> Ucok, interview, 20 March 2019.

## Personal background

Music has always been an important part of many young people's lives in Indonesia. It was a gateway for provincial youths to escape their daily realities. For other music enthusiasts in my village in West Borneo, rap music was our soundtracks to the 1990s and 2000s. Iwa K's '*Bebas*' (1993), the *Pesta Rap* compilation albums (*Pesta Rap* 1995, 1996, 1997), NEO's '*Borju*' (2002) and Saykoji's hit tracks in the 2000s all helped provincial kids like me feel connected to the rest of Indonesia. When I was young, we did not have internet access at home. We barely had any electricity. When I was growing up, having electricity to study and play was a luxury. We only had electricity for twelve hours in the afternoon, and the electricity supply was often cut in the evening to help the local government "preserve" their budget. The power was cut because of the rampant corruption in the local government, leaving barely any money to ensure a sufficient supply of basic needs to the residents.

Many provincial young people did not regard hip hop as a "cool" genre. Most of my peers listened to rock, metal or any other random bands that could be found on the bootleg tapes and CDs that we purchased from roadside kiosks. Metallica, Megadeth, Scorpion, Deep Purple and Judas Priest were the kings of that era. Our choices of musical heroes were somewhat limited. We did not know that other bands even existed. We did not even have access to the local Indonesian MTV. We could not buy official catalogues because we did not have any official music stores. I still remember how terrible the music quality was and how we needed to play a roulette game every time we bought a CD because we could not return it once it was opened. In this regard, I was lucky. I grew up in an upper-middle-class family in my hometown in West Borneo. My parents had a relatively successful clothing store that allowed them to take a loan from a bank to open a hotel. I did not realise it at the time, but I was lucky and privileged. I did not need to struggle for food or education. After going through twelve years of mandatory basic education in Indonesia, I then moved to Melbourne, Australia, to pursue my higher education. This experience of growing up in a safe situation, when compared to my field trip in Jakarta and other parts of Java, shapes the way I view hip hop and politics.

## **Thesis overview**

The remainder of this thesis is presented in eight chapters, structured as follows.

Chapter 2, “Locating the politics of hip hop: literature review”, is a focussed literature review. I first examine how the hip hop and rap literature was established in the United States. This helps to map potential issues and approaches may help clarify this previously uncharted area of scholarship. I will then move on to the existing academic research on Indonesian hip hop, reviewing relevant literature (for instance, Bodden 2005; Golpushnezhad 2017; Nasir 2015, 2018, 2020; Riyanto 2016; Varela 2014) and addressing how this thesis’ examples of hip hop politics contribute to ongoing academic conversations.

Chapter 3, “Methodology”, recounts the processes of data gathering and analysis for this project. This chapter is divided into three sections. First, I outline core concepts of digital ethnography (Hjorth et al. 2017; Pink et al. 2015; Postill 2017) and explain how I use them to gather and analyse research data for this project. Second, I discuss how I use lyrical analysis to help analyse Indonesian hip hop songs (Eckstein 2010; Stoia, Adams & Drakulich 2018; Kizer 1983; Vito 2015). Lastly, I recount my ethnographic fieldwork (Angrosino 2007; Cohen 1993; Montano 2013; Postill 2017, 2018) experience in Indonesia in 2019 and how it informs this research.

Chapter 4, “From outlaws to millennials”, traces how Indonesian hip hop has changed after the fall of the New Order regime. Much of the contemporary academic literature (especially after 2016) focuses on its “outlaw” aspects. While this notion was apposite in the 1990s, I will show how this understanding should be revisited. This chapter will review one of the earliest works on Indonesian hip hop (Bodden 2005) and provide a bridge to the recent literature (for instance, Nasir 2018, 2020; Riyanto 2017; Varela 2014) by identifying four phases (or generations) of Indonesian rappers: imagining the underground, stagnation and growth, a communal turn and millennials norms.

Chapter 5, “Peer politics”, explores interpretations of authenticity in Indonesian hip hop. In this chapter, I identify hip hop’s roles in establishing and negotiating the identity politics in the scene. I argue that peer politics stemmed from the differing interpretations of authenticity and the notion of monetisation in Indonesia’s ever-changing music industry. I present this chapter in a chronological order to capture its historical narrative. The first case study is a conflict between Bandung and Surabaya rappers in the year 2000, where the rappers were all

of similar age. The conflict stemmed from the interpretations of authenticity in the underground and “outlaw” (Bodden 2005) context. The second case study is an intergenerational conflict between an up-and-coming rapper with the older and more senior rappers in 2016. Like Kim and Sung's (2019) findings on Korean rappers and Fu's (2015) discussion on Singaporean rappers, I find that the politics of Young Lex, a young up-coming rapper, indicate his resistance to the scene's existing moral and ethical codes, enabling him to revolutionise the scene by presenting his interpretation of authenticity. The last case study is a conflict between Indonesia's two hip hop powerhouses and their leaders in 2018. Like Kubrin's (2005) and Ford's (2004) research on mainstream and underground hip hop in the US, I find that the issue of monetisation creates conflicts among Indonesian hip hop communities.

Chapter 6, “Leftist politics”, examines politics and protest during the post-authoritarian Indonesian regime by analysing the song ‘Puritan (God Blessed Fascists)’ by Homicide (2002). Here, I identify three key sites of protest in Homicide's song: conservatism and violence, conservatism and the army, and lastly, conservatism and education. I found that Indonesian rappers in the early 2000s, especially those from Bandung, tried to fight the rise of conservatism and fascism by reclaiming their space through the so-called “Bandung underground scene” (Saefullah 2017). In Bandung, their politics and protest were direct, despite the city and the region being home to the largest concentration of radical Islamic groups in Indonesia. By tapping into their “leftist” ideologies, Homicide established a resistance network where other rappers could participate and reclaim their space in an increasingly politicised city.

Chapter 7, “Traditionalist politics”, examines the protest and activism of Jogjakarta-native Jogja Hip Hop Foundation. In a scholarly conversation with Varela (2014) and Riyanto (2016), this thesis adds that the politics of Jogjakartan rappers revolve around the topics of Malioboro street, Javanese masculinity and their relationships with the Sultan. My research will show that, similar to Mayan rappers in Guatemala (Bell 2017), the group has reinvented their understanding of *kejawaan* (Javanese traits) by recalling ancient literature and adapting it to the current context of Jogjakarta. To do so, the group has taken on Malioboro Street as the focal point of their protest. The street is the cultural and economic hub of the city-state (Kurniadi 2009). By using ancient Javanese poems and literature familiar to locals as proof of the importance of moral codes in Jogjakartan society, the group links issues of cultural

preservation to the Sultan's growing embrace of capitalism to influence change in an increasingly commercialised Jogjakarta.

Chapter 8, "Regional politics", details the use of rap and hip hop as tools to unite and empower marginalised Eastern Indonesian domestic migrants in Western Indonesia. Here, I study the Bali-based group Mukarakat and three key features of their political activism: regionalism, anti-prejudice and cultural preservation. Like Scarparo & Stevenson's (2018) research on Jamaican rappers in Italy and Helbig's (2014) research on African rappers in Ukraine, my research will show that these rappers, who are displaced from their hometowns, attempt to reimagine their Indonesian identities while promoting the decentralisation of power and governance in Indonesia. Similar to Mayan rappers in Guatemala (Bell 2017), these rappers and their followers use ethnic minority languages as the focal point of their politics. By using languages that are unfamiliar to most Indonesians, the group links the decentralisation of governance and cultural preservation to national prejudice and racism.

Chapter 9, "Conclusion", starts with a recapitulation of the research problem. To answer this, I will argue that my map of politics demonstrates the versatility of Indonesian hip hop and that Indonesian rappers are examples of sociopolitical brokers. I will explain how my four examples of politics in this thesis interact with and contribute to our understanding of brokers (for instance, Boissevain 1974; Bräuchler 2019; Bräuchler, Knodel & Rösenthaller 2021) by considering the elevation of rappers into sociopolitical brokers by their fans. I will also showcase how my map of Indonesian hip hop politics interacts and extends the works of other Indonesian hip hop scholars (for instance, Bodden 2005; Golpushnezhad 2017; Nasir 2020, 2018; Riyanto 2017; Varela 2014). I argue that my map helps explain the phenomenon that is Indonesian hip hop, how rappers interact with their fans and how this interaction helps shape the politics of the communities it lives in. I end this thesis by providing recommendations for further studies.

## **Chapter 2 Locating the politics of hip hop: literature review**

Hip hop is a cultural movement born in the South Bronx area of New York City in the late 1970s (Rose 1991). As a movement, it has always grappled with the tension between its “commercial vitality and its strivings to be a meaningful source of youth empowerment and social change” (Watkins 2001, p. 10). As the genre rose in popularity throughout the 1990s, large corporations began to invest in it, actively recruiting musicians who fit a “gangster” persona to sell records. By 1998, hip hop reached an impasse wherein sales reached their peak, with most record sales happening under the creative control of major companies. More importantly, Watkins (*ibid*) argues that the tension between the hip hop artists and major record companies seemed to be swaying toward the commercial side. As a response, independent labels began to form, inspired by the pushback from artists and listeners concerned with the shift in the content of mainstream hip hop culture and music. This response was an opposition to the capitalistic, heteronormative, and Western-centric nature of mainstream record labels, which failed to address issues of social inequality (Dyson 2008; Ogbar 1999; Perry 2009; Rose 2008; Watkins 2001).

Chang (2007) writes that hip hop’s origins can be traced to a tiny, seven-mile circle in the South Bronx. He argues that hip hop stems from the vocal and musical expressions of culture in that area, specifically from the influences of the African American, Afro-Caribbean and Latino cultures present there in the late 1970s. The formation of alternative local identities could be seen through the four initial pillars of hip hop: MCing/rapping, turntablism/DJing, breakdancing and graffiti. Hip hop scholar and legendary MC KRS One later added the fifth pillar of hip hop, which he calls knowledge.

Rap is rooted in African oral traditions such as boasting, testifying and signifying (Forman 2002). Hip hop originated as a way to express the economic and social hardships experienced by those in the South Bronx as the throwaways of America’s capitalism (for instance, Androutsopoulos 2009; Aidi 2011; Androutsopoulos & Scholz 2003). Furthermore, Rose (1994) argues that early hip hop practitioners offered a social critique against racism that supported the civil rights movement’s goals in the United States.

Since its inception, hip hop has struggled continuously to maintain its spontaneity and locality in New York as it is further commodified and coopted (Pough 2004). On the one

hand, hip hop culture has been able to address an array of social issues, ranging from the prison industrial complex to Black political movements.<sup>1</sup> On the other hand, the rise of new technologies, from cassettes and CD players to the internet and the rise of various online distribution platforms<sup>2</sup>, has allowed for a more streamlined broadcasting network. Such a broadcasting network spurs both broader cultural flow and the commodification of hip hop (Mosley et al. 2017). Commodification has helped hip hop move from the underground to the mainstream music industry, where large conglomerates then homogenise music production, the distribution process and the means of consumption (Rose 2008).

Hip hop scholarship has a complex, multifaceted, politically contentious and hotly debated history. The challenge has been to create a dialogue and vocabulary to bridge street culture and academia. Gathering from and building on these studies, this chapter reviews several discussions about hip hop politics. I first start in the broader context of hip hop, tracing its inception and growth in the US. I then expand on the growing literature on hip hop around the globe, focusing mainly on the localisation of hip hop in the context of Southeast Asia.

This chapter is a literature review. It provides the framework necessary to understand and map out the politics of Indonesian hip hop by reviewing current academic literature surrounding this field of study. Furthermore, given my aim is to map out this previously undocumented field, this chapter introduces the concepts and methodologies that other hip hop scholars have used to interpret their studies. As a point of reference, this literature review focuses on well-documented US hip hop studies to analyse the politics of Indonesian hip hop.

### **US hip hop scholarship**

Early hip hop writing from the mid- to late- 1980s and early 1990s chiefly focused on the textual manifestations of hip hop music (in this case, rap lyrics) and was concerned with historical questions regarding hip hop's cultural roots and origins (for example Petchauer 2011). Two of the most significant scholarly works on hip hop are Tricia Rose's *Black Noise* (1994) and Nelson George's *Hip Hop America* (1998). Both scholars trace hip hop's historical roots in and around New York City and the Bronx during the mid-to-late 1980s and

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<sup>1</sup> For instance, from the Black Panthers and the Young Lords in the United States to the issues of immigration in France.

<sup>2</sup> Examples of media platforms are Bandcamp, Myspace, Facebook, YouTube, Soundcloud and Spotify.

emphasise hip hop's African American influences and cultural origins. They focus on hip hop figures such as Afrika Bambaataa, DJ Kool Herc and Grandmaster Flash.

Since *Black Noise* and *Hip Hop America*, the number of scholarly works examining hip hop culture has grown significantly. Most of these works are located within cultural studies (Kitwana 2005; Bennett 1999; Gabsi 2019, 2020). The growth of the hip hop literature has led to a process that Snell & Söderman (2014, p. 76) describe as the “academisation of Hip Hop”. These authors (ibid, p. 88) note that Harvard University established the Hip Hop Archive in 2002. Snell & Söderman also found over three hundred classes, courses and programs in the United States alone relating to hip hop. Additionally, Cornell University started its Hip Hop Research Centre in 2007. This centre aims to collect hip hop music recordings, photographs, event flyers, and other critical historical objects perceived as significant to hip hop's cultural history. This rise of hip hop institutes and archives, and the growing number of related classes, courses, and programs demonstrate that hip hop has become a serious and legitimate field of study in the United States.

Petchauer (2011, p. 783) notes that scholarly work about hip hop interacts with various fields of study, including philosophy, sociology, psychology, counselling, communications, higher education, Black studies, cultural studies, women's studies, spirituality, ethnomusicology, critical literacy, curriculum studies and sociolinguistics. The trend towards new interdisciplinary research has brought about the development of hip hop studies—an interdisciplinary field becoming increasingly established.

Forman and Neal's (2011) research further legitimises the academisation of hip hop culture. Their volume consists of several essays written by several writers deemed by the editors to be the leading scholars within hip hop studies. These essays, written by those who initially developed hip hop as legitimate site of academic enquiry, have paved the way for the current generation of scholarly hip hop writers. Following this, global hip hop becomes the focus for scholars worldwide.

### **Global hip hop**

Competing notions of authenticity have been the subject of numerous scholarly hip hop books and journal articles. In his edited book *Global Noise*, Mitchell (2001) addresses differing notions of hip hop authenticity outside North America. In this edited book, Ian



Maxwell focuses mainly on Sydney's hip hop scene. Similarly, Osumare (2013) views hip hop as a cultural practice that people appropriate outside of the US. Pennycook (2007) writes that the global spread of hip hop and the various interpretations of its notion of authenticity recall the global spread of the English language. This attitude is reflected through many recent discussions following the emergence of Asian hip hop performers, for instance, Rich Brian and the 88rising (McTaggart, Ninotchka & O'Brien, Eileen 2017).

Hip hop scholars such as Alim (2009), Bennett (1999), Condry (2006), Dimitriadis (2009), Maxwell (2003), Mitchell (2001) and Osumare (2013) are but a few who have positioned hip hop as a form of social narrative that exists in many locales beyond the United States. These scholars have sought to consider hip hop and its many practices as a living and continuously evolving global field in which authenticity and legitimacy are earned and socially constructed across local settings, rather than something that is fixed or agreed upon. They have each used hip hop as a tool to explore various aspects of cultural production, including the negotiation process between local and global cultural identities (for instance, Maxwell 1994; Mitchell 2000), the construction of authenticity in local contexts (Alim, Ibrahim & Pennycook 2009; Bennett 1999; Osumare 2002; Pennycook 2007), the way hip hop knowledge is appropriated into local identities and mixed with local cultures (Dimitriadis 2009) and more.

As Mitchell (2001) states in the introduction to *Global Noise*, hip hop from beyond the United States was somewhat of a void, at least at the time he was writing; its growth was rarely acknowledged or seriously examined. He noted that hip hop from places other than the United States was deemed "inauthentic". In this thesis, I intend to build on the growing body of scholarly hip hop literature that explores hip hop's various forms of expression, narratives and cultural productions outside of the US, especially in Southeast Asia. I also build upon the small but growing body of anthropological research that examines Indonesia's popular culture and identity (Heryanto 2018a; Makin 2018; Halim 2018) and hip hop in Southeast Asia (Nasir 2018; Riyanto 2017). I do this by challenging on the preconceived notion of underground and authenticity of Indonesian hip hop across few chapters in this thesis (see, especially, Chapter 4 and 5).

The global diffusion of hip hop is a fitting example of globalisation, a term that Inda and Rosaldo (2008, p. 2) define as the "intensification of global interconnectedness". Culture channels that were previously closed by geography, ecology or any other form of resistance

are now being connected and transformed by the extension of social, economic and political relations across the globe (Alter 2017; Goh 2013). However, globalisation is problematic to many because it is seen as an inherently uneven process. Popular culture goods and ideologies from the West, particularly the US, have long influenced and displaced local products and practices. From this perspective, globalisation is understood as a one-way cultural flow that erodes cultural differences and could be perceived as a modern form of cultural imperialism. However, Flannery (2010) and Guttal (2007) argue that this point of view is an oversimplification of the intricacies of globalisation.

Hannerz (2003, p. 209) contends that criticism of globalisation often comes from “established assumptions about cultural purity and authenticity”. For him, many tend to see culture as something that can be lost and not gained. This viewpoint is prevalent in Indonesia. The appropriation of hip hop is often denigrated as a crude imitation of American hip hop or as a form of cultural contamination of “national culture and national identity” (Bodden 2005, p. 5). Furthermore, hip hop in Indonesia is often framed by the mainstream media in terms of a moral panic over the Americanisation of Indonesian culture (Mulachela 2019).

While these fears are not as common today as they used to be, the view that hip hop culture is destroying “local culture” still carries some weight in popular opinion. In academic circles, the discourse of globalisation has started to acknowledge that it is flawed to reduce an entire series of diverse, parallel and fluid processes to a singular, one-way stream (Inglis 2005, p. 111; Man 2001). To avoid this reduction, scholars like Inglis, for example, have problematised the creation of categories like “Western” or “Eastern” culture, instead encouraging us to recognise the heterogeneity of each cultural stream and the selectivity involved in cross-cultural consumption.

### **Localising hip hop**

These developments have also been reflected in hip hop studies. While the ubiquity of hip hop was once seen as evidence in support of the global homogenisation paradigm, many scholars now reject this model in favour of theories that emphasise “glocalisation”, “hybridisation”, “localisation” and “indigenisation”, in which different groups of people adopt hip hop in diverse contexts around the world (Tong & Cheung 2011). Although each of these terms has a slightly different meaning, they are all meant to emphasise the “active element” involved in the “transfer of culture from one setting to another” (Brown 2006, p.

138). This emphasis reflects a shift from the global homogenisation discourse of hip hop to its “creolisation” (as noted by Howes 1996, p. 5), a concept used to highlight how goods and practices can be transformed when people in different local contexts utilise them. Howes also notes that, although he uses the term creolisation, this cultural adaptation process has also been referred to as localisation (Friedman 1990; Appadurai 1990) and “domestication” (for instance, Tobin 1992). This thesis will use the term localisation because it is more commonly used in hip hop studies (Tong and Cheung 2011; Pennycook and Mitchell 2009; Androutsopoulos 2009). Following this, I define localisation as an intermingling process of culture, where hip hop is absorbed and shaped to suit local norms.

More recent studies of hip hop outside the United States have focused on the process of localisation, especially by exploring the ways hip hop is imbued with new meaning or being “made and re-made” to suit local traditions (Condry 2006, p. 2). Alim (2009) labels this research area “Global Hip Hop Studies”. This thesis builds on this growing body of work by examining how hip hop is given meaning in Indonesia, or, as articulated by Maxwell (2001, p. 260), “how that thing becomes our thing”. My findings support the contention that Indonesians have localised hip hop. Hip hop in Indonesia is not the same as hip hop in the US, Australia, Malaysia, Singapore, or the Philippines. As my findings show, hip hop in Indonesia has differentiated itself from United States hip hop and developed into a distinct entity with its own agency and identity.

In his comparative study between hip hop in Frankfurt and Newcastle (Australia), Bennett (2000, p. 138) discovers that global hip hop’s localisation was accompanied by “...fractional in-scene debates”. His research shows that the process of localisation can cause conflicts when the local performers start to debate what, when, why, how and if local factors should affect the formulation of authenticity. As I show in Chapters 3 and 4, my research supports Bennett’s argument that several distinctive variations of hip hop authenticity can exist within the same region. In Indonesia, these variations centre on how hip hop should be localised and the implications that these variations have on the relationship between hip hop in Indonesia and globally. As the hip hop scene continues to expand, some practitioners in Indonesia have

started to listen exclusively to Indonesian hip hop. They have started to reject copycat trends of US hip hop, especially modern “mumble rap and trap”.<sup>3</sup>

This sentiment reflects common depictions of localisation, which posit it as the process by which foreign cultural forms become authentic. In many respects, localisation has become synonymous with authenticity, with the local being assumed to be genuine or authentic. This is what Carrier, in a personal communication to Wilk, meant by “It’s all right, they’ve appropriated it” (Wilk 1995, p. 115). While scholars are now critical of the global homogenisation paradigm, an underlying bias equates authenticity with locality. These kinds of assumptions can collapse the highly nuanced ways that people make distinctions between what is local, global or foreign, and how these categories are imbued with authenticity. As I discuss in Chapters 6 and 7, I find that locality does not necessarily denote authenticity, just as globality does not always imply inauthenticity. Accounts of localisation need to consider that people, especially in a country as diverse as Indonesia, can have differing opinions about what localisation should entail and may have negative views on some aspects of localisation. Therefore, at this early stage of the academic discourse about hip hop in Indonesia, we should not assume a correlation between authenticity and locality. Authenticity must be judged “according to local consequences, not local origins” (Fu 2015, p. 4).

### **Conscious vs gangster rap**

Following hip hop’s rise to prominence in 1979 via The Sugarhill Gang’s ‘Rapper’s Delight’, two dominant themes within the genre have arisen (Banda 2019; Yoo, Ju & Sohn 2017). The first theme is “conscious rap”, which is associated with songs with lyrics representing the experiences of marginalised and subordinated members of the society. This theme has been used to build a sense of movement and activism among fans, instead of reproducing mainstream racial and economic stereotypes. More specifically, rappers and producers of conscious rap focus on their surroundings and unfair treatment from corporate America. These messages are what KRS One, a popular US rapper, refers to as the “knowledge” aspect of hip hop (Turner 2017).

The second theme that emerged is “gangster rap”. This theme gave the same picture of marginalised life as conscious rap, however, as opposed to conscious rap, gangster rap

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<sup>3</sup> Gerry, interview, 16 April 2019.

embraced the consumerism and patriarchy of the mainstream media. Within the “gangster rap” culture, the knowledge aspect of “conscious rap” was replaced with a blend of “street credibility” and commercial success. Despite their violence and often misogynistic lyrics, gangster rap artists are often portrayed as the “protagonist hustler” (Kubrin 2005).

Kubrin (2005) notes that while these two themes are not mutually exclusive, gangster rap mainly became associated with the mainstream hip hop market, while conscious rap became better known within the underground community. However, it should be noted that gangster rap also exists within the underground hip hop scene, while conscious rap also exists within the mainstream market. They both co-exist within the two scenes, but one is more dominant than the other. In this specific case, the notion of underground means that the spread of music and artists relies upon community efforts rather than mainstream funding (Bliss 2019). This is also shown in Chapter 4 and 5 of this thesis, where the notion of monetisation becomes an important issue for the Indonesian hip hop scene.

Conscious rappers relied on their circles of friends, families and other associates. As they gained more fame, their circles widened. They declined the help of major labels, instead forming independent record labels to sell their albums. It was at this point that performers faced a crossroads: signing with or creating an independent label and remaining underground, or signing with with a major label, either directly or through a subsidiary.

In the 1990s, major corporations started to push gangster rap as their primary commodity. Gangster rap became famous for highlighting the harsh, nihilistic, masculine aspects of living in a United States ghetto. Paradoxically, the initial intention of gangster rap was to criticise the disgust felt by Black people due to the demeaning comments and reports made by mainstream media. For instance, Edgar & Rudrow (2018) studied the life of one of the most famous rappers, Tupac Shakur, to show his impact and legacy in popular culture. Undoubtedly, Tupac expressed radical critiques of mainstream culture and the reproduction of dominant cultural impressions of gangsters in urban American neighbourhoods. Carpenter (2017, p. 270) notes that hip hop trends mirror modern culture’s values, violence and hypocrisy, and represents some “ugly truths about everything society is and is not”.

In contrast to gangster rap, conscious rap has traditionally thrived in the underground scene. Specifically, after the fall of the Golden Era of hip hop in the mid-1990s, both underground and independent hip hop functioned as a unifying tool representing the authenticity of the

mainstream culture. Carney, Hernandez & Wallace (2016) highlight that mainstream hip hop only represents a tiny percentage of US hip hop culture's artistic production and performance.

Adams and Fuller (2006) and Ogbar (2007) argue that hip hop has been used by its performers to negotiate complex cultural and political landscapes in their search for identity. Hip hop is not monolithic; it is deeply rooted in a local historical context, taking on the community's experience to build its own identity. This important aspect is often forgotten in discussions around underground and mainstream hip hop, despite being the most easily observable aspect of current global hip hop trends. For instance, Karubian (2009) notes that major record labels sign fewer new artists and performers today, having shifted their focus to signing established independent acts so they can achieve success in the mainstream market. As a result, many artists and performers treat the independent and underground scene as the "waiting station or the minor league" before they sign lucrative deals with major labels (Oware 2014).

This is reflected in the current trend of mumble<sup>4</sup> rap, popularised on platforms like YouTube and Soundcloud. These platforms serve as breeding grounds for major labels, with many artists who have broken through on mainstream media (for example, Post Malone, Lil Pump, Lil Yachty, Lil Uzi Vert, and 6ix9ine among others) gaining prominence on them. On the opposite end of the spectrum, MF Doom began his career by signing with a major labels (Hess 2007). However, MF Doom and other artists in similar circumstances have migrated to the independent scene, dropping their major labels for more creative freedom once they had established their fanbase (Oware 2014).

Perkins (1996) argues that before 1979, hip hop was a vital component of the flourishing underground culture in the Bronx and upper Manhattan, acting as a fertile space for debate on various social issues experienced by the community. This changed after 1979, as hip hop's initial popularity reached the attention of the mainstream music industry. Similarly, George (2005) argues that independent African-American music has always been an untapped space for growth by corporate labels. Furthermore, Johnson (2008) and Myer and Kleck (2007) suggest that the independent music scene has historically driven popular music.

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<sup>4</sup> Mumble rap is a style and subculture of hip hop where the performers intentionally slow down their speech, championing unclear vocalisation of their lyrics.

## **Rap lyrics and messages**

Ciccariello-Maher (2007) argues that hip hop lyrics often shuttle between the uncritical<sup>5</sup> and critical<sup>6</sup> consciousness, which can be both a source of oppression and liberation throughout hip hop's history. These contradictions have been a mainstay. For instance, Mitchell (1996) argues that hip hop engages in both resistance and complicity with relations to domination. Ultimately, hip hop lyrics can be a valuable tool to create definitions and conceptualise terms such as race, class, and gender (McTaggart, Ninotchka & O'Brien, Eileen 2017), but have also been used to cross these boundaries and create social consciousness, resistance and inspire social activism (Ogbar 1999; Martinez 1997).

Akom (2009) argues that for a sociopolitically conscious rapper such as KRS-One, critical hip hop should be used to call out hip hop performers and producers who pump out products that conform to mainstream media images instead of social reality. He further argues that hip hop, especially critical, conscious hip hop, should be used as a foundation for critical learning about racism, police brutality, mass incarceration and poverty. As a medium of expression, hip hop can provide a means of "knowledge building" applicable to a specific population that has been marginalised. This process can be achieved in multiple ways, ranging from primary texts such as lyrics, secondary texts such as the music on the radio or television and tertiary texts such as cyphers or spoken word poetry groups (Akom 2009; Gosa 2017, 2011).

Critical rappers form identities based on a shared recognition of oppressed social positions at the core of critical thinking and critical hip hop. Hip hop's ability to express ideas from a disenfranchised social location through culture and knowledge outside of the mainstream society has two consequences (Leard & Lashua 2006). First, it allows for a collective process in which hip hop lyrics provide an alternative outlet for the hip hop community to express their grievances. Second, urban youth of colour in the US use hip hop texts to construct locally validated selves and create a sense of community linked to what it means to be marginalised, a trait appropriated by many hip hop practitioners worldwide. It is the essence of an alternative "lived" curriculum to teach important lessons about how to survive in the world and understand how it works (Dimitriadis 2009).

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<sup>5</sup> Uncritical consciousness means reflecting the status quo and the music industry driven lyrics.

<sup>6</sup> Critical consciousness means challenging the status quo, reflecting an almost similar image to conscious rap, although in different packaging.

Hip hop can also be used as a medium to engage the critical thinking ability of those marginalised by the mainstream media (Hill 2009). This is most noticeable for young people who believe that the system has failed them. In this regard, hip hop practitioners interpret lyrics and music in relation to their everyday lives. Hip hop allows them to build common bonds and create a shared community that can better accommodate their own needs (Drury 2017).



### **Messages of activism**

Hip hop culture allows listeners to express and reflect on their personal experiences (Maddex 2014). This is particularly salient for the poor and marginalised youth seeking a way to express their dissatisfaction with mainstream culture and society. Alim (2007) notes that hip hop allows for an informal method of communication. It denounces the dominant and formalised modes of reading, writing and speaking. It often takes the form of “real talk” or “straight talk” and can be used by listeners to navigate the social world and resist and combat mainstream ideology and culture.

Once performed, whether live or on record, hip hop can serve as the spark for an oppositional consciousness (Maddex 2014). Hip hop gives a framework that provides spaces for ideas, rituals, and long-standing interactions that can be refined and developed to suit what a particular group might need to maintain and spur oppositional consciousness. This is shown in Chapters 6, 7 and 8 of this thesis, in which hip hop scenes become the home of counter-mainstream movements in Indonesia. Hip hop’s ability to redefine history, create a sense of community, and form an oppositional consciousness (Decker 2016) is something rarely explored in the context of Asian countries like Indonesia. This thesis will help bridge the gap by connecting the previously undocumented politics of Indonesian hip hop and shows how they are connected to these global messages of activism.

Hip hop artists and performers are celebrities of varying standards whose voices can be heard by the public and, as a result, be scrutinised or praised for their messages (Berard & Meeker 2019). This is especially important during an era in which people are restricted in what they can and cannot listen to. In the United States, because of this visibility, rappers such as Eminem and MF Doom (Hess 2005) can create hidden transcripts or encrypted messages understood only by the hip hop community, which can act as their form of resistance. This is what Drury (2017) calls “play-as-resistance”. These embedded messages exemplify the multiplicity of language that can be used as both a tool of resistance and as a means of creating and recreating meanings (Hart 2014).

Hip hop practitioners and community members have had a long history of political activism in social movements, from involvement in the South Africa apartheid resistance movement in the 1980s to their participation in the Los Angeles riot of 1992 (Chang 2007). Nevertheless, hip hop has continuously faced less success in its battles for class and racial equality within

its own culture, despite sharing similar desires for social change and ending legacies of oppression and domination. There are various reasons for this, including the characteristics of the culture, in which performers and avid fans are subjects of the market demands, record labels' executives and acknowledgement of the mainstream media (Maher 2005; George 2005). However, hip hop can still spark discussion and challenge mainstream ideas, and therefore cannot be separated from political action (Kitwana 2002).

Hip hop activism, or the ability of hip hop practitioners to address the issues within their respective hip hop communities and their wider surroundings, harnesses the social experiences and energy of the often-disenfranchised members of society (Bliss 2019; Taviano 2016). The activism of hip hop practitioners and listeners can range from micro-level actions, such as posting videos and lyrics of their favourite hip hop songs and artists on their social media accounts, to broader macro-level activism, such as protests and rallies (Hafez 2017; Saunders 2012).

Within the scope of hip hop, we can observe two processes of activism. The first is a process in which the pull and push factors of society are exhibited (Trapp 2005). Through this process, we can observe how hip hop can push political systems and mainstream culture into addressing minority groups that were previously ignored. At the same time, it can also pull together actors from the hip hop community and create a collective drive for social change. For instance, hip hop practitioners and fans in the US rejected Ronald Reagan's conservative administration, which shifted blame for drugs and violence onto underprivileged members of society, instead building a critical stance toward the government (Trapp 2005; Maddex 2014).

The second process is where hip hop activists act as both the mirror and the engine of a social movement. In this regard, we can observe the two distinct works of Queen Latifah and Tupac Shakur. Armstead (2007) argues that the works of Queen Latifah were crucial in helping establish the feminist movement among African American youth. In this regard, Trapp (2005) notes that women's portrayals in Queen Latifah's songs reflect the reality of female minorities in society. They also influence the social movement participants in the Black and Third Wave Feminist Movement (Carney, Hernandez & Wallace 2016). On the other hand, Tupac's songs showed the overtly masculine tendencies of African American communities in the US (Edgar & Rudrow 2018). Tupac was a mascot for a movement that embraced violence and drugs as a way to cope with the social and economic precarity (Kubrin 2005).

Activism in hip hop creates oppositional culture from African American and other minority groups in the US. They have used their cultural resources to resist the oppression under the modern form of internal colonialism (Mansbridge and Morris 2001). Similarly, in his research, Martines (1997) has shown that hip hop subcultures of the late 1980s and early 1990s presented key themes of anger and resistance toward a racist and discriminatory society. This resistance peaked in the infamous 1992 Los Angeles riots. This movement expressed resistance, empowerment and social critique against a racist police department and a corrupt legal system. However, Nielsen and Krogh (2017) claim that, although this hip hop helped powered this movement, it backfired because police became even more brutal following the riot.

Clay (2006) found that hip hop was a space for young people of colour in the San Francisco Bay Area to converse with those who shared similar struggles and circumstances. This theme holds true around the world, with Forman and Neal (2011) highlighting community organising and civic engagement spreading from the US to other major cities worldwide, including London, Paris, Frankfurt, Rio de Janeiro, Tokyo, Hong Kong and Seoul. Similarly, Dedman (2011) writes that social activism among independent UK hip hop artists appropriates hip hop into a subculture of resistance and social activism against the mainstream commodification of their country's culture.

This literature review has shown some of the works that indicate the politics of US and global hip hop. Before we go on to the discussion on how I build my map of the politics of Indonesian hip hop, let us first explore the emerging scholarship around Indonesian hip hop.

### **Indonesian hip hop**

Indonesians eager to question state-mandated cultural production and consumption welcomed the arrival of hip hop culture. As a result, early hip hop in Indonesia was regarded as a minority expression from the margins of society. The earliest account of rap music and Indonesian hip hop is an analysis by Henschkel (1991), in which she reviews several articles and interviews on music in Indonesia published in *Tempo* magazine, covering rap and hip hop. Henschkel contends that hip hop and rap were an “infiltration” of Western influences into the Indonesian popular culture. At the time, Indonesian hip hop was viewed negatively. Rapping was considered as *ngomel* or “grumbling”. Her article quoted Iwan Fals, one of Indonesia's most popular singers and songwriters, who mentioned that rap was a form of

cultural imperialism by the West (Henschkel 1991, p. 56). Henschkel's article, however, did not acknowledge the influence that local languages and dialects had on early Indonesian hip hop.

Early Indonesian hip hop voiced communal resentment. It positioned itself as an opposition to and critical of the hegemonic power of Soeharto's New Order regime. Bodden (2005, p. 6) notes that at the time, Indonesian hip hop mainly focused on how the urban middle classes were becoming "increasingly critical of, and vocal about, the shortcomings of the New Order regime". According to Bodden (2005, p. 1), Indonesian hip hop of the 1990s did not adopt local traditions and was instead a copycat of US hip hop. In his article, Bodden argues that Indonesian hip hop was an "outlaw" genre, his argument stemming from one of his participants, who viewed themselves as the opposition to Soeharto's authoritarian regime. At the time, this was correct.

In the 2010s, Varela (2014) argues that Indonesian hip hop has been used to promote local culture. His research finds that Wayang hip hop, a combination of hip hop culture with the performance of Wayang (puppet theatre performance), is a "deliberate and sophisticated interaction of Javanese heritage and global youth music" (Varela 2014, p. 482). Here, Varela's research shows that Indonesian hip hop has been adopted to suit local needs. He said that "appropriation, although some may find problematic, is a tool to revolutionise and modernise something. It could be used as a tool of preservation" (Varela 2014, p. 497). Considering this notion, Riyanto (2016) notes that the use of traditional cultural products, such as Javanese cultural products in Jogja Hip Hop Foundation's music, would require specific "rules of conduct" of the true Javanese expression (see Chapter 7).

Building on the use of language in Indonesian hip hop, much research has focused on the lyrics' contextualisation. Nasir (2018, p. 376) notes that "Indonesian hip hop outfits have utilised the strategy of cross-fertilisation to transcend the conventional boundaries of hip hop and include folk elements and religious practices" in order to avoid state censorship. This

technique is called code-switching.<sup>7</sup> However, it is important to note that this technique is not unique to Indonesian hip hop (see Chapter 5 and 7).<sup>8</sup>

Golpushnezhad (2017) argues that the politics of Indonesian hip hop lie in its use as a tool of identity politics for Muslim youth. Her research finds that these youth use rap songs and breakdancing to help validate their religious beliefs. In doing so, they tell “their stories of love, poverty, politics, religiosity and personal success in an Islamic society” through songs and music (Golpushnezhad 2017, p. 113). Similarly, Nasir (2018, 2020) finds that young Muslims in Indonesia, Malaysia and Singapore share similar concerns regarding the negative stigma of their religion after the 9/11 terrorist attacks in the United States. His study argues that these youths’ politics represent a “*jihad* of words” (Nasir 2015, p. 1046), signifying their fights against the supposed enemies of Islam through song. Chapter 6 of this thesis interacts with this discourse by exploring the case study of Indonesian youth who resisted the politicisation of Islam and right-wing conservatism in Bandung, West Java.

### **Locating the politics of Indonesian hip hop**

At this point, the reader might be wondering what I mean by Indonesian hip hop politics and how my thesis contributes to the larger academic discourse on this topic. My discussion up to this point has presented some key points regarding the larger discussion on US and global hip hop politics. It has also presented an overview of the current academic discourse on

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<sup>7</sup> White (2019), in his study of hip hop in Quebec, finds that code-switching in popular music can create new opportunities for shared community among young people of diverse backgrounds. Similarly, Omoniyi (2008) notes that codeswitching and local languages and dialects have been used to signify their authenticity for Nigerian artists. Omoniyi says:

“In Africa where literacy rates are abysmally low according to World Bank statistics, hip hop has been deployed to articulate resistance to a dominant elite mainstream. However, it is also difficult to describe it as the property of a social underclass when we consider that some of its contemporary exponents come from privileged, educated, and upwardly mobile socioeconomic backgrounds” (2008, p. 125).

<sup>8</sup> Other examples from Southeast Asia include Cathy J. Schlund-Vials’s research on Cambodian hip hop, which found that praCh, a popular rapper in the country, has used hip hop to memorialise Cambodia’s genocidal history. Prach is a Cambodian-American whose family fled from Cambodia to America due to the social unrest. His lyrics are ‘haunted by the trauma of the Killing Fields, yet [he] paradoxically uses this trauma as the basis for a Cambodian American form of selfhood’ (Schlund-Vials 2008, p. 22). According to Mattar (2003a, p. 298), Singaporean youths use hip hop to ‘suspend their local identity and adopt a global identity’. Also, in Southeast Asia, hip hop in Myanmar is said to have a political edge, but it might just be a harmless ‘release valve for today’s frustrated youth’ (Lin 2010, p. 147). Keeler (2009, p. 13), however, inaccurately considers Burmese hip hop to be sufficiently political, seeing it as merely a ‘commercially extremely successful way to play on people’s existential fears, fantasies, and wishes’.

Indonesian hip hop, identifying some emerging examples of its politics. Building on these studies, this thesis identifies five key areas of hip hop politics that it will address and map.

Rose (1991) argues that the politics of hip hop stemmed from its origin and evolution. As shown throughout this Literature Review, this historical documentation is important, as it serves as the basis of other studies in the field. Similarly, Bennett and Rogers (2016) argue that historical narratives of pop music are important to establish its materiality and locality. They argue that providing a setting, an historical analysis, is of utmost importance in establishing a field of study. I will address this in Chapter 4, where I will trace the history of Indonesian hip hop from its inception in the 1980s to its “outlaw” phase in the 1990s (for instance, Bodden 2005) and the current millennial era (2020) (for instance, Golpushnezhad 2017; Nasir 2018, 2020; Riyanto 2016; Varela 2014). As shown in the previous section, there are still many gaps the historical narrative of Indonesian hip hop.

Bodden (2005) argues that authenticity in Indonesian hip hop stems from the outlaw persona of its performers and fans. Bodden was correct at the time, but as I will show in this thesis, this understanding needs to be revisited. As Riyanto (2016) and Varela (2014) argue, being authentic in Indonesian hip hop does not necessarily mean that artists must oppose the authorities. Their case studies show that authenticity can also stemmed from the adoption of local traditions into hip hop. I approach this task by providing and analysing case studies of internal politics, where authenticity stems from internal conflicts between Indonesian rappers in Chapter 5.

Independent hip hop has often been associated with being conscious (Petchauer 2011). In the context of Southeast Asia, scholars such as Golpushnezhad (2017) and Nasir (2018, 2020) have proposed that being conscious rappers could be defined as staying true to their religion. While these authors studied politics from the point of view of religious Muslim rappers and fans, I will provide a counterargument from the point of view of a leftist rapper and rap groups. Situated in Bandung, West Java, in 2002, Chapter 6 studies how youth in the area responded to the rise of the politicisation of religion and the emergence of right-wing violence.

Nasir (2018, 2020) and Golpushnezhad (2017, 2018) have provided insights into the conservative and religious politics of rappers in Southeast Asia. Similarly, Riyanto (2016) and Varela (2014) have researched into the notion of conservatism in the context of Javanese

culture. Chapter 7 of this thesis seeks to push our understanding of traditionalist politics by taking an example of a Jogja-native rap group called Jogja Hip Hop Foundation. Similar to Mayan rappers in Guatemala (Bell 2017), I will show that the traditionalist politics of these rappers stemmed from their proud cultural heritage. They expressed similar inclinations to Korean rappers who used their songs and music as a way to negotiate the capitalist turn of their society (Kim & Sung 2019).

Kadich's (2019) and Barone's (2019) research have explored how rap is used as a tool to negotiate identity amid conflicts. Chapter 8 will expand on their work by exploring the regional politics of Indonesian hip hop. This chapter builds on Varela's (2014) work on Wayang hip hop in Solo and Riyanto's (2016) work on the Jogja Hip Hop Foundation in Jogjakarta. More specifically, this thesis studies the way Mukarakat, a Bali-based Eastern Indonesian rap group, uses their songs to negotiate their understanding of Indonesian identities. Expanding on the works of Bell (2017), I will show that the group also uses ethnic minority languages to enact their politics.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter has discussed and defined the key concepts, theories and literature integral to this thesis. More specifically, I have provided an overview of scholarly work that can help analyse and map the politics of Indonesian hip hop by charting the current overarching themes of politics in global hip hop studies. These include globalisation, glocalisation, conscious rap, underground and authenticity, lyrics, messages and activism. Through a review of the existing literature on Indonesian hip hop, I identified four types of politics that I argue would be good starting points to start the process of mapping: peer (Chapter 5), leftist (Chapter 6), traditionalist (Chapter 7) and regional (Chapter 8). As the previous section shows, there are gaps in existing studies on Indonesian hip hop. This thesis will attempt to provide these missing links by first proposing a model of how we can trace the history of Indonesian hip hop in Chapter 4, before we discuss of the four types of politics. Before we go any further, I will first discuss the methodology of this thesis.

### **Chapter 3 Methodology**

Now that I have laid out the research problem, provided context for this study, and introduced the ongoing debates surrounding the politics of hip hop, I need to explain my research methodology. To understand the politics of Indonesian hip hop, I had to study what the rappers and their fans said and did.

To understand the context for the views expressed in my interviews and to compare those interviews with public debates and narratives, this study relied mostly on ethnography (both digital and physical), which I supplemented with lyrical analysis. My fieldwork mainly consisted of several methods, namely semi-structured interviews and participant observation. The main periods and locations of physical fieldwork were January to May 2019 (five months) in Jakarta, Bandung, Jogjakarta, Surabaya, Malang and Denpasar, with four years of additional online and “remote” fieldwork (Postill 2017) conducted between 2018 and 2021. I will start with the digital ethnography that I conducted from March 2018 to July 2021.

#### **Digital ethnography**

This project adopted a “digital ethnography” (Hjorth et al. 2017; Pink et al. 2015) approach to study the politics of hip hop in Indonesia. In their book, Pink et al. (2015) highlight five guiding principles for engaging in digital ethnography: multiplicity, non-media-centricness, openness, reflexivity and unorthodoxy. Multiplicity acknowledges that there are multiple ways to engage with the digital space. Non-media-centricness argues for the importance of acknowledging that media is inseparable from all the other activities that make up our daily lives and therefore cannot be studied in isolation. Openness acknowledges the unbounded and collaborative process of digital ethnography, where we make knowledge and ways of knowing alongside others, rather than as isolated researchers. Reflexivity locates the practice of digital ethnography within the longstanding tradition of “writing culture” (Clifford & Marcus 1986), in which the producers of knowledge must reflect on the subjective nature of their experiences and the processes through which they encounter things, places and people that enable knowledge production. Lastly, unorthodoxy recognises that the field of digital ethnography is still nascent. This means that digital ethnography often involves going beyond the established norms and existing formal structures of research.



That final principle is important to this research. As I stated in Chapter 1, this thesis is an exploratory study into the politics of Indonesian hip hop. Although it builds on existing studies on Indonesian rap and youth culture (Bodden 2005; Chapter 4), it proposes a new map of hip hop politics (Chapter 5 to 8). To do so, I follow Postill's (2018, p. 18) approach by studying and analysing "a certain group or category of people", in this case Indonesian rappers, hip hop enthusiasts and their fans, focusing on how they create and exchange their interpretation of politics to influence those around them. Prior to my participant observation, interviews and lyrical analysis, I used digital ethnography to map out my field from afar (Postill 2017).

Massey (2013) argues that the idea of space and place of research are becoming more decoupled in this era of globalisation. Instead of imagining "place" as a physical geolocation with fixed boundaries, it can be better characterised in terms of social relationships—a network of shifting communities, identities and ties that are constantly in flux and continuously renegotiated. Similarly, Postill & Pink (2012) claim that ethnographic study of both offline and online contexts allow for a deeper understanding of the relationship between offline and online processes. This is a particularly important insight that I will explore further in Chapters 5, 6, 7 and 8 of this thesis.

Barratt & Maddox (2016) state that digital ethnography allows for an active participation in the "scene" without necessarily being there. Similarly, Pink (2016, p. 163) argues that digital ethnography methods "are always evolved as part of a specific research project, question design, and practice". This was how I used digital ethnography to help "set the scene" of my study. My approach was to always be dynamic and flexible, which I will discuss further in a later section. While preparing for my fieldwork in Indonesia in early 2019, I started contacting rappers, producers and record labels through their social media platforms. The selection criteria were non-existent. As I was an outsider to the scene, I welcomed any opportunities for interviews. Like Morgan (2021), I was hopeful that this would help establish my connections in this scene. However, also like Morgan, this method did not work (more on this in the next section).

This was the preparation that I conducted prior to my field work in January 2019. The next section will detail my participation observation and the issues that I encountered along the way.

### **Participant observation**

For Hine (2015, p. 55), ethnography is “an immersive method, using the ethnographer’s participation to build a multi-faceted portrayal of the research setting”. Dewan (2018) considers ethnography to be a technique designed to explore cultural phenomena where the researcher observes society from the point of view of the subject of the study. Similarly, Hine (2017) views the task of an ethnographer as being to understand ways of life as they are lived. I adopted these understandings by fully immersing myself in the “field”, both online and offline.

Following Barz and Cooley (2008, p. 4), my ethnography also included “meaningful face-to-face interaction with other individuals”, which primarily consists of one-on-one interviews with prominent rappers, producers, audio engineers, hip hop fans, academics, audience members and local community leaders, as well as extensive immersive participant observation. My ethnographic approach to fieldwork provided a valuable means of understanding the sociopolitical contexts of both rappers and their audience members. I immersed myself in this unfamiliar field. Although I had been a fan of hip hop since my early youth, many of the places in which I conducted my fieldwork were new to me, rendering everything strange and unfamiliar.

Often, researchers are familiar with the field they are working in. Whiting (2019), for instance, argues that his status as an insider within his field of research, bolstered by his employment and history of performance, largely influenced his ethnography. Similarly, Montano (2013) notes that his status as a DJ allowed for connections and information that might be unavailable to outsiders. In some ways, I had a similar form of hybrid research identity as an insider-outsider, although I largely felt like an outsider due to my unfamiliarity with the field sites.

I began the process of data collection by contacting rappers and producers via Instagram and Twitter (following Postill’s 2017 approach of digital ethnography). At first, I thought I was building my “social capital” (Smart 1993), hoping that doing this would establish a network that could help my fieldwork when I arrived in Indonesia. As I have stated earlier, my initial plan was to establish a small collection of potential interview participants to help get this project started. Alas, this did not happen. When I departed from Melbourne for Indonesia in early January 2019, almost all my initial participants, who had initially agreed to be

interviewed, refused to speak. They refused to reply to my emails, messages or phone calls. The project was halted the moment I landed in Jakarta.

Truthfully, I loathed my Jakartan experience. The traffic and pollution were unbearable. I hated being stuck in traffic for hours but walking was not an option, thanks to the pollution and the distance from one spot to the other. But the worst part of starting my research in Jakarta was the loneliness. I was separated from my supportive community of researchers at RMIT and was thrown into a concrete jungle with no support. I stayed in Pulomas, North Jakarta. Each day I would walk to the nearby street vendors for food, mostly along the arterial roads of Kelapa Gading, stopping to chat to as many people as I could. I talked regularly to a local fried rice stall owner, struck up a friendship and ended up getting deals for cheaper meals in exchange for a chat about my experience living overseas. Because the internet service at Pulomas was so poor, I had to constantly move from one café to another. Starbucks was my second home for three months. This was perhaps a trial by fire for a young researcher in his mid-20s, trying to gather data for his PhD.

I was stuck in the same spot for two weeks before finally attending a local rap event in Pulomas organised by a North Jakarta-based rap collective called DefYard. Luckily, attending this event proved fruitful, as it helped me ingratiate myself with the Indonesian hip hop community, thereby informing the vast part of this thesis. From then, After the DefYard event, I spoke to a number of established and up-and-coming rappers, attended numerous hip hop gatherings and concerts, and interviewed anyone who wanted to talk to me (rappers, motorcycle drivers, pedestrians, anyone). I also tried to get my foot in the door of Indonesia's rigid academic system. Eventually, I was able to speak to some young Indonesian academics who told me where I should go and who I should talk to.

From Jakarta, I flew to Jogjakarta. The initial grunt work that I had done in Jakarta allowed me to establish connections with Jogjakartan rappers prior to landing in the city. Yacko and Ucok, both established rappers from Jakarta and Bandung, gave me the contact details of the leaders of Hellhouse, Jogjakarta's most prominent hip hop collective. Upon making contact with Alex and Gerry, the founders of Hellhouse, I was set. They were very well-connected and as a result I was able to reach anyone who I wanted to speak with in the city. Because my motorcycle license had expired, Arya, also known as Mario Zwinkle, was kind enough to drive me to areas I could not reach with public transport. From Jogjakarta, I travelled around

the province, then further east. I took a bus to Klaten, Semarang, Surabaya, Malang, Bojonegoro and, lastly, Bali.

Like Postill (2018, p. 25), my motto during fieldwork was “if it matters to my research participants, then it matters to me”. As an outsider in the field, I chose to “roll” with various groups, trying to understand their concerns and issues. For instance, in Jakarta, I was asked to ride with an outlaw biker gang who were hunted by Indonesian police for the alleged homicide of rival gang members (Irmayani 2018). While this might sound extreme, I learned that this gang did so because their rival gang members were allegedly running a child pornography ring. This situation ended up inspiring a song called ‘Street’ by a rap group from Tanjung Priok called A2Kill. I also stayed for several nights at a Papuan dorm in Jogjakarta, I learned how the dorm’s residents had migrated to Jogjakarta from various areas of Eastern Indonesia only to experience racism and discrimination. They had to team up so that they would not get bullied in the city.

These practices of catching up, tagging along and sharing, laid the foundations for this research. As I was an outsider, I needed to understand how and why my research participants were doing what they did. Lived experience was crucial in setting up the context of the politics that I ended up writing about. For instance, had I not spoken with the sales promotion girls who sold cigarettes around Malioboro in Jogjakarta, I would not have understood why they were angry at the members of the Jogja Hip Hop Foundation. The group sang about how wearing skimpy and tight clothes damaged their Javanese pride but talking to these hard-working women shed light on the group’s skewed understandings of Javanese male masculinity (see Chapter 7).

During this participant observation period, I gathered a large amount of empirical data. It was also an eye-opening experience for me. I was raised in an upper-middle-class, ethnic Chinese family in rural West Borneo. The experience that I had growing up was significantly different to those with whom I spoke during my fieldwork. I was not used to seeing people being unable to afford food or lodging. I was perhaps “radicalised” by this experience. Unlike Postill (2018), who was able to turn his activist voice on and off, I had a rough time finding this balance.

Postill (2018, p. 26) argues that ethnographic fieldwork is an open-ended process that can lead to surprising research directions and even complicate any prior comparative framework.

This holds true for my research project<sup>1</sup>. This project was the fruit of an exploration by an *orang kampung* (country bumpkin) who experienced urban Indonesia and its complex sociopolitical problems with only scant prior experience or preparation. I will explain this further later in this chapter. Before that, I will first explain how I conducted interviews for this project.

## Interviews

I conducted “formal interviews” with 34 rappers across Indonesia (for the full list, see Appendix B).<sup>2</sup> I also had informal conversations with Indonesian hip hop enthusiasts I met in the field (around 50-60 on top of the 34). I approached the participants based on recommendations and referrals by the initial participants. As I have explained earlier, I was an outsider with no “social capital”. I did not have many options my interview participants. Thus I employed a snowball sampling method (Heckathorn 2011, p. 2-3), starting with five initial respondents (who said yes to being interviewed) and actively seeking references from the previous participants for further potential participants. Like Whiting (2019, p. 28), I found this to be a useful method. However, unlike Whiting, I needed to rely entirely on these research participants as I was an outsider to this field. Many of my research participants were male. This was unintended. While I was able to interview Yacko, Ramengvrl and Lsista, it was difficult to find other female rappers in this male-dominated space. Like Golpushnezhad (2017), I informally found that female rappers in Indonesia experienced a great deal of discrimination, often forcing them to exit the scene.

According to Baym (2012, p. 286), musicians, managers and others who work in the music industry “understand how they perceive their interactions and relationships with audiences”. Although unintended, my snowball method reflects similar findings to her project. Baym notes that she relied on her social network and her participation in musical culture. These then allowed her to build social capital (Smart 1993). Like Morgan's (2021) approach to professional institutions and musicians, I decided to connect with these people and it allowed me to gain insight into the inner world of this subculture (see Chapter 5). My experience,

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<sup>1</sup> The project I started during my confirmation of candidature and the thesis that you are reading now are radically different.

<sup>2</sup> Here some readers may query why I did not interview Papa Wee Wee. They were omitted from much of the thesis because they have not been active for a long while. At their peak, the group was not widely recognised as influential. Tellingly, none of the interviewees mentioned them.

however, was not the same as Baym's or Morgan's. They both found that musicians and professionals were hesitant to speak with them. However, I found Indonesian rappers, producers and music professionals to be more open than their research participants. This could be partly because I spoke to one of Indonesia's most prominent rappers, Iwa K, who subsequently introduced me to the Indonesian hip hop scene by posting a picture that I took and sharing it to his followers on social media.

While this research project was initially focused on Indonesian rappers, I felt it was important to include the experience of their fans and casual listeners as it would enable a well-rounded perspective of hip hop in Indonesia. I did not realise this at the time, but this was a particularly important step as it gave this project important added perspectives. These added perspectives allowed for an interrogation of the "musical affect" (Huron 2015) of Indonesian hip hop. I found that the interests and arguments of rappers did not always resonate with their fans. I also encountered a range of inconsistencies in the rappers' social and political views. For instance, Chapter 7 shows that even though Jogja Hip Hop Foundation was popular and beloved by Jogjakartans (Riyanto 2017), many of their fans were dissatisfied with their macho politics.

I originally developed a list of general questions and prompts to be used during the interviews (see Appendix B), but I soon realised that I began to divert from them. They worked well to start a conversation, but I found that reacting to the participants' responses was more effective in fostering a deep conversation. I noticed that beginning my interviews by asking participants about their views of Indonesian hip hop and the ways they interpret hip hop were most effective. I would then follow up with a series of questions about their career history, their upbringing and how hip hop fit into their life.

All of the interviews were conducted in person. The location and time of interviews varied, as I endeavoured to make it easier for participants by choosing flexible interview times that worked around their schedules. For instance, there were times when I had to make a three-hour train trip to Bandung to talk to one participant in the morning, then another three-hour trip back to Jakarta to interview another participant that evening. I conducted interviews in Starbucks, cafes, recording studios, rappers' residences, restaurants, the sidewalks of major roads and backstage at concerts. All interviews were recorded and transcribed. They were all conducted in Indonesia, though some interviewees did use some English words and

sentences. Interviews lasted approximately 30 minutes to one hour. The shortest interview was 15 minutes and the longest lasted just under 90 minutes. I entered transcripts into nVivo software and coded them for thematic content, identifying several points of commonality in responses which informed the structure of my chapters and arguments.

### **Lyric analysis**

To supplement the empirical data from interviews and participant observation, I also performed a lyrical analysis of Indonesian hip hop songs. In this research, songs were treated as texts. Stam et al (1992) explain that the roots of textual analysis can be found in “biblical exegesis, in hermeneutics and philology, in the French pedagogical method of close reading (*explication de texte*) and in New-Critical ‘immanent’ analysis” (Stam, Burgoyne & Flitterman-Lewis 1992, p. 53). The literary bent of these methods assists in breaking down the narratives of the songs in my sample, while enabling a deeper examination of the components of each song, including its lyrics and references.

McKee (2001, p. 140) warns researchers against using textual analysis to reach a “correct” interpretation, noting that there are “many ways in which the same ‘truth’ can be accurately described” (ibid. p. 142). By virtue of my dual insider/outsider status (insider as an Indonesian who grew up in the country, outsider as a fan of the culture as opposed to a performer, rapper or producer), I was able to reach interpretations that hip hop and popular music scholars or other partisan audiences may overlook. As the basis for qualitative textual analysis is the text itself, the research will continually return to the songs and interview transcripts in the sample to anchor my analysis. Lewis (2008, p. 32) states such studies should treat texts as cultural documents, so I believe that the songs need to be the starting point of any analysis (for instance, Chapters 6, 7 and 8 of the present thesis). This makes textual analysis the most likely method to respect both the intended and unintended meanings of a text, as it always keeps the point of origin within sight. I wish to emphasise that the primary focus of this thesis is the songs themselves as cultural documents, and with textual analysis as my tool, I will always return to these documents in order to remain faithful to the songs that inspired this research.

It would be misleading to suggest that all meanings derived through my textual analysis are “correct”. I agree with Bertrand and Hughes (2017, p. 226), who argue that meaning arises “out of the interaction between a creative artist and an active reader”, and recognise that

audiences, including this author, produce individual meanings from individual texts. My approach is intuitive and interpretive, as I look beyond intentionalism towards meanings that the text hides even from its authors. As Bordwell (2007, p. 22) boldly suggests “...we want to know their secrets, especially those they don’t know they know”. Such an approach requires a degree of intuition and as McKee (ibid, p. 138) indicates, an intuitive approach is a standard form of textual analysis.

I am not the only person interpreting songs in this thesis. My research participants, including the rappers who wrote the songs in question and the fans who listen to them, also provide readings.<sup>3</sup> This is especially important as this thesis shows that fan interpretation can differ from the composer’s intention. For instance, in Chapter 7, I show that some Javanese rappers try to reinforce certain perceptions of Javanese male masculinity, perceptions not necessarily shared by their fans. Similarly, Chapter 5 shows that song lyrics can be interpreted differently depending on the background of the listener. This difference in perception speaks to the core of peer politics in the Indonesian hip hop scene. Hip hop and rap can be understood differently depending on the socioeconomic and sociopolitical backgrounds of the listeners.

### **Summary of methodology**

As articulated in this chapter, the methodology of this thesis combines participant observation, interviews and lyrical analysis. These methods allowed for the study of Indonesian rappers as political brokers who mediated the sociopolitical issues of their communities. Using a combination of these techniques allowed me to gather information and analyse the data through the perspectives of both the rappers and their fans to form a holistic understanding of Indonesian hip hop. Rather than a one-way road, I regard rap song and performances as two-way communications, where meanings are created and negotiated between differing parties.

As described, my interview sample was broad (due to the unintentional snowball method) and I spoke with people from different backgrounds and roles in the Indonesian hip hop scene. While I do not claim to be able to define all aspects of Indonesian hip hop, I was able to

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<sup>3</sup> Chapter 5 analysed ‘*Semiotika Rajatega*’ (Homicide 2002), ‘*Dobrak*’ (XCalibour 2004), ‘*Young Wack*’ (Xaqhala 2016) and ‘*Melempem*’ (Xaqhala 2018). Chapter 6 analysed ‘*Puritan*’ (Homicide 2002) and ‘*Puritan – Fuck Homicide*’ (Thufail al-Ghifari 2004). Chapter 7 analysed ‘*Jogja Istimewa*’ (Jogja Hip Hop Foundation 2010) and ‘*Jogja Ora Didol*’ (Jogja Hip Hop Foundation 2014). Chapter 8 analysed ‘*Rompes*’ (Mukarakat 2018).



identify key patterns of politics over the three years I conducted my research. My fieldwork comprised talking to people who wanted to speak to me, whether they had significant social and political capital and were influential in the Indonesian hip hop scene or not. This fieldwork enabled me to identify and map Indonesian hip hop's sociopolitical ecosystem, and observe how research participants conducted their politics, including their techniques for disseminating political messages.

Having described my methodology and methods, I will now put these approaches in practice in the following five chapters, each of which examines a specific example of hip hop politics. I will begin with my historical analysis of this emerging field, where I argue that the "outlaw" notion of Indonesian hip hop (Bodden 2005) should be revisited as the scene has become more complex since the late 1990s.

## Chapter 4 From outlaws to millennials

In the middle and late 1990s, rap music and hip hop culture became a popular vehicle of protest for Indonesian youth. Fans and performers viewed rap as the music of “outlaws” (Bodden 2005). These were people who refused to conform to the mainstream discourses in big cities around Indonesia, such as Jakarta, Bandung and Surabaya. Hip hop became a platform for young people to express their political views, be it the issue of freedom (Iwa K 1994), homelessness (XCrew 1997), financial strains (Black Skin 1995) or drugs (Black Skin 1997). As a result, in the late 1990s, BJ Habibie<sup>1</sup> declared hip hop and rap to be a demoralising and demeaning art forms detrimental to the mindset of young Indonesians (Bodden 2005). The moral panic around hip hop stimulated the growth of “underground” youth culture, of which Indonesian hip hop was initially a part. Indonesian hip hop culture began to appear on the street corners of Jakarta, Bandung and Surabaya. Its participants (rappers, graffiti bombers, break-dancers, DJs and their fans) saw it as a space that countered government-controlled popular culture.

Since then, academic research on Indonesian hip hop has grown steadily. Take, for instance, Varela's (2014) investigation into the use of rap and hip hop as a tool by Javanese puppeteers to encourage young people to study *wayang*<sup>2</sup>. For his part, Nasir (2015, 2018, 2020) has documented the ways Indonesian Muslim youth use hip hop to negotiate their identities, especially in the aftermath of the September 11 terrorist attacks in the United States. Similarly, Golpushnezhad (2017) compares the understandings of hip hop among Muslim rappers in Indonesia, Tunisia and the United States, finding that although the sociocultural contexts of these three countries differed, young people in each of these countries used their music to push the boundaries of what is considered acceptable.

Riyanto (2016) wrote a PhD thesis on the “itinerant celebrity” status of Juki, the leader of the Jogja Hip Hop Foundation. He found that aside from his status as a well-known rapper, Juki was active in numerous organisations across Jogjakarta, allowing him to bridge various communities and bring their protests together. Riyanto's findings reinforce the notion of

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<sup>1</sup> B.J. Habibie was the Minister of Technology of Indonesia (1978-1998) and the third president of the country (1998 - 1999).

<sup>2</sup> *Wayang* is the Indonesian leather puppets show. See Varela (2014) for more information.

“protest brokers” in Indonesian hip hop as well-connected individuals (Bräuchler 2019, 2021; Bräuchler, Knodel & Rösenthaller 2021).

Indonesian hip hop is experiencing drastic changes. A similar theme appears in various rap scenes worldwide—most are comprised of young people who bend the rules and change supposedly rigid codes. Seniority has always played a significant role in the contestation of authenticity, be it in the US (Grazian 2005), Australia (Mitchell 2007), Tunisia (Gabsi 2019) or the Czech Republic (Oravcová & Slačálek 2019). This is even more prevalent in hip hop subcultures in Asian countries, where patriarchal societies see a clear divide between young and old. In China, for instance, younger rappers release diss-tracks to criticise the role of their elders and their heavy-handed involvement in the growth of the subculture (Tang 2019). Similarly, Kim and Sung (2019) examine how Korean rappers use their music as a hopeful way to remake their future amid the economic and identity crises young people in the country currently face. Closer to Indonesia, young Singaporean and Malaysian rappers use their songs to reinvent, reintroduce and reinvigorate their religious beliefs amid what they regard as stagnant and strict Islamic codes (Nasir 2020).

As we can see, Indonesian hip hop has grown to be more than its perceived image as the outlaw genre from the 1990s. It is much more complex than that. To help contextualise these changes, I will build on existing studies and trace four different eras of Indonesian hip hop. I will start with 1) imagining the underground (the late 1980s and 1990s), 2) stagnation and growth (2000s), 3) a communal turn (2010 to 2016), and lastly, 4) millennials norms (from 2016 onwards).

This chapter takes a “big picture” approach to Indonesian hip hop, connecting the existing scholarly work on the subject that I reviewed in Chapters 1 and 2. To aid in this process, I will be using the concept of DIY (Baulch 2002b; Martin-Iverson 2012) as opposed to more commonly used mainstream/underground dichotomy favoured by researchers of Indonesian hip hop. This chapter will show that this duality is not useful. Although conflicts exist within the Indonesian hip hop scene, they are rarely about conflicting understandings of mainstream or underground (for instance, Chapter 5). Instead, this thesis shows that Indonesian rappers tend to focus on the larger sociopolitical issues of their communities, rather than differing interpretations of authenticity (for instance, Chapters 6, 7 and 8).

To investigate Indonesian hip hop's complex transition from outlaw subculture to its present millennial era, let us look back to its underground era, from the late 1980s to the end of the 1990s.

### Imagining the underground

Bodden (2005) contends that Indonesian rappers of the 1990s called themselves outlaws. At the time of his writing, Bodden was correct because rappers explicitly used their music to defy Soeharto's authoritarian regime. However, since then, the self-identification of Indonesian rappers has become more complex. As such, I suggest designating the period between the late 1980s to the late 1990s as the first phase of Indonesian hip hop. During this period, several major events in Jakarta and other major Indonesian cities paved the way for hip hop to become part of Indonesian popular culture. Rappers and rap groups such as Iwa K, Sindikat 31, *Pesta Rap*, Boyz Got No Brain, Yacko, Blakumuh and Blake were the first producers of rap performed in the Indonesian language (see Appendix D for more information about these rappers and groups). While other rappers covered songs by US rappers or copied their style<sup>3</sup>, these rappers were fundamental in establishing a unique style of Indonesian hip hop.

Directed by Maman Firmansyah, *Gejolak Kawula Muda* (1985) was the first movie to capture the wave of hip hop hitting Indonesia at the time. The film beautifully captured the sociopolitical conditions of Indonesian society, following a group of breakdancers who were considered outlaws and therefore targeted by the police. Ironically, these breakdancers appropriated US hip hop values to fit Indonesian social norms. Hip hop in general was portrayed in the film as a subculture for outlaws, hence its negative perception among the mainstream media. At the time of the film's release, the spread of hip hop culture in Indonesia had been hindered by the fact that few Indonesians spoke English. This movie was an early piece of culture that resulted in a small explosion of interest in hip hop among young people across Indonesia.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Doyz, interview, 23 March 2019.

<sup>4</sup> The original language from the interview is as follows: *Film itu itu film paling ampuh di indonesia, Will. Itu yang ngebuat kita semua tertarik buat belajar hip hop* (Doyz, interview, 23 March 2019).

<sup>5</sup> The original language from the interview is as follows: *Ini film yang ngebuat anak anak bandung nge rap dan nge dengerin musik hip hop* (Ucok, interview, 20 March 2019).

This film drove the creation of alternative spaces (Forman 2002) in schoolyards and road pavements in major cities throughout Indonesia. After that came basketball, graffiti bombers and, lastly, rappers and DJs. Unlike in the Bronx, DJing was the last feature of hip hop to be popularised in Indonesia. Pampam (or Lacosmusixx), one of Indonesia's most popular beatmakers and a founder of Hellhouse, told me that DJ and beat-making equipment were too expensive for many youths at the time.<sup>6</sup> From the late 1990s to early 2000s, only two groups in Indonesia had a professional-grade music production studio: Sony Music Indonesia and Indra Lesmana.<sup>7</sup> It took more than twenty years, until the early 2010s, for music production equipment and software to become affordable and widely available.<sup>8</sup>

Over approximately twelve years, from the late 1980s to the late 1990s, several rap groups and individual rappers gained prominence in Indonesia (Bodden 2005). These rappers were mainly from Jakarta and Surabaya, and included Black Skin, Blake, Blakumuh, Boyz Got No Brain, G-Tribe, Iwa Kusuma, Probz, XCalibour and Yacko. These artists are now famous and still active in the scene. Although a sense of community and support emerged among these rappers and their friends, there were still controversies and battles, similar to the various controversies observed among hip hop groups from different parts of the United States. Just as there are rivalries between east and west coast hip hop artists in the US, there also exist rivalries between rappers in Indonesia, for instance those from Surabaya and Bandung. Most rappers in Surabaya belong to a more conservative region and come from more affluent backgrounds, while Bandung rappers are associated with working-class and punk-leaning philosophies. Their respective local cultures and traditions also reinforce these rivalries (see Chapters 5, 7 and 8).

While Bandung and Surabaya had the first monumental rivalries in Indonesian hip hop (see Chapter 5), Jakarta was the epicentre of this subculture's early growth. Alongside its status as Indonesia's capital city, Jakarta is also the nation's centre for art, business, manufacturing and distribution. This centrist sentiment is also reflected in hip hop (see Chapter 8). Rappers from Jakarta claimed to be the real hip hop enthusiasts, mocking affluent rappers from other

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<sup>6</sup> The original language from the interview is as follows: *Waktu itu kita ga bisa buat beli alat alat canggih kaya gitu mas. Ga ada yang punya duit* (interview, 16 April 2019).

<sup>7</sup> The original language from the interview is as follows: *Zaman itu, yang punya alat studio cuman dua, Sony Indonesia sama Indra Lesmana* (Gerry, interview, 16 April 2019).

<sup>8</sup> The original language from the interview is as follows: *Anak anak mulai bisa beli alat alat itu pas uda awal awal 2010an* (Anto, interview, 14 April 2019).

parts of the country. They felt no such “slums” or “ghetto areas” existed in Indonesia’s other cities. Erik, of the rap duo Blakumuh, explained:

At the time, we’re the only ones who had hit the street, you know. Breakdancing started the whole thing, and no one else in Indonesia knew about this but those who grew up in Jakarta.<sup>9</sup>

Alongside the growth of breakdancing in Jakarta in the late 1980s and early 1990s, Iwa Kusuma was the first rapper to release a solo rap album in Indonesia. Before releasing his first album, *Kuingin Kembali* (I Want To Go Back), Iwa was invited to sing in Guest Band’s album *Tak’kan* (1990). Iwa’s rap part in the song “It’s gonna get better (ft. Iwa K)” (Guest Band 1990) was a mainstream hit. This led to a contract offer from Guest Band, who then transitioned into Guest Music, a music production house and label that focused on producing Iwa and other Indonesian rappers.<sup>10</sup>

Apart from Iwa, whose role in the growth of Indonesian hip hop has been thoroughly recorded by Bodden (2005), other young people were active in creating hip hop communities and growing their local scenes. Erik and Adoy, who go by their rap names MR EP (Extreme Poetz) and Doyz da Noise, were among the few who won most of the rap competitions in Jakarta at the time. They told me that:

in the late 1980s and early 1990s, there were plenty of rap competitions all around Jakarta. It was like rap battles just popping here and there all around the street corners of Jakarta. Most of the kids who participated, we included, were so young. We were rapping songs by Onyx, Naughty by Nature, Public Enemy without even understanding their lyrics.<sup>11</sup>

Concerning the widely believed notion that the Indonesian rap scene was kickstarted by the release of Iwa’s first album, *Kuingin Kembali*, in 1993, as argued by Bodden (2005), Erik says:

I will have to disagree with that statement. I guess it depends on what people mean by the rap scene. We have been rapping since the late 1980s. Like we were still in

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<sup>9</sup> The original language from the interview is as follows: Waktu itu, kita doang yang ada di jalanan. Breakdancing sih yang ngemulai, tapi waktu itu anak anak Jakarta doang yang tau dan ngelakuin. Anak anak daerah lain belum ada yang kaya kita zaman itu (Erik, interview, 31 January 2019).

<sup>10</sup> Macan, interview, 22 March 2019.

<sup>11</sup> The original language from the interview is as follows: Pas waktu itu, di akhir 1980an dan awal 1990an, banyak banget kompetisi rap di Jakarta, Will. Anak anak seolah nge-battle di semua sudut jalanan Jakarta. Anak anak pas waktu itu, termasuk kita berdua, masih muda banget. Dulu kita nge rap lagu lagu Onyx, Naughty by Nature, Public Enemy, tapi ga ada yang ngerti kita ngerap itu arti nya apa (Erik & Doyz, interview, 23 March 2019).

high school, and we were rapping on street corners and in our schools. There were many competitions, too.<sup>12</sup>

While Iwa was the first to release a hip hop album in Indonesia, he was not the first rapper in Indonesia. When I talked to Iwa, he said:

I wasn't the first rapper man. I don't think I was even the tenth. There were so many kids rapping everywhere in Jakarta. I was lucky because I was scouted by Guest Music.<sup>13</sup>

As previously mentioned, music production equipment was simply unaffordable for many people at the time. Personal computers, internet connections, drum machines and samplers were not widely spread. Not even Guest Music, who produced Iwa K and *Pesta Rap*, owned a sampler. In addition, there was a severe lack of rap references for young people. Rap CDs were not allowed to be distributed officially in Indonesia because Soeharto's New Order regime was adamant about removing "outside influences" from popular culture (Heryanto 2018b). Similarly, music circulation was tightly controlled by the state (Frederick 1982; Baulch 2002a). The only way to get hip hop tracks was to ask those who were living overseas to bring them to Indonesia:

Bringing CDs and cassettes was difficult. No official stores had any stock and even if they did, they only stocked mainstream artists like LL Cool J and stuff, you know. We had to ask our friends to secretly bring them in, smuggle them illegally.<sup>14</sup>

Upon receiving CDs and tapes from their friends, the practice was to burn the tracks and give bootlegged versions of songs to others directly. The DIY spirit of Indonesian musicians, where they promote self-reliance and self-sufficient ecosystem, of rappers and hip hop enthusiasts was similar to that of Indonesian punk enthusiasts in the 1990s and early 2000s (Saefullah 2017; Baulch 2002b; Wallach & Clinton 2013). Jakartan rappers often congregated in various urban spaces to exchange their collections and have in-depth

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<sup>12</sup> The original language from the interview is as follows: Gue ga setuju sama pernyataan itu. Mungkin beda interpretasi soal skena rap ya. Kita uda ngerap dari akhir 1980an. Dulu kita dari SMA dan kita uda ngerap di sekolah dan sudut sudut jalan. Kompetisi pas zaman itu juga uda banyak kok (Doyz, interview, 23 March 2019).

<sup>13</sup> The original language from the interview is as follows: Wah gue bukan rapper pertama lho di Indonesia. Bukan juga rapper ke sepuluh. Waktu itu anak anak ngerap uda banyak banget. Gue beruntung aja karena waktu itu gue di scout sama Guest Music (Iwa, interview, 18 March 2019).

<sup>14</sup> The original language from the interview is as follows: Ngebawa CD dan kaset itu ribet banget. Toko toko ga ada yang punya barang, dan walaupun ada, mereka ada nya artis artis mainstream semacam LL Cool J dan teman temannya. Kita dulu mesti nanyain temen temen uda ngemasukin barang barangnya secara illegal dulu (Ucok, interview, 20 March 2019).

discussions about various artists and tracks while at the same time exchanging their illegally obtained songs:

I think that was why it was so fun to be a rapper at the time. Like we are not singing or rapping about political stuff, but our actions, pirating CDs, spreading them around and meeting in large groups to exchange and discuss songs that we have listened to at the time was really fun. We were like outlaws in our teenage years.<sup>15</sup>

This activity, exchanging information and knowledge through a direct physical transaction of physical artefacts, enabled Indonesian hip hop enthusiasts to communicate and build a sense of community. Various groups of enthusiasts started to form throughout Jakarta. While many Jakartan hip hop groups prided themselves on being the city's kings (taking on the boastful authenticity spirit of hip hop and rappers, for instance, Armstrong 2004; Gabsi 2019), Benhil City Rockers (BCR) was the only organised and structured hip hop community at the time.

BCR, as its name might suggest, is based in the Bendungan Hilir area of Central Jakarta. John Parapat<sup>16</sup>, one of the leaders of the group, said:

This is how we identified ourselves—a group of friends who liked to hang out in Bendungan Hilir, Jakarta. We came from various backgrounds, from rappers, DJs, party and event organisers, graphic designers, photographers, club-goers, band players, producers, musicians, sound engineers, etc. Our hangout location in Bendungan Hilir was famous for being one of the only hangout sites for rap enthusiasts since the boom of rap, that is since 1995. Even though most of us were rap enthusiasts, BCR was cross-label and cross-genre.<sup>17</sup>

Some of the most notable members of this group (who became important figures in the scene) include Black Skin, Blakumuh, Boyz Got No Brain, Guest Music, Iwa Kusuma, Masaru Riupassa, Neo and Sweet Martabak. In addition to the various communities appearing

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<sup>15</sup> The original language from the interview is as follows: Dulu gue seru ngerap gara gara itu sih. Dulu kita ga ngerap soal politik, tapi tingkah kita, kaya ngebajak CD lah, kopi kopi illegal, terus di sebar sebarin ke teman teman, ngumpul buat tukaran dan diskusi di group gede itu asik banget. Dulu kaya penjahat banget (Udet, interview, 31 January 2019).

<sup>16</sup> Interview, 9 August 2019.

<sup>17</sup> The original language from the interview is as follows: Ini gimana kita menganggap diri kita sendiri—teman teman yang demen ngumpul di Bendungan Hilir, Jakarta. Kita datang dari bermacam sudut belakang, dari rapper, DJ, promotor pesta dan acara, pembuat grafis, tukang foto, peserta pesta, anak band, produser, musisi, sound engineer dan lain lain. Kita ngumpul di Bendungan Hilir yang sejati nya adalah pusat perkembangan rap sejak 1995. Walaupun kita semua penggemar rap, BCR itu menerima semua orang dari label dan genre apapun.



throughout Indonesia, bootlegged CDs and tapes started to be distributed to various communities outside of Jakarta. Ucok said:

We had never met, but we started writing letters and sending facsimiles of our lyrics to fellow rappers from other cities. Soon enough, these interactions escalated to sending bootlegged CDs and tapes. Most of us at the time were really broke, so when we tried to send our own songs, they were recorded by us singing onto the microphones of our tape players. The quality was terrible, but it was a start.<sup>18</sup>

The 1990s, apart from being the era of Iwa K, was also known as the era of *Pesta Rap*. During Iwa K's height in the mid-1990s, Masaru Riupassa, Iwa K's manager and producer, felt that Iwa was getting too comfortable on the throne of Indonesian hip hop. At the time, no one was able to challenge his position or even dared to attempt to do so. Macan said:

At the time, Iwa was the king of the scene. He was at the top of the food chain. He was the prime predator of hip hop in Indonesia. No one dared to challenge him. We thought that if he didn't have any challenges and competitors, his skills and growth would stagnate, so we decided to hold this rap competition. We hoped Iwa could pass on his knowledge and baton.<sup>19</sup>

Guest Music's launched a music competition that attracted many rappers from around Indonesia. More than 200 tapes were submitted. Although most groups and rappers were from Jakarta, some lived in Surabaya, Malang, Bandung and Jogjakarta. This talent search worked, and Guest Music discovered promising young rappers from various corners the archipelago.<sup>20</sup>

The initial plan was to select ten songs from ten different artists, record them and release them as compilation CDs. However, due to the surplus of talent and the high quality of the songs, Guest Music chose instead to release three compilation albums: *Pesta Rap 1* (1995), *Pesta Rap 2* (1996) and *Pesta Rap 3* (1997). These three rap compilation albums significantly boosted the interest of youth throughout Indonesia. Anto GNTZ, a member of Jogja Hip Hop

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<sup>18</sup> The original language from the interview is as follows: Kita ga pernah ketemu, tapi dulu udah sering nulis surat atau ngirim fax lirik lirik kita ke temen temen di kota lain. Ga lama kemudian, kita mulai ngirim kaset dan CD bajakan. Banyak dari kita pas itu itu bokek banget, jadi pas kita ngirim, kualitas nya jelek karena kita ngerekam dari microphone pemutar tape itu. Kualitas nya belakang banget, tapi itu dimana kita mulai berinteraksi (Ucok, interview, 20 March 2019).

<sup>19</sup> The original language from the interview is as follows: Waktu itu, Iwa itu rajanya. Dia itu yang ada di atas semuanya. Iwa waktu itu adalah singa yang berdiri di atas semua rapper Indonesia. Ga ada yang berani nantangin. Pas itu kita mikir, kalo ga ada yang nantangin, ntar dia ga berkembang, jadi ya uda kita buat kompetisi rap buat nyariin penantang baru si Iwa. Pas itu kita berharap akan nada rapper muda yang bisa ngelanjutin dan menemanin si Iwa (Macan, interview, 22 March 2019).

<sup>20</sup> Macan, interview, 22 March 2019.

Foundation and G-Tribe, and one of the participants of the first *Pesta Rap* from Jogjakarta, says:

I'd been producing songs since the 1990s, but we never had competitions like those Jakarta kids. Our communities were small because everyone thought that rap music was music for outlaws, for thugs. *Pesta Rap* revolutionised this perception.<sup>21</sup>

Similarly, Pandji Pragiwaksono states that the *Pesta Rap* series was perhaps even more influential than Iwa's albums:

They were so creative, man. They were game changers. You thought Indonesian rappers would merely be copying songs from the US or something during that time, but that was not the case. Gerry and Ruli were rapping about mosquitoes but implicitly saying how shitty their living conditions were. Black Skin was rapping about materialism in Jakarta and more. It was insanely inspiring.<sup>22</sup>

Guest Music produced and released the *Pesta Rap* series. While they were the most prominent label to produce and release hip hop artists and tracks, they were also pioneers of DIY and community-based culture (similar to Indonesian punk, see Baulch 2002b, Saefullah 2017). Before the ubiquity of the internet, Guest Music's basecamp in West Jakarta was the hub of all hip hop in Jakarta.<sup>23</sup>

While some rappers did get recording contracts from either Guest Music, Melody Music or Sony, many were not so fortunate.<sup>24</sup> From the mid-1990s to early 2000s, rappers struggled to produce their music and often distributed it with no expectation that it would make money. Indonesian rap was divided by geography: there was the Jakartan scene and then there was everyone else. Jakartan rappers benefitted from the financial support of family and friends, as well as their close proximity to affluent record labels. Jakarta was and still is the centre of

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<sup>21</sup> The original language from the interview is as follows: Aku uda buat music dari tahun 1990an mas, tapi kita ga pernah ada kompetisi kompetisi kaya di Jakarta. Komunitas kita kecil banget karena anak anak nganggapin rap itu music nya penjahat. Nah Pesta Rap itu yang ngubah semuanya (Anto, interview, 14 April 2019).

<sup>22</sup> The original language from the interview is as follows: Gilak mereka kreatif banget man. Mereka yang ngerubah cara main kita waktu itu. Pas zaman nya, kita mikir rapper indonesia itu cuman nyontohin doang dari rapper luar, tapi mereka ngebuktiin kalo kita salah. Gerry sama Ruli pas itu ngerap soal nyamuk, tapi diem diem bilang soal gimana jelek nye hidup mereka dulu. Black Skin waktu itu uda ngerap soal gimana orang Jakarta demen banyak sama duit dan lain lain nya yang berbau materialisme. Gile pas gue denger gue langsung ter-inspirasi dong (Pandji, interview, 15 March 2019).

<sup>23</sup> Iwa K, interview, 18 March 2019.

<sup>24</sup> Gerry, interview, 16 April 2019.

creative industries in Indonesia. Pioneer rappers like Iwa K, Boyz Got No Brain, Blakumuh, Blake, Sweet Martabak and Neo benefitted from this. While these artists could earn living wages from their music, rappers from other major cities like Bandung and Surabaya began hosting underground gigs and parties. They could finally catch up to Jakarta rappers' growth in the early 2000s and gain national audiences.

### Stagnation and growth

Following the rapid expansion of the scene in the late 1990s (Bodden 2005), the future looked bright for Indonesian rappers. *Pesta Rap* compilation albums were massive hits that grabbed attention of mainstream popular culture. It was hoped that rappers would finally take pride of place at the centre of Indonesian popular culture. However, instead of growing, they stagnated. Gerry said:

We thought we'd finally be able to grow. At the time, many of us helped bring about the fall of the New Order regime. We were high-school kids and university students. We thought we'd be able to start rapping more political topics. The opposite happened. We suddenly lost interest. Instead of embracing the newly acquired freedom, we fell into the mainstream mindset. Like, in the *Pesta Rap*, we were singing about political stuff, but indirectly. We thought we'd do some more confrontational songs, like Public Enemy or something. However, instead, we lost everything—no one rap about political or social issues. Instead, everyone in Jakarta tried to rap about topics that could sell well in the mainstream market.<sup>25</sup>

The transition of the Jakarta hip hop scene from a community-based, independent subculture into a mainstream genre was a problem that mimicked that of the Indonesian punk scene (Wallach 2014; Baulch 2002b; Martin-Iverson 2012). Like some members of the Indonesian punk scene, some rappers embraced and enjoyed the attention of the mainstream media, especially the opportunity it presented for making money from their music. However, many others decided that this new, profit-driven approach did not fit their vision of their music and lifestyle. Gerry said:

Don't get me wrong. I did love the money. I was a senior in high school, and I was wearing Doc Martens and Timberland shoes. The *Pesta Rap* crew were all

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<sup>25</sup> The original language from the interview is as follows: Pas itu kita mikir kalo kita bisa tambah gede. Waktu itu kita anak anak yang ngebantu numbangin Soeharto. Dulu kita masih bocah, masih di SMA dan beberapa baru mulai kuliah. Kita mikirnya pas itu bakalan bisa ngerap soal yang lebih politis gitu. Tapi faktanya ya engga. Banyak dari kita patah semangat dan malah ngikutin trend nya mainstream. Kaya di Pesta Rap, kita politis, tapi sembunyi sembunyi. Awalnya kita mikir bakalan bisa lebih berani frontal, kaya Public Enemy. Tapi faktanya engga kan, kita malah kehilangan semuanya—ga ada lagi yang ngerap soal isu politik dan sosial pas itu. Anak anak Jakarta malah ngerap yang buat bisa di jual di mainstream (Gerry, interview, 16 April 2019).

teenagers. We were touring Indonesia. We ate and did whatever we wanted. Man, girls were literally throwing themselves at us.<sup>26</sup>

This short stint of euphoria and freedom, where rappers could write whatever they wanted, ended abruptly following the commercialisation of hip hop in Indonesia in the early 2000s. Following the continuous success of *Pesta Rap*, some of the rappers were offered personal contract deals. It is important to note that many of those who participated in *Pesta Rap* were rap groups. These contract deals from either Guest Music, Sony Music or Musica Studios specified that they wanted “young male rappers who will be the next star”.<sup>27</sup> Some of the clauses in the contract further restricted the creative output of the artists. Gerry, who accepted the contract and had his first solo album *Xaqhala* released in 2004 by Guest Music, says:

It was a difficult situation. You could go the independent way, like those Bandung rappers, and not make any money, or accept the contract, get the money, and use it to fund your own projects. I didn’t regret my decision in 2004. I turned that money around and used it to build my businesses and made tons of connections in the music industry.<sup>28</sup>

This approach made sense for some rappers. Jakarta was experiencing an economic downturn following the financial crisis of the late 1990s (Yasih 2017), and jobs and opportunities were scarce in the city. At the time, many citizens were sceptical of their future following the Reform movement of 1998 (Pollock 2017). They did not know if there would be any financial, political and cultural stability in the future (Heryanto 2014). While independent punk bands could self-fund their albums and lifestyles (see Saefullah 2017; Baulch 2002b; Wallach & Clinton 2013), Indonesian rappers did not have the same community support. The self-sufficiency of the Indonesian punk movement did not resonate with Jakarta’s rappers.

These contracts dampened the passion of Indonesian rappers. Those who were not offered contracts felt discouraged, especially rappers involved in *Pesta Rap*.<sup>29</sup> Many decided to put rap and hip hop aside and instead pursued official tertiary education in search of a better

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<sup>26</sup> The original language from the interview is as follows: Jangan salah ye, duit mah gue juga suka. Gue pas itu kelas tiga SMA, makai Doc Martens dan Timberland. Anak anak pesta rap itu semua masih anak belasan. Kita keliling Indonesia. Makan apa aja. Lakuin apa aja. Man, cewek cewek itu nyerahin diri ke kita (Gerry, interview, 16 April 2019).

<sup>27</sup> Doyz, interview, 23 March 2019.

<sup>28</sup> The original language from the interview is as follows: Situasinya ribet pas itu. Lu bisa independent, kaya anak anak Bandung, tapi lo ga bakalan ada duit. Nah kalo lu terima kontrak nya, ambil duitnya dan pakai itu duit buat proyek lo sendiri kan bisa. Gue ga nyesal sama pilihan gue di taun 2004. Gue bisa pakai itu duit untuk ngebangun bisnis gue sendiri dan ngebuat koneksi di dunia musik (Gerry, interview, 16 April 2019).

<sup>29</sup> Doyz, interview, 23 March 2019.

future.<sup>30</sup> Only a select few rappers continued to have paid gigs and shows throughout the 2000s, notably NEO, 8Ball and Saykoji. Udet, a member of the rap supergroup NEO, says:

The problem is that we were left all by ourselves. Our friends were getting sick of not being able to perform. These rappers were starting their own families and needed to have proper jobs. NEO was the only ones that held hip hop in the mind of your everyday Indonesians.<sup>31</sup>

While rappers still released songs and albums, the content of their songs started to shift. Earlier works of Indonesian hip hop fought for freedom ('Bebas' – Iwa K 1993), against homelessness ('Kaum Kumuh' – Blakumuh 1995 in *Pesta Rap 1*) and acknowledged the issue of drug use among Indonesian youth ('Sakaw' – Black Skin 1997 in *Pesta Rap 3*). However, from the early 2000s, many Indonesian rappers focused on contesting authenticity and politics among their peers (see Chapter 5).

However, the malaise that descended upon the Jakarta rap scene did not affect young people from Bandung, Surabaya, and Jogjakarta. The Jakarta-centrist mindset started to shift; the capital was no longer the standard bearer of popular culture for the rest of the archipelago (Schefold 1998). This stagnation left room for growth of hip hop from beyond Jakarta. Rap enthusiasts in various cities gathered and convened, searching for their own identity.<sup>32</sup> During this time, two prominent hip hop scenes grew to eventually match the Jakarta hip hop scene: Bandung and Surabaya (see Chapters 6 and 7).

Community-based enterprises and independence are the core of DIY movements in Indonesia, including punk (Baulch 2002b) and hardcore (Wallach & Clinton 2013). While the Jakarta hip hop scene in the 2000s saw the disappearance of community-based gatherings, replaced instead by record labels and commercialism, Bandung and Surabaya rappers adopted an approach more consistent with the scene of the 1990s. In the case of Bandung rappers, the scene was primarily influenced by punk musicians and a community-focused mindset. The punk, hardcore and metalcore scenes of Bandung thrived in the 1990s and early 2000s. The city was the centre of alternative musical genres and subcultures of Indonesia (Saefullah

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<sup>30</sup> Udet, interview, 31 January 2019.

<sup>31</sup> The original language from the interview is as follows: Masalahnya itu kita di tinggalin sendiri. Temen temen yang lain pada nyari acara, tapi ga ada yang buat. Nah pas itu kan anak anak mulai berkeluarga dan butuh pemasukan yang tetap dan stabil kan. Pas itu tuh NEO doang yang bisa ngebuat anak anak inget kalo hip hop Indonesia itu masih hidup (Udet, interview, 31 January 2019).

<sup>32</sup> Ucok, interview, 20 March 2019.

2017). Bandung rappers grew under their umbrella and adopted different attitudes to those of Jakarta rappers. Krowbar said:

We realised that we weren't privileged. While they had the latest CDs and tapes, we needed to wait for the bootlegged version, often one or two years later. Also, the hip hop scene at the time was tiny. We only had a couple of groups, and we couldn't survive by ourselves. That's why we grew with hardcore and punk scenesters instead of distancing ourselves from them like those Jakarta kids.<sup>33</sup>

For Bandung rappers, distancing themselves and creating separate communities of hip hop enthusiasts was not an option. They did not have the number of enthusiasts that Jakarta had, or the financial and overseas connections necessary to afford the latest hip hop tapes and CDs.<sup>34</sup> When Jakarta rappers entered mainstream culture, Bandung rappers were in their scene's foundational period. However, the foundational cores of the culture were significantly different. Jakarta rappers built their communities under the umbrella of Iwa Kusuma, *Pesta Rap* and Guest Music. In contrast, Bandung rappers relied on punk and hardcore communities to support them. Ucok said:

The first performance that Homicide had was in a punk show. Everyone else was playing in bands, and Homicide was the only one with a DJ deck. Even our first song was a collaboration with Puppen.<sup>35</sup>

The growth of the hip hop scene in Bandung was parallel with the growth of Homicide (see Chapter 6). It was the most prominent rap group in Bandung, and perhaps Indonesia, from their formation in 1994 until their disbandment in 2007. Even post-mortem, Homicide remains the benchmark of independent hip hop in Indonesia. Today, the band is often used as a reference whenever independent hip hop is being discussed.<sup>36</sup> Even though Homicide had

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<sup>33</sup> The original language from the interview is as follows: Waktu itu kita sadar kalo kita bukan orang mampu. Anak anak yang lain punya CD dan tape terbaru, nah kita di sini mesti nungguin versi bajakan, biasanya keluar telat satu dua tahun. Dan lagi, hip hop di Bandung pas itu kecil banget. Cuman ada beberapa group doang dan kita ga sanggup hidup dari sana. Makanya anak hip hop itu gedanya sama anak hardcore dan punk, ga kaya anak Jakarta yang bisa buat scene mereka sendiri (Krowbar, interview, 7 August 2019).

<sup>34</sup> Doyz, interview, 23 March 2019.

<sup>35</sup> The original language from the interview is as follows: Homicide itu pertama kali manggung di acara punk. Anak anak lain semua pada main band, sedangkan Homicide pakai alat DJ gitu. Lagu pertama kita aja itu kolaborasi sama Puppen (Ucok, interview, 20 March 2019). Puppen was a Bandung-based underground giant. They were the seminal band of upmost importance in Bandung who solidify the underground scene in the region and across the country. The band portrayed themselves as a combination of hardcore, punk and metal.

<sup>36</sup> Pandji, interview, 15 March 2019; Doyz, interview, 23 March 2019; Iwa, interview, 18 March 2019.

been active in Bandung since 1994<sup>37</sup>, it did not record and release their albums until 2002. Instead, its first recorded performance was when a Bandung underground band featured them in its 1998 hit track ‘United Fist’ (Puppen 1998).

Similarly, hip hop and rap music experienced an exponential growth in Surabaya in the 2000s. Following an eventful national gathering event initiated by Bandung rappers in July 2000 in Bandung (see Chapter 5), a group of Surabaya rappers released the city’s first hip hop album. This kickstarted the DIY movement both in Surabaya and the wider East Java region. The movement’s leader was a young rapper named Wiesa Tamin, also known as Iprobz, who was then a Surabaya high school student. Before attending the hip hop gathering in Bandung, Wiesa and his friends had started performing and practising rap together. The mid-to-late 1990s saw a significant wave of hip hop “fever” (Rose 2008) in Surabaya, albeit not as significant as the post-Bandung gathering. Wiesa said:

The mid-1990s was perhaps when we started to rap and learn about rap and hip hop. Some of our friends could get their hands on CDs and tapes of Wu-Tang Clan, Onyx, Notorious BIG and Tupac. We were all star-struck. We imitated their rapping methods, clothing styles, musical influences, and even their gangsta personalities.<sup>38</sup>

The *Pesta Rap* series was also affected. Although most *Pesta Rap* rappers were from Jakarta or West Java, some were Jogjakartans and Surabayans, for instance, the Pumpkin Hardcore Crew (Surabaya) and G-Tribe (Jogjakarta). These groups, who flew to Jakarta to record their songs, brought back a DIY work ethic and community-based events to each of their home cities. Yacko<sup>39</sup>, a member of the Pumpkin Hardcore Crew, put it this way:

*Pesta Rap* was a huge opportunity that we, the non-Jakartan rappers, used to the full. The few days we spent in Jakarta while recording our tracks were not wasted. We travelled to various communities to bring some knowledge back to Surabaya.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Ucok, interview, 20 March 2019.

<sup>38</sup> The original language from the interview is as follows: Pertengahan tahun 1990an itu dimana kita mulai ngerap dan belajar soal rap dan hip hop. Temen temen ada beberapa yang bisa dapetin kasetnya Wu-tang, Onyx, Notorious BIG dan Tupac. Dan kita kecantol banget mas. Kita niru semua cara rap mereka, dandanannya, style musiknya, dan sampai gangsta nya gitu (Wiesa, interview, 4 February 2019).

<sup>39</sup> Interview, 20 February 2019.

<sup>40</sup> The original language from the interview is as follows: Pesta Rap itu kesempatan mumpuni untuk rapper dari luar Jakarta, dan kita pakai itu. Beberapa hari di Jakarta itu kita pakai bener bener. Kita juga ketemu temen temen dari komunitas di sana yang ilmunya kita bawa balik ke Surabaya.

Similarly, Anto Gantaz<sup>41</sup>, a member of G-Tribe of Jogjakarta, says:

At the time of *Pesta Rap*, there wasn't any scene in Jogja. We were overwhelmed by the sense of community of Jakarta rappers. All of us tried to absorb how they did things back then, with the hope of building our local communities in our home cities. We wanted that kind of scene, too.<sup>42</sup>

Anto, Yacko and Wiesa were the catalysts of the robust growth of hip hop in East and Central Java. Post-*Pesta Rap*, Anto went back to Jogjakarta to start events and community gatherings. He then met his future music partner Marzuki Ismail, or Kill the DJ, a young artist whose vision of combining Javanese instruments, poems and cultures with hip hop created the famous Jogja Hip Hop Foundation (Riyanto 2017, see also Chapter 7). Anto shared his production skills with the youth of Jogjakarta. Some of the youth who were mentored by Anto, such as Balance (JHF), Pampam (Lacosmusixx & Hellhouse) and Alex (Donnero of DPMB & Hellhouse), are now considered pillars of the Jogjakartan hip hop scene.

Recalling the 2000s era of Indonesian hip hop, Alex reminisces:

That era saw the decline of Jakarta hip hop, and I did feel sad for them. In saying that, I was happy we could create our own music and culture and channels. In that vacuum, we were finally not patronised by Jakarta's glamorous lifestyle and instead stayed true to our own local cultures and communities.<sup>43</sup>

The 2000s era was one of the more influential Indonesian hip hop eras for non-Jakartan rappers, perhaps eclipsing the Iwa and *Pesta Rap* era. When Jakarta started to lose its grip on being the epicentre of cultural growth, distinct scenes and styles could grow in other areas. The lifting of media and information-sharing restrictions following the collapse of the New Order regime and the accompanying hope of Indonesian youth for greater political freedoms (Heryanto 2014) helped accelerate this trend. Indonesian pop culture was no longer

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<sup>41</sup> Interview, 14 April 2019.

<sup>42</sup> The original language from the interview is as follows: Pas jaman nya pesta rap, belum ada scene hip hop di Jogja. Kita itu kaget banget sama komunitas nya di Jakarta. Semua nya pada ngedalemin, gimana cara nya kita bisa ngebuat ini juga di Jogja. Kita mau juga punya skena dan komunitas seperti mereka.

<sup>43</sup> The original language from the interview is as follows: Pas tahun tahun segitu, skena Jakarta mulai merosot, dan aku sedih sih mas buat mereka. Tapi aku juga senang karena akhir nya kita bisa ngebuat musik, kultur dan channel kita sendiri. Pas ga ada skena di Jakarta, kita ga perlu lagi kecantol sama gaya beken mereka dan kita bisa ngebuat skena dan komunitas yang pas untuk kita sendiri di sini (Alex, interview, 16 April 2019).



centralised around Jakarta. It provided a space for regional youth, for instance those from Jogjakarta, Bandung and Surabaya, to express discontents in their own way.

Hip hop, however, is not unique in this context. Other musical styles like *dangdut*, rock, punk and hardcore have been used as a medium of sociopolitical protest since the 1970s (Frederick 1982; Dunbar-Hall 2013; Pioquinto 1998). Before the advent of hip hop in Bandung, Saefullah (2017) argues that Bandung's punk scene has provided space and tools for the "outlaws" of the region. The rearrangement of social hierarchy through popular culture products (as argued by Ardianto 2017) was also the main focus rappers from this era. The shifted focus from individual rappers to the communities around them saw an emphasis on the larger hip hop ecosystem outside of Jakarta.

### **A communal turn**

Varela (2014) argues that hip hop has been adopted as a tool for Indonesian leather puppeteers (*dalang*) in Solo and Jogjakarta to help raise the awareness of their performances (*wayang*) since the early 2010s. For these artists, the incorporation of hip hop modernises their shows and helps attract younger audiences. Similarly, Riyanto (2017) argues that popular Jogjakartan rappers, for instance Juki and Anto from the Jogja Hip Hop Foundation (also see Chapter 7), are celebrities who use their stature to build the city's hip hop ecosystem (Androutsopoulos 2009). Between 2010 and 2016, these hip hop ecosystems enabled a rise in community-based events and activities, including breakdancing classes for young female Muslims (Golpushnezhad 2017) and public rap-infused Islamic preaching (Nasir 2018).

I argue that if the 1990s was the seminal phase and the 2000s was the mainstream and independent growth phase of Indonesian hip hop scenes, the six years between 2010 to 2016 constituted an incubation period of independent and mainstream scenes. There were various uncertainties, mainly because older rappers started to become fatigued:

Most of us who were involved in *Pesta Rap* were growing older. Some owned businesses, some work in offices. Balance and Pampam had started to grow as producers, but most of the rappers were getting older. We did not have the same drive anymore.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> The original language from the interview is as follows: Pas itu anak anak Pesta Rap mulai tua. Beberapa punya bisnis, beberapa kerja kantor. Balance sama Pampam itu awalnya rappers juga. Mereka masih ngerap, tapi kaya nya uda lebih fokus jadi produser. Yang tua tua mah uda ga punya niat kaya mereka lagi (Erik, interview, 31 January 2019).

This period lacked rappers, both independent and mainstream. For instance, a prominent rap group of the previous era, NEO, started to perform less as rap and hip hop were no longer mainstream.<sup>45</sup> Derry, a member of NEO, says:

That's the issue with Indonesian TV channels, man. They did not look at us as people. We were products. Once people started to lose interest, they just threw us away like we're nothing.<sup>46</sup>

The lack of show opportunities was one of the driving motivations behind the scene's lack of talent. By the early 2020s, most of the *Pesta Rap* era rappers had turned 30 or older, decided that hip hop was not a stable occupation and begun looking for alternatives.<sup>47</sup> The few who decided to stay in the scene felt the need to shift both their musical style and hip hop ideology (see Chapter 5). Saykoji, one of the most prominent rappers in Indonesia, says:

I think it depends on how you approach the subject. Look, we need to be realistic. Some Indonesian rappers were too idealistic. They refused to accept that rap is a business. We need to earn money, especially now that most of us have wives and kids. Singing about the shady deals of the government, about injustice or corruption is important. I agree with that. However, those songs don't make money.<sup>48</sup>

The commodification of Indonesian hip hop was unavoidable (see Chapter 5). Like US hip hop artists of the 1990s, who glorified gangster lifestyles because the mainstream market demanded those songs (Kubrin 2005), Indonesian rappers could not avoid the same pressures. The mainstream market did not ask for songs about drive-by shootings or drugs dealings through the record labels. They demanded these rappers to write songs that could be used as ringback tones or original soundtracks.<sup>49</sup> For instance, music industry executives demanded rappers write songs teenage love and high school drama, as these were the dominant themes

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<sup>45</sup> Udet, interview, 31 January 2019.

<sup>46</sup> The original language from the interview is as follows: Nah ini masalah nya sama acara acara Indonesia. Kita itu ga di anggap manusia sama mereka. Kita itu produk. Pas orang orang uda ga tertarik, kita di buang aja kaya sampah (Derry, interview, 12 June 2019).

<sup>47</sup> Gerry, interview, 16 April 2019.

<sup>48</sup> The original language from the interview is as follows: Ini tergantung cara kita ngeliat ini juga sih. Gini deh, kita mesti realistis. Beberapa rapper kita itu terlalu idealis. Mereka ga mau nerima kalo rap itu bisnis. Kita perlu nyari duit, apalagi buat yang punya anak istri. Nyanyi soal isu pemerintah, ketidakadilan atau korupsi ya penting. Gue juga setuju. Tapi lagu kaya gitu ga ngasi kita duit (Saykoji, interview, 5 May 2019).

<sup>49</sup> Udet, interview, 31 January 2019.

of *Pop Melayu*, a style of homegrown pop music that shot to popularity in the early 2010s (Baulch 2013). Those rappers who did not comply were removed from their label's roster.<sup>50</sup>

Additionally, RBTs, or ring back tones, were massively popular in Indonesia, and most record companies wanted to dominate the market (Baulch 2014). RBT focuses on 10 to 15 catchy seconds, which many rappers felt was an affront. One of the more prominent rappers who refused to record for RBT was Gerry from Boyz Got No Brain. In a song that was released in 2017, he recalls this era when he raps:

It's not a comeback if I've never left  
Surabaya, Jogja, Jakarta I still stand  
I am still with Ruli and BGNB  
Writing songs for RBT have never crossed our minds.<sup>51</sup>

The departure of community-based music-making started to create rifts between rappers in Jakarta. While previous eras saw intimate scenes and enthusiasts, the span between 2010 and 2016 focused on its mainstream conversion. Rappers started to drift apart, and those who chose not to follow their labels began to fade into obscurity. Saykoji and 8Ball were the only two rappers who were able to turn their rap proficiency into careers. These two rappers, however, took two distinct routes and approaches to the trend of the period. 8Ball was, and still is, a highly respected rapper by the scene and mainstream media, while Saykoji was, and still is, a highly controversial figure who is disliked and considered as a sell-out by most rappers in Indonesia. He is, however, adored by the mainstream media (Mokodompit, Lasut & Ranuntu 2019).

Saykoji is perhaps the most recognisable rapper in Indonesia after Iwa Kusuma, at least for those not involved in the scene. When I travelled to Indonesia in early 2019, Saykoji's name was mentioned numerous times by everyday Indonesians I met, including motorcycle drivers, taxi drivers, restaurant staff, random passers-by and others, whenever we struck up a conversation about Indonesian hip hop. His name, however, is often left out of the conversation whenever I talked to rappers, both emerging and prominent. Many noted that

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<sup>50</sup> Udet, interview, 31 January 2019.

<sup>51</sup> The original lyrics in Indonesian is as follows: Ini bukan comeback gue ga pernah pergi  
Surabaya, Jogja, Jakarta gue tetap berdiri  
Bareng sama Ruli dan BGNB  
Ga pernah mikir buat nulis lagu untuk RBT ('BGNB' – Boyz Got No Brain 2017).

Saykoji was a talented rapper, but disagreed with how he approached his music and career.

One of the participants said:

Saykoji's a great rapper. Perhaps one of the best word-crafters and poets in Indonesia. However, he is such a sell-out. He doesn't want to use his platform to promote important issues. He keeps pumping out mainstream songs on irrelevant issues. Man, who cares about your ringtones, your emails when you've got people literally dying outside.<sup>52</sup>

Saykoji, however, is not bothered by these negative comments. For Saykoji, those who focus on "being real" are those who could not survive in the scene:

Okay, on the topic of being real, who cares? It's not about how real you are. It's about whether you can provide food for your family or not. Those who say I'm not a real rapper, fine, what do *you* do with your music?<sup>53</sup>

There was growing dissent between rappers on the topic of the commodification of rap in Indonesia (see Chapter 5). Rappers who wanted to be relevant had to obey the restrictions placed upon them by their labels. Those who disobeyed fell behind and had to find money somewhere else.<sup>54</sup> This was a hugely important issue among rappers at the time. While previous eras of Indonesian hip hop allowed flexibility due to their DIY nature, the 2010s saw heavy restrictions on rappers. They could no longer write and perform the music and lyrics that they wanted.

Jogjakarta's scene experienced a similar trend. Hip hop shows and performances dried up and the interest of local youth began to wither. Many young people became disenchanted with Indonesian hip hop because they felt that Indonesian rappers were just rapping about "silly and trivial issues".<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> The original language from the interview is as follows: Saykoji itu rapper yang luar biasa. Mungkin salah satu penulis lirik dan puisi terbaik di Indonesia. Tapi dia itu sell out banget. Dia ga mau make platformnya untuk promosiin isu isu penting. Kerjaan nya keluarin lagu lagu mainstream soal isu isu yang ga relevan. Man, ga ada yang perduli soal RBT atau email lu kalo masih banyak orang yang mati di luar sana (Gerry, interview, 16 April 2019).

<sup>53</sup> The original language from the interview is as follows: Oke, soal topik yang paling real, siapa sih yang perduli? Ini soal lu bisa nyediaiin makanan buat keluarga lu apa engga. Yang mau bilang gue bukan real rapper, fine, lu ngapani aja sama musik real lo itu? (Saykoji 2019, interview, 5 May).

<sup>54</sup> Balance, interview, 10 April 2019.

<sup>55</sup> The original language from the interview is as follows: *Isu bobrok yang ga ada gunanya* (Yudo, interview, 9 August 2019).

8Ball, on the other hand, thrived in the early 2010s. Iqbal, who currently lives in Bekasi, largely escaped this trend because of his massive underground following across Indonesia.<sup>56</sup> While he was often ignored by mainstream media outlets, as was almost every Indonesian rapper bar Iwa and Saykoji<sup>57</sup>, Iqbal<sup>58</sup> was able to sustain himself through music:

I think I'm very lucky. My fans are militant. They always buy everything, all CDs and tapes that I put out. My shows are always sold out, and my performances are always lively. They will travel hundreds of kilometres by motorbike or train just to see my shows.<sup>59</sup>

Iqbal's militant followers enabled him to release songs without the need to cater to a mainstream audience. Also, Iqbal, unlike Saykoji, is not managed by a mainstream manager. Macan, the art director of Guest Music, is Saykoji's manager. Macan also manages Yacko and Iwa. While Macan enables Yacko and Iwa to publish the songs that they want, he treats Saykoji differently:

I think Igor's [Saykoji's real name] already decided what he wants to do. He wants to do hip hop as a full-time job. He also wants hip hop to support his family. Unlike other artists that I manage, Igor is focused on catering to what sells. That is why he has been at the top of the game since the 2000s.<sup>60</sup>

Furthermore, Saykoji contests the claims of many of his peers regarding his lack of authenticity (see Chapter 5). He notes that being authentic in hip hop means making a living from it:

I mean, you can't get more real than this. What? Being real means that you live through hip hop and hip hop pays for everything in your life. I can confidently say that hip hop has paid for everything in my life. What about my haters? Can they say so? Dude if you work in an office, 9am to 5pm, then perform at night, doesn't that mean that you are even "less real" than me? This is why I said these people are idealistic idiots.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> Brenk, interview, 21 February 2019.

<sup>57</sup> Iwa K, interview, 18 March, 2019.

<sup>58</sup> Interview, 21 February 2019.

<sup>59</sup> The original language from the interview is as follows: Gue beruntung banget sih. Fans gue militan. Mereka pasti ngebeli semua, CD lah, tape lah. Show gue selalu sold out dan acara gue pasti hidup banget. Ada yang sampai naik motor ratusan kilo atau pakai kereta cuman buat ngeliatin show doang.

<sup>60</sup> The original language from the interview is as follows: Gue rasa Igor itu uda jelas sih dia mau ngapain. Igor mau hidup dari musik. Dia mau hip hop buat ngebayar kebutuhan keluarganya. Ga seperti artis lain, Igor itu fokus ke produk yang bisa di jual. Inilah kenapa dia uda jadi salah satu yang paling populer dari 2000an (Macan, interview, 22 March 2019).

<sup>61</sup> The original language from the interview is as follows: Gini deh, buat gue ini uda paling real. Menurut gue, jadi real hip hop itu ya berarti lo hidup dari musik dan hip hop yang ngebayar semua di hidup lo. Gue bisa dengan bangga bilang kalau itu uda terjadi di hidup gue. Nah orang orang yang

For Saykoji, authenticity means devoting his life to hip hop and letting hip hop pay for his needs. He doubts his haters, most older rappers, can say the same. Iqbal<sup>62</sup>, however, disagrees:

I agree with Igor that we live off hip hop music. However, we are the few lucky rappers. We are lucky because we have fans who help us pay our wages. This doesn't mean that other rappers are wrong though. Living from your songs and performances means that sometimes you'll have to make decisions based on other people's requests, be it our managers, event organisers, publishers or even fans. Those who have full-time jobs do not have this problem.<sup>63</sup>

Indonesian hip hop from 2010 to 2015 was relatively quiet, and older rappers started to assume mentorship roles in their local scenes. While the productivity of rappers in Jakarta and other areas (as measured by the number of songs recorded and concerts performed) was lower than during previous phases of Indonesian hip hop, the focus shifted to the communities that they had built (for instance, Golpushnezhad 2016, Nasir 2018, Riyanto 2017, also see Chapter 6, 7 and 8). Those rappers who did not follow the instructions of their mainstream labels and wanted freedom from the pressure of mainstream fans decided to create their own labels and production houses (see Chapter 6).

This era saw the creation of some of Indonesia's most prominent independent labels in the next phase, including Grimloc, Hellhouse, Allday, 16Bar, West Wew, and others. Instead of lamenting the twilight of their careers, these rappers shifted their focus to mentorship positions. Older rappers created, both formally and casually, multiple mentorships programs to help guide younger enthusiasts around Indonesia.<sup>64</sup> This trend followed a similar pattern to the US scene in the 2000s, following the decline of the Golden Era of hip hop in the country (Vito 2019). On this topic, Gerry<sup>65</sup> says:

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ngebenci gue itu gimana? Mereka bisa bilang kaya gitu juga ga? Man kalo lo kerja di kantor dari jam 9 pagi sampai 5 sore, terus manggung pas malem, itu berarti lo lebih ga real dari gue dong. Ini maka nya gue bilang beberapa orang itu orang orang idealis yang guoblok (Saykoji, interview, 5 May 2019).

<sup>62</sup> Interview, 21 February 2019.

<sup>63</sup> The original language from the interview is as follows: Gue setuju sama Igor kalo kita sama sama hidup dari music. Nah tapi isu di sini adalah kita ini beberapa yang sangat beruntung. Ga semua orang bisa seperti kita. Hidup dari musik dan manggung itu ya berarti kadang lo harus ngambil keputusan berdasarkan kebutuhan dan permintaan orang lain, dari manager lo lah, event organisers, publishers atau fans lu. Orang yang ada kerjaan lain ga perlu mikirin ini.

<sup>64</sup> Balance, interview, 10 April 2019; Ucok, interview, 20 March 2019; Gerry, interview, 16 April 2019.

<sup>65</sup> Interview, 16 April 2019.

Like what I said in my songs, I've never had any interest in satisfying the general masses or creating catchy songs. I rap for myself and my communities. This was the reason behind my movement in the early 2010s. I wanted to mentor young and promising rappers so that they could replace us soon. We genuinely need regeneration.<sup>66</sup>

### **Millennial norms**

The current era of Indonesian hip hop is led by millennial rappers. Similar to the use of punk to spread the teaching of Islam (Saefullah 2017), young Indonesians began to utilise rap to push the boundaries of the religious philosophy (Golpushnezhad 2017). It was also a tool to help counter the stigma of their belief (Nasir 2018, 2020). I posit that this era started in 2016 when Young Lex, a young mainstream rapper, released a video containing his slander of Iwa Kusuma and other prominent rappers of previous eras.<sup>67</sup> Young Lex's seemingly witty and narcissistic remarks marked the end of the mentorship era, instead bringing a new stream of independent approaches (I explore this further in Chapter 5). While DIY and a communal spirit were the traits of the previous eras and other independent music subcultures in Indonesia (Baulch 2002b and Harnish & Wallach 2013), this period has seen a rise in individualistic approaches. This generation of Indonesian rappers has also seen significant growth in the development of independent labels and distribution channels, negating the need for traditional record labels or mainstream media outlets. Ukok sums it up best:

The millennials era, the 2016 kids, saw massive growth in both rappers and enthusiasts. I think we can't even call hip hop underground music genre anymore. Hip hop is displayed to the mainstream audience through Tuantigabelas, Ramengvrl, Onar and, of course, Rich Brian.<sup>68</sup>

Upi, or Tuantigabelas, one of this era's most prominent rappers, says:

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<sup>66</sup> The original language from the interview is as follows: Kaya yang gue bilang tadi, gue ga tertarik buat ngebuat senang fans atau ngebuat lagu catchy doang. Gue ngerap buat diri gue sendiri dan komunitas gue. Ini kenapa di tahun 2010an, gue nge-mentor anak anak rapper yang muda dan berbakat, biar mereka bisa ngegantiin kita dedengkot ini. Kita perlu regenerasi (Gerry, interview, 16 April 2019).

<sup>67</sup> Gerry, interview, 16 April 2019; Liputan6.com 2016.

<sup>68</sup> The original language from the interview is as follows: Anak anak era millennial, dari tahun 2016, itu gilak banget yang demen jadi rapper dan fans. Gue rasa kita ga bisa bilang kalo hip hop itu underground lagi sekarang. Hip hop udah ada di pasar mainstream lewat artis kaya Tuantigabelas, Ramengvrl, Onar dan yang pasti Rich Brian (Ukok, interview, 20 March 2019).

This era is incredible. We can see the excitement in everybody's eyes again. There are so many shows too. Like, I had three shows last week, and they were not just in Jakarta. I even have a show booked late this year in Jayapura.<sup>69</sup>

The increasing number of shows, fans and record sales signify a lively scene (Montano 2013). While the previous two eras (the 2000s and 2010s) saw a limited number of shows due to lack of interest by rappers and enthusiasts, this era has seen the scene's reinvigoration. Older rappers who had quit rapping for various reasons have started to perform again:

I think the challenge that Young Lex aired was the spark that we all need. Older rappers, like myself, were too comfortable with our situation. In the 1990s, we had something to fight for. We wanted freedom from the regime. But we lost that spark in this Reform era. That's why the 2000s' scene was so dry. Young Lex is one impolite kid, but his comments about us helped give us the edge to come back and prove to these kids who we really are.<sup>70</sup>

As seen in other established rap scenes, such as those in the United States (Gosa 2017) or Australia (Minestrelli 2017), young rappers are often hesitant to acknowledge the achievements of older rappers, instead questioning their skills and the circumstances in which they rose to prominence:

All right, let's see. In their era, these people didn't have any competition. Who were they competing against? *Dangdut* singers? Pop singers? They were unique because they were the only ones doing that. This has changed. Younger people need to compete not only against domestic rappers but also international stars. This is why I said that it's more difficult to be us.<sup>71</sup>

This trend is not new. In the digital era, the boundaries of local and international scenes have blurred (Guttal 2007; Tong & Cheung 2011). The appropriation of a global cultural product—in this instance, hip hop—shows how a cultural product can be transformed to fit a

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<sup>69</sup> The original language from the interview is as follows: Era ini luarbiasa banget. Kita bisa ngeliatin semangat di mata semua orang orang ini lagi. Shows nya banyak banget. Ini aja minggu lalu gue ada tiga shows, dan mereka ga cuman ada di Jakarta. Contoh nya akhir tahun ini gue bakal manggung di Jayapura (Tuantigabelas, interview, 31 January 2019).

<sup>70</sup> The original language from the interview is as follows: Menurut gue tantangan seperti Young Lex itu yang kita perlukan. Rapper dedengkot kaya gue itu uda terlalu nyaman denga napa yang kita ada. Tahun 1990an, kita itu ngerap dengan tujuan. Dulu kita mau numbangin rezim Soeharto. Tapi sekarang di reformasi rasanya ini kita ga ada motivasi gitu. Makanya di tahun 2000an, semuanya mati banget. Young Lex memang anak yang agak kurang ajar, tapi komen dia seolah ngebalikin lagi semangat kita buat ngebuktiin kita ini siapa (Erik, interview, 31 January 2019).

<sup>71</sup> The original language from the interview is as follows: Nah gini kita liat ya. Di era mereka, ga ada kompetisinya. Siapa sih lawannya? Penyanyi dangdut? Penyanyi pop? Mereka unik karena mereka doang yang ngerap. Ini uda berubah. Anak anak muda perlu ngelawan rapper domestik dan juga internasional. Makanya tadi gue bilang sekarang itu lebih susah (Young Lex, interview, 10 October 2019).



local context (Alim, Ibrahim & Pennycook 2009). Further, adopting the open market approach following the New Order regime saw global cultural artefacts become more prominent than domestic versions.<sup>72</sup> This sentiment applies to the Indonesian hip hop scene as well:

It's tough to sell our music to Indonesians because they feel that Indonesian hip hop is lame. Many of my friends chose to spend more money or instead just subscribe to Spotify or Apple Music. Like back then, Indonesian rappers only needed to compete among themselves. Millennials like myself need to compete against the world. We need to be creative, and I think that's why many youths from my generation feel that we're better than the older rappers. We still respect them, but we feel that our competitors are way more challenging.<sup>73</sup>

Understanding the financial benefits of rapping seems to be one of this period's more contested authenticity points. While hip hop's commodification in the 2000s saw many rappers leave the scene, this generation adores it. Many young hip hop artists become creative in their pursuit of commodification, for instance, pairing their CDs with scarfs (for instance, Joe Million), vlogging on YouTube for better exposure (for instance, Boy William & Kemal Palevi), or combining rap and online gaming (for instance, Reza Oktovian). Tuantigabelas says:

Nowadays, it's challenging to separate rappers and YouTubers. Every youth I know wants to be a rapper. It's just the trend here in Jakarta. All YouTubers seem to release their rap songs and collaborate but never perform outside their studios or bedrooms.<sup>74</sup>

The era of social media has shaped the way young people approach and consume popular culture in Indonesia (Lim 2014). In Jakarta and most of Indonesia, TVs, newspapers, and radios have been replaced by social media platforms like YouTube, Instagram, Facebook and Twitter. The way young Indonesians consume popular culture products also changes rappers'

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<sup>72</sup> Gerry, interview, 16 April 2019.

<sup>73</sup> The original language from the interview is as follows: Susah buat ngejual musik kita ke orang Indonesia karena masih banyak yang nganggap kalo hip hop itu malu maluin. Banyak teman teman gue yang make Spotify atau Apple Music. Dulu rapper indo cuman kompetisi sama sesama Indonesia. Millennials kaya gue perlu compete sama seluruh dunia. Kita jadi harus lebih kreatif dan ini kenapa banyak rapper generasi gue yang mikir kalo mereka lebih hebat dari generasi sebelumnya. Kita masih hormat sama mereka, tapi kita ngerasa sekarang lebih kompetitif aja (Joe Million, interview, 19 June 2020).

<sup>74</sup> The original language from the interview is as follows: Sekarang lebih susah untuk ngebedain rapper dan youtubers. Semua anak muda yang gue tau mau jadi rapper. Lagi ngetrend aja di Jakarta. Semua youtubers juga kayanya lagi demen ngeluarin lagu rap dan buat kolaborasi bareng, tapi ga perlu manggung di luar kamar atau studionye (Tuantigabelas, interview, 31 January 2019).

ideas of authenticity. While older rappers might see YouTubers or artists releasing rap songs as fake rappers (or, as Tuantigabelas<sup>75</sup> says, “raptertainers”), there is a need for this perception to change. Authenticity should not be understood as rigid and immovable, especially in a country as dynamic as Indonesia.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter has sketched the history of Indonesian hip hop by dividing its five decades of existence into four phases: imagining the underground, stagnation and growth, a communal turn and millennial norms. It has done so by linking the existing scholarship on Indonesian hip hop following the New Order regime (e.g., Bodden 2005) to the present era (for instance, Nasir 2020, Yanko 2022). It has shown that the understanding of Indonesian hip hop as an outlaw genre stemmed from perceptions of rebellious attitudes during the New Order era (Bodden 2005). While this observation was correct at the time, by tracing the phases following this underground period, I have shown that Indonesian hip hop has grown to be much more complex. It is now a space to both spread religious teaching (Nasir 2020) and push boundaries (Golpushnezhad 2017, Nasir 2018). Hip hop is also a space to promote a counter-mainstream ideology and traditional artforms (Riyanto 2017). In fact, the mainstream and underground Indonesian hip hop scenes should not be considered separate but rather as two sides of the same coin. As this chapter shows, mainstream and underground scenes in Indonesia are so intertwined that it is pointless to differentiate them. In many cases, these scenes actually work together instead of opposing one another.

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<sup>75</sup> Interview, 31 January 2019.

## Chapter 5 Peer politics

Many critical studies have been conducted on the central role of authenticity for artists and performers in various popular music genres, including punk (Lewin & Williams 2009), hardcore (Driver 2011) and others. Some have suggested that hip hop is perhaps the best site to study authenticity because of its heavy emphasis on “keepin’ it real” and “staying true to oneself” (Forman 2002; Gibson 2014; Pennycook 2007; Solomon 2005). According to McLeod (2013), in American hip hop, codes of authenticity have long been depicted as encompassing six dominant values: being true to oneself, being Black, being underground, being hard, being on the street and, lastly, being old-school (McLeod 1999; see also Armstrong 2004; Harkness 2012).

The concept of authenticity has been adapted to local contexts by hip hop artists in Southeast Asia. For instance, young people in Cambodia have used hip hop as a way to memorialise the genocidal history of their country, using their lyrics to display this tragedy as a sign of their authenticity (Schlund-Vials 2008). Unlike their Cambodian counterparts, some Singaporean youths have chosen to embrace a global identity (Fu 2015), with some of them have deciding to “suspend their local identity and adopt a global identity” (Mattar 2003, p. 298). Politics also play a part in the way Southeast Asian rappers enact authenticity. Lin (2010, p. 147) observes that “frustrated youths” in Myanmar have been using hip hop as a “release valve”. However, it has also been observed that these tracks are simply a “commercially extremely successful way to play on people’s existential fears, fantasies, and wishes” (Keeler 2009, p. 13). Gabsi (2019) argues that the authenticity of rappers is dependent on their ability to be the voice of the voiceless.

Indonesian hip hop performers also have their own specific interpretations of authenticity. As mentioned in Chapter 4, during the 1990s, authentic rappers were considered “outlaws” (Bodden 2005). At the time, hip hop was a “form of liberation or a cultural alternative to subjects living in the shadow of an oppressive state” that fought against various “social conflicts involving class and age” (Bodden 2005, p. 2). As I have shown in Chapter 4, authenticity in Indonesian hip hop no longer revolves around the notion of the underground and the outlaw. It is much more complex than that.

Indonesian artists have used various combinations of hip hop and traditional art form to create artworks that suit modern Indonesian lifestyles while also still embracing local traditions (Varela 2014, p. 502). Local acts such as the Jogja Hip Hop Foundation also utilise rap as a tool to convey old Javanese folk tales, poems and arts (Riyanto 2017, p. 31, also see Chapter 7). Societal norms and religion also play a part in the enactment of authenticity in Indonesia. Nasir (2018, p. 387) has observed Islamic scholars and practitioners in Indonesia and Malaysia using hip hop to spread *dakwah* (a process of Islamisation).

This chapter studies internal politics between rappers in Indonesia and the conflicts that arise between various groups and individuals. This chapter explores the rise of what I call “sociopolitical brokers” (an elaboration on Brauchler’s 2018 “protest brokers”) across the Indonesian hip hop scene. As I put forth in Chapter 1, sociopolitical brokers are those who are connected across communities and able to bring about changes. These political actors, I suggest, operate almost exclusively within the hip hop space, where outside influences are minimal. In contrast to the events described in subsequent chapters, these conflicts over authenticity seldom impact non-hip hop communities.

To this end, I introduce the notion of peer politics. By this term, I mean the politics between Indonesian rappers constrained within their own space, to interactions that do not involve those outside of the hip hop scene. I argue that peer politics—exemplified by Indonesian rappers’ varied perceptions of authenticity—is a form of identity politics (Heryanto 2008). I argue that authenticity in Indonesian hip hop is an extension of identity politics reflected in popular culture. As I will show throughout this chapter, peer politics in Indonesian hip hop revolves around the notion of “staying true to oneself” (Pennycook 2007).

To support my argument, I will present three case studies that explore conflicts among Indonesian rappers during the 2000-2018 period. The first is the dispute between rap groups Homicide, from Bandung, and Xcalibour, from Surabaya, that occurred between 2000 and 2002. The second is a conflict between Young Lex and other Indonesian rappers that took place in 2016. The final case study is the clash between Xaqhala (Hellhouse Records) and Ben Utomo (Allday Records), which occurred in 2018. These case studies were chosen because they provide different contexts in three separate periods. They are examples of an intergenerational conflict, an intragenerational conflict and a combination of both.

Before we set out on an empirical analysis of peer politics in Indonesian hip hop, it is worth examining the broader context and considering why such an important topic has remained understudied. It is also crucial to discuss why an in-depth investigation into peer politics in popular culture is a critical component to studying the varied discourses of the social life of the world's fourth most populated nation. I will first start with the concept of authenticity in hip hop.

### **Hip hop authenticity**

Authenticity occupies a central place in the study of popular music (see Grazian 2005; Peterson 1999). Blackness was often the critical component of hip hop authenticity (Pennycook 2007; Rose 1991, 2008). However, the rising success of white and non-Black “people of colour”, middle class, elite class and female rappers makes it difficult, perhaps even impossible, to strictly ground the authenticity of hip hop in a formal code composed mainly of racial and class categories. Authenticity is always contingent on specific contexts or situations (Fraley 2009; Harrison 2008).

For example, Bennett's (1999) work on minority hip hop movements in Germany successfully revealed the importance of articulating specific local issues and cultural sensibilities through hip-hop. In his study, hip hop served as a musical vehicle for expressing collective affects, such as anger and fear, shared by Turkish and Moroccan immigrants living in Frankfurt. In this sense, authenticity should be not regarded as an inalterable prescription of conduct, but rather as an ethical or cultural construct that is forged, performed and staged through continuous social processes (Albrecht 2008, pp. 379–390; Benson 2013, p. 502; Harkness 2012; Haenfler 2013).

This malleability of authenticity becomes crucial when analysing Asian hip hop. Many Asian rappers have created their distinctive norms by “reproducing authenticity” (Harkness 2012, p. 286; Larsson 2013, pp. 102–103). According to Condry, Japanese hip-hop rappers, for instance, have long puzzled over how to pull off the “construction of blackness” (Condry 2007, p. 654) in their largely racially homogeneous society. The solution was found not in the emulation of physical traits of African Americans (for example, by darkening their skin or kinking their hair) but rather in the symbolic appropriation of the cultural and political attitudes found in their lyrics, such as resistance, struggle or dissidence (Condry 2006).

The reproduction of authenticity has also become a site of contestation within Indonesia's independent hip hop scene. Some independent rappers in Indonesia that I interviewed<sup>1</sup> denounced the strategies being employed by some rappers to artificially create a sense of authenticity.<sup>2</sup> They criticised some younger rappers for projecting their ghetto-like situations in their verses, interviews and performances. For these youth, their ghettos do not refer to actual slum-like neighbourhoods. It is a symbolically constructed, metaphorically transferred, and narratively fabricated reality. It could take on various guises such as poverty-stricken life, miserable childhoods, the oppressive school system and victimised femininity that mimic the “ghetto-centricity” (Kubrin 2005, p. 361) or “street-conscious identity” (Alim 2002, p. 288) of American hip hop. The following section will provide more background information regarding the space of rappers' peer politics in the form of communities, labels and groups.

### **Communities, labels and peers**

There are many independent hip hop labels and production houses in Indonesia. The most notable ones are perhaps Rontak of Jakarta, Hellhouse of Jogjakarta, Grimloc of Bandung and Pasukan of Surabaya. Apart from these big four, other smaller labels, such as WestWew of West Jakarta, Bakutumbu of the Moluccas and 16Bar of Bali, have made significant contributions to the growth of the independent scene. Technological advancement and the increased affordability of recording equipment have allowed youth everywhere, including Indonesia, to assemble and create their own movements (Abuhoff 2017), while online music distribution platforms such as YouTube, Soundcloud, Spotify, Google Music, Apple Music and Bandcamp are freely available, allowing independent artists to connect to their audience directly. Additionally, the growth of independent labels in Indonesia has fostered the development of the local hip hop culture and, subsequently, the hip hop industry.<sup>3</sup> However, the growth of these labels has also led to a number of conflicts—or “beefs”<sup>4</sup> in hip hop parlance (Kubrin 2005).

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<sup>1</sup> See Appendix B for the list of research participants.

<sup>2</sup> Gerry, interview, 16 April 2019; Alex, interview, 16 April 2019; Erik, interview, 31 January 2019.

<sup>3</sup> The growth of independent labels in Indonesia has allowed hip hop to transition from being hobby to being a primary income generator for many. Jobs such as record label directors, distributors, graphic designers, website engineers, communications managers, audio engineers and many more are available for those who want to be involved in the world of hip hop. They do not need to be rappers.

<sup>4</sup> Beefs are common in hip hop. Take, for instance, the conflict between Bad Boy Records and Death Row Records in the United States. This 1990s feud split the hip hop scene in the United States into two opposing empires, the East Coast and the West Coast. Each of the empires had their champions.

Power and control have become the major driving forces for many artists. Independent hip hop has shifted away from KRS One's and Public Enemy's political protests to the misogynistic and wealth-driven industry of Young Thug and Ty Dolla \$ign (Carter & Welsh 2019). The political discourse of hip hop has shifted from a vertical power rally and minority empowerment (Rose 1991) into a contest for political power among peers (Pardue 2016). It has become a discussion of who has the most power between rappers.<sup>5</sup>

Like the hip hop scene in the United States, rappers in Indonesia also contest for power and influence. I argue that peer politics in Indonesia's scene involves contesting definitions of authenticity. Additionally, peer politics in Indonesian hip hop does not have the same region- and-polar-centrism as hip hop in the United States. This means that Indonesian rappers represent their labels and communities instead of their cities or geographical locations.<sup>6</sup> The following section will discuss the concepts of *ketimuran* (Eastern traits) and *silaturahmi* (friendship) and how they impact these rappers' politics.

### Respect and seniority

Don't try to act crazy in front of the Ghetto Papi  
I've been there, done that  
Still the same Indo you don't wanna fuck with.<sup>7</sup>

The quote above is taken from the chorus of '*Belaga Belgi*' by Boyz Got No Brain. The song criticises young and up-and-coming Indonesian rappers who pretend as if they have been in the scene for a long time. For Boyz Got No Brain, these rappers do not represent hip hop. Essentially, Boys Got No Brain does not believe that Indonesian rappers should act like

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Tupac and Suge Knight were the leaders of the West while Notorious BIG and P Diddy were the leaders of the East. It is important to note that this conflict was not just about music. It was about power and politics. Gangs-affiliated rappers did not just release diss tracks about each other; the feud spilt into the roads and streets of various major cities in the United States. It became a bloody proxy war between US street gangs Crips and Bloods (Kubrin 2005). It resulted in the murder of both the Notorious BIG and Tupac. Also, Suge Knight was imprisoned for his involvement in both murders.

<sup>5</sup> Presently, we can observe these displays of power and control in some of the most recent music videos. Young rappers such as Lil Xan, Lil Uzi Vert, XXXTentacion and Tekashi 6ix9ine are showing off their wealth, their collections of expensive pieces of jewellery, cars, branded accessories, their girls and more as signs of the power that they command (Roy 2019; Choi 2017).

<sup>6</sup> However, this sentiment has started to grow among rappers who live in regional areas in the eastern part of Indonesia, especially those who live in Papua (Iqbal 2019, interview, 21 February).

<sup>7</sup> The original lyric in Indonesian is as follows: Ga usah belaga belgi di depan Ghetto Papi  
I've been there, done that  
Still the same Indo you don't wanna fuck with ('Belaga Belgi' – Boyz Got No Brain 2018).

Westerner rappers. When I spoke to group member Gerry<sup>8</sup>, he said he was unhappy with how youth approached hip hop in Indonesia. He thought that many young people had tried to copy American hip hop while ignoring Indonesian norms and moral codes.<sup>9</sup>

The growth in the independent scene created a need for a code of conduct. Erik<sup>10</sup> and Udet<sup>11</sup> told me that older generations often require Eastern cultural traits<sup>12</sup> and friendship<sup>13</sup> are essential to Indonesian hip hop and that they can bridge generation gaps. They<sup>14</sup> said that these two traits are essential to Indonesian hip hop. However, in the current era of independent rap in Indonesia, this might no longer hold true. While previous generations thrived on physical concerts, local gatherings and enthusiast congregations, millennial rappers connect to their audiences via social media platforms.<sup>15</sup>

Udet and Erik do not view the hip hop scene as separate from society but rather as an extension of society.<sup>16</sup> To them, the independent scene exists within the larger Indonesian communities and needs to follow the local societies' rules and norms. While independent rappers of the first generation (see Chapter 4 and Bodden 2005) used their songs and positions to protest the New Order regime, I would argue that they have established a power structure via their version of politics among peers. Iwa, the reputed "godfather" of Indonesian hip hop, told me:

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<sup>8</sup> He is one of the members of Boyz Got No Brain (interview, 16 April 2019).

<sup>9</sup> The original language from the interview is as follows: anak anak banyak yang kurang hormat sama yang lebih tua. Mau gaya gayaan hip hop luar, ga peduli etika sama kebiasaan kita di Indonesia (Gerry, interview, 16 April 2019).

<sup>10</sup> Erik is a member of the legendary Jakarta rap outfit Blakumuh and Probz. See Appendix D.

<sup>11</sup> Udet is a member of the legendary 2000s rap supergroup NEO. See Appendix D.

<sup>12</sup> *Ketimuran* refers to the assumed 'politeness' of the everyday Indonesians. It also refers to the social structure of which the youths must always bow down to their elders. In many cases (in my own experience), youths do not have any rights to anything.

<sup>13</sup> *Silaturahmi* refers to the friendship and connections between the members of the society..

<sup>14</sup> Udet & Erik, interview, 31 January 2019.

<sup>15</sup> The original language from the interview is as follows: Anak anak sekarang mah sukanya sendiri sendiri. Ga ada lagi yang mau ngumpul bareng. Semuanya pada ngumpul di Facebook, Instagram, Whatsapp, tapi ga ada yang mau tatap pandang (Udet & Erik, interview, 31 January 2019).

<sup>16</sup> The original language from the interview is as follows: Hip hop itu bagian dari komunitas kita di sini. Akar rumpunnya sudah jelas. Dari tahun 80an sudah ada. Masa sekarang anak anak mau belaga kaya hip hop itu baru di Indonesia?



hip hop has been here for ages. It has taken roots in society. Therefore, it is important to follow the local societal codes.<sup>17</sup>

For his part, Erik<sup>18</sup> noted that respect towards elders plays a crucial part in uniting Indonesian society's different classes. Those who belong in the elite class of society often pay little respect to those they deem below them. This derives from the *priyayi* (Javanese aristocratic) ideology (see Geertz 1957, Riyanto 2017) common among the Javanese population who make up most of Indonesia's population. A significant component of the New Order regime's political agenda was dictating and enforcing a particular understanding of Indonesian identity through popular culture products and popular discourses that remain influential today (Hadiz 2000; Heryanto 2018a).

When I spoke with Tuantigabelas<sup>19</sup>, he noted that the issues with social notions of respect are outdated as most communities are hosted on the internet as opposed to physical locales. Online platforms, he said, have divided independent rappers into segregated worlds.<sup>20</sup> Segmented social media bubbles that form around rappers' Twitter, YouTube, SoundCloud, Facebook, and Instagram accounts have negated the need for support from the independent communities.<sup>21</sup> Rappers, the argument goes, can now connect directly to their fans and listeners and receive instant gratification and acknowledgement. This is different from previous eras, where rappers had to prove themselves in front of hip hop communities before calling themselves rappers.<sup>22</sup>

Let us take the examples of two young rappers: Young Lex and Ben Utomo. While both entered the Indonesian rap scene in 2016 while they were in their early 20s, their public personas differ. Young Lex irrupted into the scene through his social media antics.<sup>23</sup> For instance, his brazen claim to be the last king of Indonesian hip hop<sup>24</sup> was poorly received by

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17 The original language from the interview is as follows: Hip hop sudah ada di Indonesia dari dulu. Akarnya sudah ada di komunitas. Makanya penting buat anak anak untuk ngikutin peraturan peraturan lingkungan sekitarnya mereka (Iwa K, interview, 18 March 2019).

<sup>18</sup> Interview, 31 January 2019.

<sup>19</sup> In the WeW records headquarter in West Jakarta in 2019. He is a millennial rapper (Tuantigabelas, interview, 31 January 2019).

<sup>20</sup> Tuantigabelas, interview, 31 January 2019.

<sup>21</sup> The original language from the interview is as follows: *Rapper ga perlu lagi ngumpul, nongkrong, semua udah ada di dunia maya* (Tuantigabelas, interview, 31 January 2019).

<sup>22</sup> In this context, proving means that they will have to perform in front of senior rappers in a live situation, write songs themselves and actively participate in the communities.

<sup>23</sup> Gerry, interview, 16 April 2019; Alex, interview, 16 April 2019.

<sup>24</sup> *Raja Terakhir*, Young Lex's self-imposed nickname.

rappers from both the current or previous eras.<sup>25</sup> Ben Utomo<sup>26</sup>, on the other hand, garnered a great deal of success in the independent scene, despite the controversies of his *Beef Rap Battle* event. Although Ben Utomo's and Young Lex's core mission is identical—namely, to gain as much social and financial capital as possible—the response to their careers from established Indonesian rappers has been markedly different. While Ben was able to gain respect from the hip hop community, Young Lex was regarded as a “moron” (*anak geblek dan kurang ajar*) by many rappers.<sup>27</sup>

In addition to a public persona, a platform and a generational “type” (for instance, mainstream vs underground), authenticity also demands originality (Fraley 2009). Actions such as imitating the appearance and behaviour of famous American rappers is likely to be seen as inauthentic by one's peers. Tattoos, expensive apparel, and gold and platinum jewellery pieces are not necessary for Indonesian rappers to signify their authenticity. Iwa K claims that rappers in Indonesia do not require such luxury items or need to boast about their personal wealth. Instead, Iwa argues that “the ability to write quality lyrics and rap skilfully”<sup>28</sup> is what gives rappers their authenticity.<sup>29</sup> To summarise, numerous factors contribute to a rapper's ability to command political power and accumulate social capital among their peers in Indonesia's independent hip hop scene. These factors include varying definitions of authenticity, respect, Asian cultural traits (*ketimuran*), generational eras, friendship (*silaturahmi*), platforms of choice, labels and mainstream appeal. These factors have triggered a chain of processes resulting in what I call peer politics. By peer politics, I mean that perceptions of authenticity in Indonesian hip hop differ significantly from one

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<sup>25</sup> Iwa, interview, 18 March 2019; Tuantigabelas, interview, 31 January 2019; John Parapat, interview, 5 April 2019.

<sup>26</sup> Taking on the opposite approach to Young Lex, Ben Utomo entered the scene by creating an independent label and production house on YouTube. The beginning of the channel was various videos of himself rapping with Eitaro, his best friend, who is also a rapper from Medan. This duo, who later received a capital investment from a South Korean media company to start their music label, uses their YouTube channels to catapult their career from a relatively unknown duo to nationally renowned rappers. While presenting their production house and YouTube channel as educational and promotional spaces for independent, they slowly built a giant of an independent label.

<sup>27</sup> Gerry, interview, 16 April 2019; Ucok, interview, 20 March 2019; Erik, interview, 31 January 2019; Udet, interview, 31 January 2019.

<sup>28</sup> The original language from the interview is as follows: *Yang penting itu anaknya pinter nulis sama ngerap aja* (Iwa K, interview, 18 March 2019).

<sup>29</sup> Similar to Iwa, Tuantigabelas notes his dissatisfaction of Indonesians who tend to care more about outward appearances than honing their rapping skills. He even goes as far, arguing that ‘...the more money Indonesian rappers spend on their appearances; the less skilful they are...’ (Tuantigabelas, interview, 31 January 2018).

rapper to the next. To contextualise this, the following sections will present three case studies from different eras, the first being the politics reflected in the first documented conflict of youth from Bandung and Surabaya following the fall of the New Order military regime.

### **From Bandung to Surabaya**

The first historical moment I wish to discuss is the conflict between youth from Bandung and Surabaya in 2000. This example clearly demonstrates the way the differing politics of Indonesian rappers stems from their unique local moral codes. In the late 1990s and early 2000s, hip hop became a space for alternative youth politics in Indonesia (Bodden 2005). Codes of conduct, accepted methods of interaction and the languages in which messages could be transmitted differed significantly from a mainstream society profoundly shaped by Soeharto's New Order regime (see Barker 2008). During the New Order regime, hip hop was unable to integrate itself into Indonesian society.<sup>30</sup> Hip hop became more accessible after the fall of Soeharto's regime in 1998, when bans on "dangerous materials" were lifted (Hadiz 2000). Indonesian hip hop fans and performers were finally allowed to perform publicly without fear of criminal persecution.

In May 2000, Bandung rappers organised a national hip hop gathering<sup>31</sup>, with invitations being sent to hip hop communities all around Indonesia (Zufar 2021). The event was not about showcasing talents or commodification. Rather, it was a networking event for those interested in connecting with like-minded members of the hip hop community. This first-of-its-kind community gathering was led by Ucok and Aszy, two rappers from Bandung-based rap collective Homicide. When I spoke to Ucok regarding his recollection of the event, he said the idea was to put names to faces.<sup>32</sup> The event was organised as a convention of hip hop enthusiasts, with prominent rappers, break-dancers, DJs and graffiti bombers delivering keynote speeches in which they shared their experiences of organising and performing hip

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<sup>30</sup> This initial integration process was further complicated because unlike dangdut, whose main audience members are working-class Indonesians (Weintraub 2006), Indonesian hip hop's initial performers and fans were (and still are) mostly upper-middle and elite-class citizens (Bodden 2005; also, Ucok, interview, 20 March 2019). These people did not (and still do not) make up a large portion of the Indonesian population.

<sup>31</sup> Also, Ucok (interview, 20 March 2019); Erik (interview, 31 January 2019).

<sup>32</sup> Before the gathering, they had been sending physical mail to each other. However, they did not have the means to connect, apart from listening to mixtapes they regularly sent to their friends (Ucok, interview, 20 March 2019).

hop in their local areas. It was "...a space for [young rappers] to build some sense of belonging to the independent communities".<sup>33</sup>

This hip hop event is an example of a scenario that Heryanto (2018b) calls a series of contestations of identities in popular culture in Indonesia. As Ukok put it to me, interactions of different ideologies and moral codes were happening "on the stage, one song, one dance and one battle at a time".<sup>34</sup> Performances of rappers with differing accents, messages, attitudes and visions created tensions among attendees. They tried to influence each other in their contest for dominance, perhaps even "exaggerating their authenticity" (Reitsamer & Prokop 2017, p. 5). These contestations and attempts to dominate others happened because of struggles to establish a societal power structure in this newly established space.<sup>35</sup>

According to Ukok, trends and performance styles were the key criteria of political influence during this gathering. Many rappers who participated in the event were blatantly mimicking famous American rappers' songs and performance styles. Many declared themselves "gangsters", which did not sit well with other event participants.<sup>36</sup> Machismo and braggadocio (Williams 2012) are not uncommon in the adaptation of hip hop in various third world countries. For instance, Golpushnezhad's (2017) thesis on the connections between Islamic belief and hip hop culture in different Muslim countries (mainly Indonesia and Tunisia) argues that hip hop in these countries contains performances of overt masculinity beyond even that of rappers in the United States.<sup>37</sup> Similarly, Gabsi (2020, p. 6) argues that sociopolitical rappers are "recapturing the symbolic space hijacked by the government, not solely in concrete terms, rappers claim ownership of their Tunisian and Islamic identity".

Additionally, the fluid nature of Indonesian identity (Heryanto 2008) played a significant role in the politics of the people within hip hop community. They tried to replicate African

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<sup>33</sup> The original language from the interview is as follows: *Ruangan untuk anak anak yang demen ngerap buat ngumpul aja sih. Biar ngerasa kalo mereka itu ada komunitas dan ga sendirian* (Erik, interview, 31 January 2019).

<sup>34</sup> Ukok, interview, 20 March 2019.

<sup>35</sup> The original language from the interview is as follows: *Anak anak ada yang coba coba jadi kaya Soeharto di Bandung* (Ukok, interview, 20 March 2019).

<sup>36</sup> Ukok, interview, 20 March 2019.

<sup>37</sup> Her research, however, also shows that the overtly masculine rappers did not come from their religious beliefs, but rather their resistance against 'the imposing unified Muslim culture and politics that neglect ethnic and religious diversity of the country' (Golpushnezhad 2017, p. 226).

American rappers' identities, as observed in Iwa Kusuma's 1994 video clip '*Bebas*'. Ucok<sup>38</sup> recalls that many participants performed "...gangster wannabe, Wu-Tang wannabe" characters while ignoring that they came from "Surabaya, not New York" and that they were "high school kids, not criminals". This argument reflects the concept of "triple inauthenticity".<sup>39</sup> In this case, the lack of authenticity demonstrated by young rappers arose from simultaneously simulating a popular music genre from South Bronx while ignoring their East Javanese identity.

The distinction between unionisation and DIY was the second leading source of peer politics. In the early 2000s, many young people argued for the creation of a governing body. Unlike Indonesian punk artists and musicians, who thrived under a DIY philosophy (see Baulch 2002), some rappers instead sought to create a set of guidelines and codes of conduct for Indonesian hip hop.<sup>40</sup> With a union of rappers and other performers, it was suggested that they would have the capital to purchase professional recording equipment, advancing their ability to produce and distribute their songs.<sup>41</sup> This was their attempt to compete against major labels like Sony Music Indonesia, Guest Music and Warner Music, which dominated Indonesia's mainstream hip hop market in the 2000s.<sup>42</sup>

Following their performance at the first national hip hop gathering in Indonesia, Ucok and Aszy of Homicide proclaimed "hip hop is dead!" With those four words, they started the first nationwide hip hop beef in Indonesia, between independent Bandung and Surabaya rappers.

While those words might sound innocuous to outsiders, many rappers saw them as insulting. Those four words represented an offence against their authenticity, their notion of self and their perception of their assumed identities. Bodden (2005) notes that Indonesian rappers, especially in the era directly following Soeharto's New Order regime, saw hip hop as an alternative space for rebels, social outcasts and outlaws. Ucok and Aszy's statement defied

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<sup>38</sup> Ucok, interview, 20 March 2019.

<sup>39</sup> This concept was coined by Oravcová & Slačálek (2019) and builds on Soysal's (2004) concept of double inauthenticity. Double inauthenticity refers to moments when musicians of ethnic minorities take up a foreign musical style (Soysal 2004). Oravcova and Slacalek then expand this concept by applying it into a third dimension: in their study, it was a case of Roman identity in Czech rap.

<sup>40</sup> Ucok, interview, 20 March 2019.

<sup>41</sup> Erik, interview, 31 January 2019.

<sup>42</sup> Further discussion of the idea would suggest that they were trying to create an independent label, as opposed to a governing body. This is a topic of future research I would like to investigate.

these beliefs, and many Surabaya rappers felt that their authenticity was being questioned, despite their efforts to portray themselves as authentic rappers.

Ucok and Aszy's words incensed Surabaya rappers at the gathering.<sup>43</sup> They had travelled nearly sixteen hours by train to Bandung to attend the event. They were tired and did not have the time to process what Ucok and Homicide meant. Wiesa Tamin, better known as IProbz, the leader of Pasukan Records and member of Surabaya hip hop collective XCalibour, was so angered by the statement that he and his friends stormed the stage. This nearly led to a physical confrontation before rappers from Jakarta intervened.<sup>44</sup>

The reactions by both parties resemble what Rose (2008) and Fraley (2009) noted as the overly inflated ego, a heightened view of self and an inability to accept criticism of male rappers. Sekewael's (2016) thesis on expressions of Indonesian identity in popular music reaches a similar conclusion, albeit in a different field. Her investigation on the performativity of gender, class and religion in Indonesian popular music reveals how the social hierarchy ladder that governs the Indonesian communities informs the shape and production of Indonesian popular culture (Sekewael 2016, p. 34).

The way Surabaya rappers responded to the denouncement of their overly macho projections of identity demonstrated their political agency. They were displeased that someone tried to criticise their choices. The hypermasculine sense of self common among Indonesian youth has been well-documented. Nilan's (2009) research on portrayals of masculinity in Indonesian media outlets shows that hypermasculinity is expected of men. For instance, she concludes that Indonesian men are often expected to become "good citizen[s] and dependable provider for the family on the one hand, and on the other hand, to match the fantasy images of global "hypermasculinity"-tough, hard and heroic" (Nilan 2009, p. 339).

From the perspective of brokerage, this case study showcases how Indonesian rappers from the same island (Java) have different understandings of moral codes. These differences of understandings are then brokered through the actions of influential figures from their

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<sup>43</sup> Wiesa, interview, 4 February 2019; Ucok, interview, 20 March 2019.

<sup>44</sup> When I spoke to him in 2019, Wiesa recalls the early 2000s gathering as an adventurous event. He notes that they were "young and dumb" and angered because they felt that their efforts of travelling for more than 18 hours from Surabaya to Bandung by train were disregarded by Ucok, Aszy and DJ-E (Wiesa, interview, 4 February 2019).

respective communities. As I noted earlier, the event was initially peaceful. Even though there were tensions between the participants, there was not any confrontation. In that space, Ucok and Homicide brokered these tensions and brought them to the surface.

### **Young Lex and the outsiders**

While the previous section investigated the state of peer politics in the early 2000s, the present section fast forwards to 2016. Here, we find a new scenario, where older rappers have matured and younger rappers have started to take over the reins. This second historical moment shows a scenario where first- and second-generation rappers (see Chapter 4) demanded respect from their juniors while young Indonesians wanted to create their own norms. This is reflected in the following quote:

At the moment, for me, if we compare, say, the skills, their skills are only 20. I can rap like them, but they cannot rap like me. If we talk about techniques, they're not up to date. Their careers will eventually wither by themselves, and I don't think they can be considered legends.<sup>45</sup>

This statement is taken from a speech by Young Lex (2016), a young Indonesian rapper who, in 2016, was in the early stages of his music career. The speech was captured in an amateur video and published online by an anonymous account. It went viral on all major social media platforms in Indonesia, including Twitter, YouTube and Instagram (Liputan6.com 2016), gathering hundreds of thousands of views in just two days and spawning countless controversies.<sup>46</sup> This event reflected the influence of social media in shaping youth discourse in Indonesia (Lengauer 2018) and demonstrated the fact that political discourse among Indonesian citizens was beginning to occur primarily online (Lim 2014).

Before dissecting how this case study demonstrates another interpretation of peer politics in the independent scene during this era, let us identify the main actors in this case study. Young Lex is a rapper who has been publishing his music videos on the internet since 2012. He comes from the millennial generation of Indonesian rappers. His approach to hip hop and rap

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<sup>45</sup> The original language from the speech is as follows: Bagi gue sekarang, kalo kita bandingin, secara skill, mereka skillnya cuma 20. Gue bisa flow kaya mereka, mereka ga bisa flow kaya gue, kalo kita omongin teknis. Mereka itu ga up-to-date. Mereka bakal mati dengan sendirinya dan mereka bukan sosok yang pantas untuk legend (Young Lex 2016).

<sup>46</sup> As the time of the writing of this section, there were no less than one hundred YouTube videos, popular media articles and songs dedicated to discussing and dissecting the video and the conflicts that came with it.

mirrors the movements of SoundCloud and mumble<sup>47</sup> rappers in the United States. He carefully moulds his public image to be seen as trendy, thuggish<sup>48</sup> and full of swag<sup>49</sup>.

Before he released the video that popularised his name in Indonesian popular culture, Young Lex's musical career did not look promising. He was not (and still is not, according to many rappers that I spoke with) known for his rapping skills. His songs are deemed deficient in quality because of their poor vocal performances. He lacks lyrical proficiency. Iqbal<sup>50</sup>, commonly known as 8Ball, who spoke to me in Bekasi, West Java, says:

Like what I said in my diss track, his music is just terrible. He's a lousy rapper that no one in the rap scene likes. He refuses to learn. He just wants to do his own thing, which is fine, but you can't say you represent Indonesian hip hop if your skills are amateurish.<sup>51</sup>

While previous generations were more likely to engage in physical confrontations than attack one another in their songs<sup>52</sup>, this generation uses diss tracks as a site to contest for peer capital.<sup>53</sup> Criticising fellow rappers through song became a valuable tool for Indonesian rappers seeking to police the scene. Diss tracks have almost become guidelines outlining what independent rappers can and cannot do (Rivers & Ross 2018). They contain the unwritten rules and norms of the independent scene.<sup>54</sup> The problem is that these tracks and songs are personal and non-descriptive. While rappers can continue to self-police the scene by releasing diss tracks against rappers they deem out of line, there is no proper documentation outlining how young up-and-coming rappers can or should act. The standards were never set, and this method lacks consistency (Turner 2017).

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<sup>47</sup> This subgenre features mumbling, unclear vocalisation of lyrics, which contradicts many other previous subgenres of hip hop in Indonesia (for instance, Bodden 2005; Riyanto 2017; Varela 2014; Mohamed Nasir 2018; Roy 2019).

<sup>48</sup> In terms of appearance, Young Lex's body is covered in tattoos that reach up to his neck, an uncommon trait among independent rappers in Indonesia. He wears various gold and diamond accessories in his videos, establishing his allegiance to the public outlaw and gangster imageries common to many US rappers. Young Lex's music also follows the recently-popularise microgenre of hip hop called mumble rap.

<sup>49</sup> Swag is a term in hip hop that has a similar definition to the word cool (Choi 2017). It was popularised by Lil Uzi Vert, Lil Xan, Lil Yachty, A\$ap Rocky, Post Malone and many more.

<sup>50</sup> Interview, 21 February 2019.

<sup>51</sup> The original language from the interview is as follows: Kaya yang gue bilang kemaren, itu anak musiknye emang jelek. Dia rapper yang ga bagus dan ga ada yang suka dia di skena. Dia ga mau belajar. Mau seenaknya aja. Itu ga apa, tapi lo ga bisa bilang lo representasi kita kalo skill lo amatiran.

<sup>52</sup> Ucok, interview, 20 March 2019; Erik, interview, 31 January 2019.

<sup>53</sup> Kojek, interview, 29 January 2019; Tuantigabelas, interview, 31 January 2019.

<sup>54</sup> Gerry, interview, 16 April 2019.



While lack of communication was the main driving force of peer politics in the first case study, the abundant access to communication platforms was the main driving force of peer politics in 2016. More affordable home recording equipment and easier access to online platforms enabled rappers to connect instantly (Kladder 2016).<sup>55</sup> While rappers of previous eras wanted to create institutions to connect, 2016 saw the rise of individualism in popular online platforms, such as Vine, Soundcloud and YouTube (thoroughly explored by Choi 2017).<sup>56</sup>

Controversy, YouTube videos, manufactured beefs and online drama became valuable tools for many aspiring rappers in Indonesia in 2016 and came to represent a new era in Indonesia's independent hip hop scene. Whereas previous generations' social capital was built upon their influence within the scene (for instance, Bodden 2005), the notoriety of this generation was based on the number of clicks, likes and views they received on social media. The intergenerational web of relations of the independent scene had changed as well. Younger rappers no longer needed the support of their seniors to achieve success in the scene. Where rappers of previous eras needed to perform in live shows and create mixtapes, Instagram, Soundcloud, and YouTube are now performance spaces for millennial rappers (Mosley et al. 2017).

Instant gratification has also become the norm in the rap world (Bliss 2019). Rappers can now receive instant feedback from their fans and listeners. Their influence over the masses is even greater than that of rappers of the previous eras. Youngblood (2019) argues that the reach of young up-and-coming rappers, such as Lil Uzi Vert or Lil Xan, through their social media accounts has made them more influential than many established rappers. Globally, the influence of technology and the affordability of communication devices has blurred the distinction between independent and mainstream rappers (Kim & Sung 2019). Independent rappers who can gather followers and fans on various digital platforms are now considered

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<sup>55</sup> This era saw an extensive amount of hip hop tracks published on the digital space, more so than the previous ones.

<sup>56</sup> Millennial rappers no longer need to meet up with one another, which is different to the previous era. The space for performances of Indonesian rappers moved from schools' gymnasiums and alternative performance spaces to the rappers' bedrooms and personal spaces.

celebrities by popular media outlets (Golpushnezhad 2018). This was not the case for previous generations of Indonesian hip hop (see Chapter 4).<sup>57</sup>

In 2016, Young Lex pioneered a series of changes in Indonesia's independent hip hop world. His public persona, musical style and appearance have influenced a new wave of young hip hop performers in Indonesia. Dindot<sup>58</sup>, a young female rapper from the rap duo Lsista, from Jogjakarta, told me that Young Lex is unique in her eyes. For her, Young Lex made hip hop discernible to millennials in Indonesia. She<sup>59</sup> claims that despite his "thuggish look", Young Lex is "...a charismatic rapper who doesn't sound like any other Indonesian rapper but rather an American one".<sup>60</sup> She further claims that in her school "...no one knew who Iwa Kusuma or Saykoji is, but everyone knows Young Lex, SexyGoath or Kemal Palevi"<sup>61</sup>—other rappers who very active on social media platforms.

Using social media for marketing and communications is a key trait of Indonesian millennials (Lengauer 2018). This includes Young Lex and other millennial rappers. At first, I failed to see the connection between YouTube and authenticity.<sup>62</sup> This mindset was also influenced by my early readings of the literature on independent hip hop. As my literature review chapter shows, independent hip hop artists worldwide often rely on the notion of freedom and independence from the big three in the music industry. For instance, independent rappers in the United States claim that they have the freedom to write and rap songs without the limitations that come with having to satisfy a mainstream audience (Skelchy 2017). This notion applied to independent rappers in Indonesia before the current millennial generation.

Millennial rappers such as Young Lex, SexyGoath, Reza Arap and Kemal Palevi are the new leading rappers in Indonesia. Unlike the previous generation, these artists rely heavily on social media platforms and popular news outlets to generate media interest.<sup>63</sup> This is probably

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<sup>57</sup> Before Young Lex, there were only a handful of rappers who were considered celebrities, for instance, Iwa K and Saykoji.

<sup>58</sup> Whom I talked to in a café in the regional area of Sleman in Central Java.

<sup>59</sup> Dindot, interview, 11 April 2019.

<sup>60</sup> Bang Lex itu karismatik banget, suaranya ga kaya rapper Indonesia. Kaya rapper dari Amerika.

<sup>61</sup> Di sekolah ga ada kenal Iwa Kusuma atau Saykoji bang, semua temen temen aku kenal nya Young Lex, SexyGoath atau Kemal Palevi (Dindot, interview, 11 April 2019).

<sup>62</sup> Like many older hip hop heads in this research, I saw hip hop tracks as the only site for the contestation of the abilities of rappers (for instance Rose 1991). It was on how good their rapping skill was, not on how popular they are on the popular media platforms.

<sup>63</sup> Their music and tracks are no longer their primary concerns. Instead, their music became a tool to help boost their popularity.

one of the primary reasons this generation has many so-called “fake rappers”<sup>64</sup>—those who release rap songs online but never perform them offline. However, there are also many promising and talented rappers in the millennial generation. Rappers such as Tuantigabelas, Laze, Joe Million, Pangalo, Mario Zwinkle and G-Brand are successful in the independent scene. While they also use social media platforms to spread their music, they regularly perform at hip hop events around Indonesia. They exist both in the digital and the physical worlds, performing rap and hip hop instead of using it as a tool to make money. Rather than looking at hip hop as a job, they “perform hip hop” in their daily lives.<sup>65</sup>

Iqbal suggests there should be a distinction between rappers and YouTubers in Indonesia.<sup>66</sup> He notes that the line has been blurred since the emergence of Young Lex and his peers. Iqbal argues that the main differences between these two terms are that rappers their elders, learn hip hop deeply and genuinely contribute to the independent hip hop community, while YouTubers tend to ignore their elders, instead merely using hip hop as a tool to accumulate wealth and fame. More importantly, he notes that these many of these YouTubers do not plan to stay in the scene for a long time. They just “...use hip hop and controversies to gain publicity”.<sup>67</sup>

These entertainers are deemed as “selling out” for potential financial gains. For Klein, Meier & Powers (2017, p. 223), sell-out artists are individuals who “as opportunities to align with brands and commercial companies proliferate, and with alternatives seemingly diminishing, ... draw and re-draw lines in order to survive”. Young Lex’s career fits this

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<sup>64</sup> Fake rappers perform rap music as a mean to gain popularity. For these young Indonesians, hip hop and rap are tools that can be utilised to gain both monetary and social capitals. These rappers often release tracks on social media platforms but are never seen performing outside of their bedrooms. They frequently boast their wealth, tattoos and their collections of cars in their music videos, for instance, Young Lex and Ben Utomo.

<sup>65</sup> “Live hip hop” is a term that I borrowed from Erik (also Dimitriadis 2009), or more commonly known as MR EP (Extreme Poetz) of Blakumuh, Native and Probz. Erik (2019) says that several criteria need to be satisfied before one can be considered as “live hip hop”. Among many, some of the most important criteria, according to Erik, are: 1) rappers need to study the history and context of hip hop culture from the States, 2) rappers need to study how hip hop grew in Indonesia, 3) rappers need to perform live in multiple events, both local and national scale, and, 4) rappers need to respect their elders and peers.

<sup>66</sup> The original language from the interview is as follows: Rapper sama youtuber beda sih Will. Orang orang banyak yang ngerap buat nyari fame doang. Habis itu uda hilang aja dari hip hop. Makanya kita mesti bedain itu dua (Iqbal, interview, 21 February 2019).

<sup>67</sup> The original language from the interview is as follows: *Make hip hop dan kontroversi buat nyari beken doang* (Iqbal, interview, 21 February 2019).

description. Young Lex transitioned from rapper to YouTuber in 2017, just one short year after his controversy.<sup>68</sup> He has since built an entertainment empire that bypasses the need for support from the independent hip hop scene.<sup>69</sup> His approach to hip hop differs from that of the previous generations. In sum, Young Lex is the perfect embodiment of Indonesian “[h]ip hopreneurs” (Romero 2012, p. 95).

In Indonesia, established rappers in the independent hip hop scene regard total obedience towards US hip hop trends as an inauthentic stance. Thus, Udet told me that Indonesian rap songs about shootings, gang killings and pimping are “inauthentic”.<sup>70</sup> He notes that none of these young rappers are who they say they are. Those who say they are gangsters because they have tattoos and expensive cars might still live with their parents and never held a job, let alone sold drugs.<sup>71</sup> Young Lex performs as an outsider to the scene, an outsider to mainstream Indonesian society in the digital world, and Jakarta’s local hip hop community.

Young Lex attracted controversy because he refused to follow his “seniors” directives. Instead of conforming, he created a new stream of independent hip hop that did not rely on the established norms of the scene (Carter & Welsh 2019). Young Lex was the first rapper to independently monetise his music through a YouTube persona. Soon after him, many others followed. The following section will present a case study from 2018, where the commercialisation of hip hop culture in Indonesia by millennials faced a strong opposition by more established hip hop performers.

Following the framework of brokerage, this case study adds how the refusal of a controversial figure elevates their status from an outsider to a broker. While the broker might

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<sup>68</sup> While he still releases songs on a somewhat regular basis (roughly once every three to six months), performing live is no longer his main priority.

<sup>69</sup> Like his numerous claims, he has indeed become a ‘king’ of his Lex Sugar (the name of his fans club) estate. His YouTube channels, at the writing of the thesis on the 2nd of June 2020, has nearly 3 million subscribers and nearly 500 million views. He also has nearly 2 million followers on Instagram. Following the footsteps of prominent rappers-turned-businessmen in the US such as Dr Dre and 50Cent, Young Lex owns 100 Management (artist management company), 100 Music (music and production house), Personamu (handcrafted artsy accessories) and Selalu Cair (a vape liquid company).

<sup>70</sup> The original language from the interview is as follows: Di Indonesia itu ga ada lah tembak tembak. Bacok bacokan ya mungkin ada, Cuma anak anak menurut gue ga ada sih yang kaya gitu (interview, 31 January 2019).

<sup>71</sup> The original language from the interview is as follows: Kebanyakan anak anak ini masih bocah yang tinggal sama bonyoknya lho. Tattooan sok sokan beken tapi masih make duit ortu.

not have the same soft power as others, they are able to harness the power of exposure and bring about changes to the scene.

### **Rap between commercialisation and authenticity**

The third and final case study I examine is the 2018 conflict between Xaqhala and Ben Utomo. This example demonstrates how the process of commercialisation by millennials triggered a strong reaction from their elders, despite those elders having engaged in similar processes earlier in their careers (see Chapter 4). This disagreement between Xaqhala and Ben Utomo was perhaps the biggest feud ever in Indonesian hip hop.<sup>72</sup> Ben Utomo represents Jakarta-based Allday Records, while Xaqhala is signed to Hellhouse Records of Jogjakarta. The conflict between these two rappers eventually affected their two powerful labels as well. Before this, conflicts only occurred in the digital space and only involved the two rappers or groups directly involved. This feud, however, impacted rappers from all corners of Indonesia.<sup>73</sup> Tuantigabelas<sup>74</sup> says that this feud was the first that required other rappers to pick sides.<sup>75</sup>

According to many Indonesian hip hop enthusiasts and journalists, this beef began with a slight disagreement about the definition of “hip hop battle”.<sup>76</sup> In 2018, Ben Utomo, Eitaro and AllDay Music held a rap competition titled “Beef Rap Battle”<sup>77</sup> recorded and aired on YouTube. It was the first of its kind. The competition held auditions from all around

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<sup>72</sup> It triggered many online and offline disputes between people trying to fight for either side, including many Youtube videos, diss tracks, popular media articles. Presently (25<sup>th</sup> of August 2020), there are hundreds of artifacts addressing this controversy.

<sup>73</sup> The original language from the interview is as follows: Ini semua anak anak hip hop masuk sih. Pada berantem semua, ada yang belain Gerry, ada yang belain Ben (Udet, interview, 31 January 2019).

<sup>74</sup> Interview, 31 January 2019.

<sup>75</sup> The original language from the interview is as follows: Gile men, lo mesti milih belain Hellhouse atau Allday. Anak anak yang ga mihak siapa siapa bisa di serang juga.

<sup>76</sup> The original language from the interview is as follows: Kompetisi Beef Rap Battle, Momentum Kebangkitan Industri Musik Hip Hop di Indonesia 2018.

<sup>77</sup> The format of the competition follows that of the American Idol. Participants were asked to register and attend the physical screening process in Jakarta. In the audition, participants were then asked to perform their songs without any backing tracks. The panel of judges then selected 32 contestants to ‘battle’ in the next round of the competition. Each ‘battle round’ saw eliminations of the bottom two contestants until there were only four contestants left for the grand finale of the season (‘8 Lagu Baru di 8 Besar Kompetisi “Beef Rap Battle”’ 2019).

Indonesia. The selected finalists then faced the scrutiny of a panel of judges.<sup>78</sup> The event winner won a music video deal, a recording contract and a significant sum of money.<sup>79</sup>

Martin-Iverson's (2012) research on “underground musicians” entrepreneurial activities in Indonesia helps contextualise this event. His research argues that commercialising such popular culture products, even those categorised as “underground” products, is inevitable (Martin-Iverson 2012, p. 388). It is a natural path of progression, as the participants in a given subculture hope to live off their craft. These “underground” performers are often highly educated individuals (Martin-Iverson 2012; Bodden 2005). Creating businesses that offer the possibility of earning a living outside of the mainstream market’s constraints is the aim of these people.<sup>80</sup>

Aside from the issue of the commodification of hip hop, the show was successful. However, Gerry was among the many who were not satisfied with the event’s concept. When I spoke to Gerry<sup>81</sup>, he said that he did not mind the event itself; in fact, he fully supported the event. Gerry’s problem was that this event was turned into a talent-search competition instead of a rap battle—a rap adaptation of “...Indonesian Idols? Fantasy Academy of Indosiar? Indonesian Dangdut Contest”.<sup>82</sup>

The first argument Gerry<sup>83</sup> strongly emphasised in his response to the event was the event’s concept and execution. Although Allday Music’s event was titled “Beef Rap Battle”, he pointed out that he could not find any traces of such a “battle”. During the weeks leading up to the final round, participants were asked to perform their original tracks. They did not “battle” each other until the grand final stage. Participants were also not placed face-to-face,

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<sup>78</sup> The panel consisted of Iwa K, Saykoji and Laze. These judges represented three generations of Indonesian hip hop: Iwa K as the pioneer of Indonesian hip hop, Saykoji who was at the height of his career in the 2000s and Laze who is one of the best young millennial-era rappers in Indonesia.

<sup>79</sup> Brayen MC, the winner of the first season, won Rp 100,000,000 (AUD\$10,000). He also acquired a music video deal and opportunities to collaborate with both Eitaro and Ben Utomo. In the following months, he was signed by Allday Music Records.

<sup>80</sup> The original language from the interview is as follows: Mau underground kek, apa kek, lo perlu nyari duit juga. Waktu muda mungkin bisa idealis ya, tapi kalo uda punya keluarga, ya lo mesti ada pendapatan. Disini kita coba untuk nyari rezeki diluar kontrol pasar mainstream (Ucok, interview, 20 March 2019).

<sup>81</sup> Interview, 16 April 2019.

<sup>82</sup> The original language from the interview is as follows: Event apaan coba? Ini mah mereka cuma nyari talent doang. Rap di jadiin kaya Indonesian Idols? Akademi Fantasi Indosiar? Kontes Dangdut Indonesia? (Gerry, interview, 16 April 2019).

<sup>83</sup> Interview, 16 April 2019.

which is usually common practice in rap battles.<sup>84</sup> Indeed, the show was an “idol competition” (Coutas 2006) wrapped in hip hop packaging.

Gerry also explained that the event heavily favoured rappers who were marketable over those who had strong rapping skills. While facial and body appearances were not as crucial as other popular talent shows, Beef Rap Battle did not favour those who were good at battling.<sup>85</sup>

Despite framing the event as a show to find the best battle rapper in Indonesia, Allday Records instead tried to find talent to sign. He used an example of a young rapper named Bacil Kill. He notes that Bacil Kill was among the best battle rappers he had ever seen in Indonesia, but Bacil did not make it to the elimination round. He<sup>86</sup> surmised that Bacil Kill was already signed to Hellhouse Records, thus not making him a prospective participant for Allday Records.<sup>87</sup>

Under the pen name Gusgercoy, Gerry compared the practices of battle rap in the US and how Beef Rap Battle did not represent the concept. He took on the legendary battle of Kool Moe Dee of the legendary Treacherous Three and Busy Bee Starski.<sup>88</sup> In his article, Gerry argued that the event was not a battle rap event but rather a talent search and a marketing campaign for Allday Music Production. He accused the producers of the event of “selling out” hip hop for profit. The supposed “prize” of the event was to collaborate and be signed by Allday Music.

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<sup>84</sup> Instead, participants performed in a sequential order without facing one another or even addressing the main ideas of their opponents’ songs. Each week, there were performances by famous Indonesian rappers and collaborations of participants with either the judges or other famous Indonesian rappers.

<sup>85</sup> In this case, the name did not represent the event. Instead, the producers favoured those who can write marketable songs. This decision does make much sense (Gerry, interview, 16 April 2019). Allday Records signed rappers who were in the top four.

<sup>86</sup> Interview, 16 April 2019.

<sup>87</sup> The original language from the interview is as follows: Si Bacil dari Surabaya ga masuk lho. Kamu bayangin deh, ini anak battle di luar sana ga pernah kalah, terus mereka bilang dia ga pinter ngerap? Ada ada aja kan.

<sup>88</sup> The later was a young star and had performed with legendary artists such as the Grandmaster Flash, Melle Mel, Afrika Bambaataa and Kool DJ AJ. Busy Bee was arrogant, claiming himself as the king of battle rap, and that no one in the world is better than him. He knew that Kool Moe Dee was in the crowd, and he purposefully did that. His youth arrogance got the best of him. The offended Kool Moe Dee did not take the insult lightly. As opposed to panelling and being an impartial jury to the battle, Kool Moe Dee joined the battle as a participant. When they both reached the grand final stage, Busy Bee was destroyed by Kool Moe Dee. Kool Moe Dee pointed out all of Busy Bee’s rapping flaws and his arrogance in that well-documented hip hop battle.

Commercialising hip hop as a product for mainstream consumption did not sit well with independent rappers in Indonesia. The resistance towards Beef Rap Battle, first articulated by Gerry in his article, spread throughout Indonesia's independent hip hop scene. Gerry's article was shared on Instagram, Twitter, Facebook and YouTube. It attracted so much controversy that even mainstream media outlets began publishing articles about the conflict. While the previous case studies saw conflicts between the same generation (Bandung vs Surabaya rappers) and between generations (Young Lex vs Everybody), this one was a mixture of both.

This case study demonstrates that some types of brokerages are primarily about money. As we have just seen, when Indonesian rappers feud about money, this reveals the gulf between the healthy financial situation of established rappers versus the difficulties of aspiring rappers. This can impact not just those who are directly involved in the feud, but also the larger communities surrounding them.

## **Conclusion**

The core issue in the case studies presented in this chapter is not the differences in understandings of the procedures of rap battles and hip hop culture but rather the internal politics of Indonesian rappers. The presented case studies show groups attempting to assert dominance over one another. This exaggerated masculinity is common among Indonesian youth in a post-New Order context (Boellstorff 2004). The resistance and hesitancy of older rappers to change their perceptions of authenticity perhaps stemmed from how they saw themselves as outlaws in the 1990s (Bodden 2005, p. 17, see Chapter 4). Their fight to hold onto leadership of the scene and uphold their seniority over new rappers is the core of peer politics.

As with US rappers (Rose 2008) after the Golden Era of American hip hop (Vito 2019), senior Indonesian rappers are faced with the fact that their time has passed and that trends have changed. Although their peer politics initially stemmed from the differences between the understandings of the moral norms between Bandung and Surabaya, they have shifted their attention to the commercialisation of hip hop. Like Orosz's (2019) research on the sociocultural implications of hip hop and country music in the United States, I found that younger rappers in Indonesia are hesitant to follow the footsteps of their elders. While trying to reinvent their own perceptions of hip hop, however, they are doing exactly what their



elders did during the 1990s. Following Khabeer (2018), I found peer politics of Indonesian rappers to be processes of “reclaiming and remaking” spaces according to popular trends.

In a sense, the peer politics of Indonesian hip hop could be looked at as the repression of weaker groups by the stronger parties (Yasih 2017). As younger people enter the scene, they find themselves on the bottom of the ladder. As they ascend the Indonesian hip hop hierarchy, they perform identity politics that alienate those who come after them (Heryanto 2008). This finding indicates a similar trend in other forms of Indonesian popular culture. Ironically, those “outlaws” who started rapping to fight against the New Order regime have established their own power structure and refused to let go of the reins.

This chapter also adds to the discussion of brokerage, especially on the issue of how certain rappers attain the position of broker. As I have shown here, the differences between the understandings of moral codes, seniorities, financial issues and authenticity can be a catalyst of peer politics. My analysis of peer politics sheds light on the process of transformation from being an ordinary, and relatively powerless, scene participant into a broker who holds considerably more power and is able to bring about change.

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## **Chapter 6 Leftist politics**

Recently, there has been a growing discourse on leftist activism and empowerment in hip hop (for instance, Bliss 2019; Oravcová & Slačálek 2019; Nasir 2020). While empowerment is an integral part of a community's ability to continue developing and improving its population's lives, it is often insufficient (Gregory 1993; Amrani 2019). Feeling like one will be heard and can make a difference is often more critical. This is where activism and directed change come together. Directed change can include spreading information about the inequality between populations, going out into the world, and changing society's mindset (Armstead 2007). It can be a grassroots movement with ideas and contributions from within the community, bringing together conventions and inventions to create a new system, or work to allow the community to function independently, without much influence or interference from outside groups (Ebels-Duggan 2010).

In the early 1970s, rap music gave oppressed and neglected groups opportunities to express their concerns, reach those outside their communities and have their worries and messages heard (Rose 1991). As rap became commercially successful, its artists realised the reach they suddenly had and began utilising it to its full potential. One of the early effects of this increased reach was the development of rap scenes in urban centres of the United States like Los Angeles, Detroit and Chicago. Each of these cities and scenes developed their own unique approaches to telling their communities' stories. For instance, Carney, Hernandez and Wallace (2016) observed how female American rappers used their celebrity status to help create and maintain the feminist movement on social media.

Outside of the US, Ratner (2019, p. 95) proposes that black Israeli-Ethiopian youth using their music as a way to make space for themselves among "white" Israelis. Here, hip hop is used as a tool to recall their ancestral heritage and as an expression of protest against mainstream beliefs. In Singapore, Malaysia and Indonesia, for instance, Nasir (2020) writes that hip hop is used as a backdrop to resist the negative perceptions placed upon Muslims because of the 9/11 terrorist attacks. Here, the focus is on distinguishing between differing streams of Islam. This is not always fruitful. Golpushnezhad (2018) writes that attempts to legitimise hip hop as a medium of protest in Iran attracted instead unwanted attention from the local government.

Harlow and Benbrook's (2019) research on the use of hip hop show how artists use their music to promote the #blacklivesmatter movement. In their research, they argue that rappers and other hip hop celebrities helped to legitimise the cause in the eyes of mainstream media and audiences. In doing so, they argue that these people were fundamental in creating the solidarity and commitment necessary for collective action. Korean rappers also behave in a similar manner. Kim & Sung (2019, p. 9) argue that Korean youth follow rappers and other hip hop celebrities because they help create a counter-narrative to mainstream Korean beliefs, allowing them to hope for a better future for themselves.

Soeharto's New Order regime fell in May 1998. In the aftermath of this event, there was a power struggle between three prominent cultural patrons: Islamist groups, military-affiliated politicians and populist leftist secular youths (Robison & Hadiz 2017). These groups fought over ideology and beliefs, and this fight spilled over into Indonesian popular culture.

Journalists often associated rap songs and hip hop groups with specific ideologies, depicting them as the dominant voice of opposition in Indonesia (for instance, Bodden 2005). This demonstrates how rap music, despite being a tiny market at the time, presents an opportunity to study narratives of cultural resistance in a post-dictatorship setting and a Muslim-majority country like Indonesia.

Among these three aforementioned cultural giants, the Islamist groups have the largest following. Their membership primarily consists of working-class adults who live in regional areas. As we know now (in 2021), these Islamic groups have successfully integrated and immersed themselves into the community. Let's examine Bandung, the city where the participants of this research live and which was known as the epicentre of Indonesia's underground hardcore music scene. Presently, it hosts the largest concentration of right-wing conservative Muslims in the country. In his research on the adoption of punk and hardcore music by Islamic youth in Bandung, Saefullah (2017) argues that leftist groups in Bandung were unsuccessful in their struggle for power in the region following the fall of the New Order era. Despite mostly being university-educated, Saefullah's research shows that leftists failed to consolidate power due to the high social and economic costs of maintaining such an underground culture and ideology.

Most Indonesian rappers in the early 2000s were highly educated, well-connected individuals. This was because they were the only people privileged enough to access hip hop

and other so-called “forbidden materials”.<sup>89</sup> For instance, Ucok, a leftist rapper who is the main case study of this chapter, is a university graduate with two separate degrees from Bandung’s most prominent universities. His first degree was in English Literature from Padjajaran University and his second was in Arts and Graphic Design from the Bandung Institute of Technology. Another example is Yani Oktaviana (or Yacko), a prominent Indonesian rapper of the early 2000s. She graduated from Trisakti University, Jakarta, with a Bachelor in Management; from Edith Cowan University, in Perth, Australia, with a double degree; from the University of Wollongong, Australia, with a Master of Business Administration; and from the University of Sydney with a Graduate Diploma of Applied Science.<sup>90</sup> The experiences of Ucok and Yacko go some way to explaining why their fight for power was unsuccessful: their positions were too distant from the general population, for whom higher education and overseas travel were unreachable dreams.

Despite that, this chapter argues that Indonesian rappers in Bandung set a precedent for resistance and protest still followed by many Indonesian rappers and hip hop enthusiasts today. To do so, this chapter studies the leftist politics of Bandung-based rap collective Homicide. This is a post-mortem study of the group, as it disbanded in 2007. Although the group has been defunct for many years, I propose that it remains an important example of a counter-discourse movement during one of Indonesia’s most tumultuous sociopolitical periods (Heryanto & Hadiz 2005). As an independent, leftist hip hop group from the outskirts of Bandung, the epicentre of the rise of right-wing conservatism in Indonesia, following the fall of the New Order regime (in 1998), Homicide’s story provides an insight into the dynamics of neighbourhoods in which right- and left-wing ideologies clashed during the Reform era. This chapter focuses on Homicide’s song ‘Puritan’, released in 2002. Here, I found that the group expressed several concerns, which I grouped into three subcategories: conservative-backed violence, conservatism and the army, and conservative-influenced education.

Before we start, I would like to briefly introduce leftist hip hop in Indonesia in order to set the context for this study.

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<sup>89</sup> Ucok, interview, 20 March 2019.

<sup>90</sup> Yacko, interview, 20 February 2019.

### Leftist rap in Indonesia

In Indonesia's Reform era, repressive actions aimed at erasing leftist ideologies and left history (Heryanto 2016) in Indonesian popular culture span beyond coverage in mainstream newspapers, TV channels and radio shows. The New Order regime was able to censor leftist thought and manipulate history through its official channels, like mandatory yearly screenings of the *G30S/PKI* movie and the mandatory civic education classes<sup>91</sup> for young people enrolled in the state education system. The current central government in Jakarta has evolved these methods further. They use alternative tactics, including violent vigilantism and *preman* (thugs) under the veil of religious conservatism, to successfully navigate the post-authoritarian era (Wilson 2015).

Indonesia's underground and DIY music scenesters and artists perform as the mainstream scene's counterculture (Wallach 2002). While portraying their scenes as spaces where forbidden ideologies banned in the mainstream can thrive, they also serve as host to many grassroots groups that resist the government's seemingly tight grip on all aspects of life in Indonesia. As such, Indonesia's underground music scene is perhaps the best breeding ground for resistance movements. The scene's embrace of alternative views of society and a self-reliant culture (Baulch 2002a, 2002b; Saefullah 2017; Wallach 2003) provide an appropriate environment for such sentiment, even if not every scenester follows such ideology. Some underground bands and artists have promoted the regime's propaganda materials, such as Cokelat and its hit song '*Bendera*' (Flag), released one year before '*Puritan*' (2002).

Explicitly sociopolitical rap songs were rare in Indonesia in the early 2000s. While rappers had been trying to insert their concerns into their songs since Iwa K's '*Bebas*' (1993), many preferred to utilise metaphors and stories without directly referring to the actors or events they were protesting. For instance, Iwa uses metaphors such as sewer rats to describe corrupt politicians ('*Tikus Got*' – Iwa K 1993) and worms to describe poverty ('*Cuma Ulat*' – Iwa K 1995). As a result, the interpretation of these songs can differ between listeners, and between listener and artist (Eckstein 2010).<sup>92</sup>

This less explicit approach to politics was understandable during that period as the ruling regime did not allow dissenting views to circulate in popular culture. Censorship of music

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<sup>91</sup> PPKN (Pendidikan Kewarganegaraan).

<sup>92</sup> Iwa, interview, 18 March 2019.

and other media was common, and any suggestion of social and political ills was suppressed.<sup>93</sup> Blakumuh, a rap duo from Jakarta involved in the first iteration of *Pesta Rap* (1995), was the first group to address the social issues that plagued Jakarta during the decline of the New Order regime in the early 1990s in their song ‘*Kaum Kumuh*’ (Slum Dwellers) (Blakumuh 1995 in *Pesta Rap 1*). However, members Doyz and Erik could not be explicit in the song as their record label did not permit them to write provocative lyrics.<sup>94</sup>

*Perspektif* by Doyz (2002) and *Godzkillla Necronometry* by Homicide (2002) were two of the most important political rap albums in Indonesia in the early 2000s.<sup>95</sup> They both played a significant role in revolutionising rap as a medium of protest after the New Order era. Like Rhoma Irama and his protest songs of the 1970s and 1980s (Frederick 1982), these two albums demonstrated how rap can be used as uncensored media where differing ideologies coexist. This was and still is important because the transition from a hard authoritarian regime to a soft authoritarian regime did not significantly diminish the central government’s power. Instead, some have argued that the government following the New Order military regime has considerably more power than Soeharto did (e.g. Chacko & Jayasuriya 2018; Jayasuriya 2018).

Officially, the government can order the removal of unapproved material from mainstream circulation. However, this was not the concern of independent artists and musicians, who did not rely on mainstream channels. Instead, they worried about the government’s use of militia organisations, such as *Front Pembela Islam*, or FPI (Islamic Defenders Front), *Forum Betawi Rembug*, or FBR (Betawi Brotherhood Forum) and *Pemuda Pancasila* (Pancasila Youths), to remove such material forcibly.<sup>96</sup> These militia use violent methods to covertly assist the current regime in taking illegal, repressive action against its opponents (Wilson 2006, 2015).

Since the fall of the New Order regime, leftist ideals have migrated from the mainstream media and formal institutions to underground and independent spaces. Further, the grassroots, familial approach of many underground scenes in Indonesia (Baulch 2002b; Bodden 2005)

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<sup>93</sup> Doyz, interview, 23 March 2019.

<sup>94</sup> Erik, interview, 31 January 2019.

<sup>95</sup> Yacko, interview, 20 February 2019; Tuantigabelas, interview, 31 January 2019.

<sup>96</sup> Yacko, interview, 20 February 2019; Doyz, interview, 23 March 2019; Gerry, interview, 16 April 2019.

helps to protect scene members from the government's official and unofficial reach.<sup>97</sup>

Bandung-based record label Grimloc Records is one of the few organisations that upholds and spreads such ideology.

### **Ucok, Homicide & Grimloc: a rebel collective**

Herry Sutresna, better known as Ucok, is a rapper, visual artist, producer and self-proclaimed social rebel.<sup>98</sup> He is an accomplished rapper who has been active in the Bandung hip hop scene since the late 1980s. Throughout his career, he has released four albums with Homicide (in 2002, 2004, 2006, 2008), one album with Bars of Death (in 2020), one collaboration album with Doyz (in 2018) and a solo album titled *Fateh* (in 2020). He is also the chairman and co-founder of Grimloc Records, a record label specialising in various “underground” music (by the definition of Wallach & Clinton 2013).

Rightfully considered one of the most prominent music labels in Indonesia, Grimloc Record's philosophy differs from other Indonesian hip hop labels. While other labels have tried to imitate the work ethic of US labels, Grimloc Records symbolises the do-it-yourself philosophy prominent among Bandung punks (James & Walsh 2015), many of whom have been deeply involved in the label since its inception. Grimloc Records releases not only hip hop, but a mix of underground and independent bands and musicians, including Balcony (emocore/screamo), Bars of Death (hip hop), Jeruji (punk) and more. Grimloc also publishes several community-funded publications that promote grassroots and independent movements, such as *Suara Rakyat*, *Surat Revolusi* and *Karya Tani*. Ucok himself has been featured as a freelance writer in some of Indonesia's most notable publications, including *Kompas*, *Rolling Stone Indonesia*, *Detik*, *Vice* and more.

Ucok is a self-proclaimed rebel and anarchist who is critical of government policies that champion economic growth at all costs. He<sup>99</sup> believes the central government's role in Indonesia is a “...useless and solely parasitic relationship where the people are being exploited for the benefits of the minority elites”. He sees himself as the voice of the oppressed. There are a few particular groups that Ucok, Homicide and Grimloc represent. Perhaps the most specific one is the *komunitas tani*, or the farming communities. According

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<sup>97</sup> Ucok, interview, 20 March 2019.

<sup>98</sup> Ucok, interview, 20 March 2019.

<sup>99</sup> Ucok, interview, 20 March 2019.

to Ucok and his colleagues, this segment of the Indonesian population is one of Indonesia's most oppressed communities.

His involvement in various communities and groups enabled his transformation into a broker. As explained by Bräuchler et al. (2021), a broker is someone whose influence allows them to mediate between individuals and organisations. Although based in Bandung, West Java, Ucok's influence spanned across the archipelago. Furthermore, by using his status as a prominent musician, he was able to bridge the fields of arts, politics and policy.

Ucok believes that Indonesia's economic and foreign policies have "let many people down, especially those who want to live their lives uninterrupted by the central government".<sup>100</sup> He further notes that Indonesia's focus on economic growth has seen rapid deforestation and removal of traditional land ownership from the land's original settlers by both the local and central government. Ucok argues that this endangers Indonesia's future cultural growth and that these issues are "more important than the bullshit authenticity and whose-genitals-are-larger debates among rappers".<sup>101</sup> His songs and activism often mention these issues and have successfully brought them to his audience, both mainstream and underground.

Before forming Homicide, Ucok was active in Bandung's underground music scene. He recalled his first gig as "up-and-close with the audience, singing Black Flag's<sup>102</sup> 'Rise Above' and swinging our fists in the air as signs of resistance".<sup>103</sup> Since middle school, he has performed with many punk and hardcore bands. Back then, however, he never performed hip hop. He noted that there was no hip hop scene in Bandung at the time; hardcore and punk were the focus of young people in the late 1970s and early 1980s. He further notes that it was "challenging" and "almost impossible" to find other hip hop enthusiasts in Bandung because hip hop was considered "weak" and "girly" among young people (Bodden 2005).

According to Ucok<sup>104</sup>, such sentiment stemmed from local radio stations only broadcasting the songs of LL Cool J and other mainstream US rappers. These songs were considered soft and "not extreme enough (*kurang garang*)" for local Bandung youth. Ucok did not engage

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<sup>100</sup> Ucok, interview, 20 March 2019.

<sup>101</sup> Ucok, interview, 20 March 2019.

<sup>102</sup> Black Flag is a punk group from the US.

<sup>103</sup> Ucok, interview, 20 March 2019.

<sup>104</sup> Interview, 20 March 2019.



with hip hop until he met his longtime songwriting partner, Aszy, in a local music competition held by a KFC Indonesia branch. These two young rappers formed a group called Verbal Homicide, which later transformed into Homicide in 1994. The legacy of Homicide: 1994 to 2007

Homicide was formed in Bandung in 1994 by Ucok, Aszy, Adolf and Kiki. When Ucok disbanded the group in 2007, the final lineup consisted of Ucok, Ridwan, and Andre. Over its 13-year career, Homicide was considered by many Indonesian hip hop enthusiasts as one of the few groups to influence social change in the Indonesian scene after the New Order regime. Instead of following the government-sponsored popular culture products of both pre- and post-Reform era governments (for instance, TVRI or information from the government's official channels) (Heryanto 2018) and producing songs for mass consumption, Homicide chose the underground scene.

The group was notorious for its anti-government and anti-establishment messages. It released four studio albums: *Godzilla Necronometry* (2002), *Barisan Nisan* (2004), *The Nekrophone Dayz* (2006) and *Illsurrekshun* (2008). Due to logistical issues, the group's last studio album was released after it disbanded. While its following was not massive in terms of numbers, the group still commands great authority nearly 13 years after its disbandment and is regarded as one of the "foundational pillars of underground hip hop in Indonesia" and "influential in establishing Bandung's hip hop scene" (Zufar 2021).

Two of Homicide's most essential characteristics are their experimental backing track composition and labyrinthine lyrics. Ucok<sup>105</sup> says that his compositions are "hip hop, freestyle and free-flowing" that consist of samples of "tracks, songs, speeches and sounds" around them. Their tracks differ significantly from one to the next, even within the confines of one album. Homicide's backing tracks are often experimental and resemble the styles of Public Enemy, Wu-Tang Clan and Company Flow. Ucok and Aszy's lyrics are heavily influenced by Immortal Technique, The Last Poets, Gill Scott-Heron and Rakim. Their lyrical flow resembles 1980s hip hop tracks by Kool G Rap and Cypress Hill.

Similar to Immortal Technique, one of the most famous left-wing US rappers, most of Homicide's lyrics follow a linear, almost storytelling-like structure. In the early 2000s,

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<sup>105</sup> Interview, 20 March 2019.

Homicide was the only Indonesian hip hop outfit to use such a songwriting style. In contrast, almost all other hip hop outfits followed the familiar verse-chorus-verse structure of pop music. Zufar (2021) argues that Homicide was only the second Indonesian hip hop act, independent or mainstream, to explicitly address various sociopolitical issues without masking them in metaphor. The first Jakarta native Doyz, on his album *Perspektif*, released in early 2002, a few months before Homicide's 2002 album *Godzilla Necronometry*.

Most of Homicide's lyrics are written in Indonesian. Only two songs—'Altar Ruins' and 'From Ashes Rise', both from the album *Godzilla Necronometry* (Homicide 2002)—were written in English. However, as pointed out by Zufar (2021), the group's earlier collaborative work had been a mix of both English and Bahasa Indonesia. For instance, the band collaborated on a song titled 'United Fist', released on Puppen's (1998) album *MK-2*. Homicide also collaborated with Balcony (2003), a Bandung-native hardcore band, on a joint album titled *Hymne Penghitam Langit dan Prosa Tanpa Tuhan*, or *A Hymn that Darkens the Sky and the Godless Prose*. Ucok<sup>106</sup> told me that English was used in Homicide's earlier works because it signified the group's authenticity. It was a proof that the group was taking on the "original" style of hip hop and not just a blatant copy of US rap groups. Regarding the shift from English to Indonesian, he said the group noticed that using Indonesia's national language forced them to think harder and smarter, as "this language was more difficult to use for complicated sentence structures".<sup>107</sup> Also, using Indonesian meant that they couldn't conceal their protest messages anymore.<sup>108</sup>

The legacy of Homicide is also another signifier of its impact on both the underground and mainstream Indonesian hip hop scene. Despite only releasing four studio albums, Homicide's music remains central and often included in various lists of the best Indonesian music (for instance, Rolling Stone 2007). Many rap artists who followed Homicide cite the group's work as a core influence. Mario Zwinkle<sup>109</sup>, one of Indonesia's young up and coming rappers from Jogjakarta, considers Homicide to be "the best lyricists in Indonesia". Blakumuh

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<sup>106</sup> Interview, 20 March 2019.

<sup>107</sup> Ucok, interview, 20 March 2019.

<sup>108</sup> Aszy, interview, 27 March 2019.

<sup>109</sup> Interview, 14 April 2019.

member Erik<sup>110</sup> argues that Homicide was (and still is) “the most important Indonesian rap group to have ever graced the Indonesian hip hop scene”.

For millennial rappers, Homicide’s songs were “imperative because of their lyrical compositions”<sup>111</sup>, “perhaps the first Indonesian rap group to sample such wide ranges of sounds, not just music but also speeches and news clips”<sup>112</sup>, and “the first group to ever touch more sensitive issues such as land reclamations, political killings and police brutalities without trying to hide behind their lyrics”<sup>113</sup>. Homicide impacted not only the younger generation but also those who came before them. Iwa K<sup>114</sup> told me it is “difficult to imagine where Indonesian hip hop will be now if Homicide, Ucok and Grimloc did not release any music in 2002”. He also says that Homicide is “by far the most vital rap group in Indonesia since I started rapping in the late 1980s”.

### **‘Puritan’ and religious fanatics**

To help capture the importance of Homicide and how the group helped establish leftist hip hop in Indonesia, this chapter analyses ‘Puritan’, a song from Homicide’s first studio album *Godzkillla Necronometry* (2002). This song was chosen because of its sociopolitical significance. It received so much backlash from many groups who were offended by it. Ucok<sup>115</sup> told me that they titled the song ‘Puritan’ because Homicide was increasingly disturbed by the often violent and misguided attacks by conservative Muslims against followers of other religions in Bandung. These religious fanatics (of both Sunni and Shia denominations) also attacked Muslims who followed other Islamic teachings, such as Ahmadiyya. Ucok<sup>116</sup> argues that these people were simply “thugs in turbans” who used religion to cover their domestic terrorism operations. Ucok was not condemning Islam but rather the fanatics who use it to influence people and promote violence.

Additionally, while the release of ‘Puritan’ less than a year after the September 11 attacks might seem to indicate a larger sociopolitical backdrop of the time, this was not necessarily

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<sup>110</sup> Interview, 31 January 2019.

<sup>111</sup> Randy, interview, 26 March 2019.

<sup>112</sup> Joe, interview, 19 June 2020.

<sup>113</sup> Krowbar, interview, 7 August 2020.

<sup>114</sup> Interview, 18 March 2019.

<sup>115</sup> Interview, 20 March 2019.

<sup>116</sup> Interview, 20 March 2019.

the case.<sup>117</sup> Ucok told me that the group wrote the song in 1996 but was not in a financial position to record and release the song until 2002. Rather than writing, recording and releasing the song as a response to the terrorist attack and a reflection of politicised Islam in the country, the timing was simply a coincidence. Ucok notes that while the September 11 attack was a key political event in many countries, the attack was not as emblematic in Indonesia: the event did not embolden fundamentalist Muslims as they were, and still are, the most powerful group in the country.

### **Conservatism and violence**

The first concern of Homicide's leftist politics was the rise of violence acts conducted in the name of conservative Islam. This is significant as Homicide's hometown, Bandung, was the epicentre of Indonesia's right wing religious extremism (Wilson 2015). Presently, the city is the headquarter of many Islamic organisations that also serve as local militias and unofficial police forces employed by the local and central governments, with members often consisting of "local thugs", "drug lords" and "domestic terrorists".<sup>118</sup> For Ucok and Aszy, Bandung has become a crucial battleground where clashing ideologies and politics are "waging war against each other daily" and "the common people are both the actors and victims of such wars" (also see Saefullah 2017).<sup>119</sup> The present reality of Bandung residents and other Indonesians is described in the first verse of 'Puritan':

Just like how humans pray to their Gods  
Cut their heads off before you question them  
Legitimising all themes of religions as copyright  
Cleaning all chastities with sperm  
Fuck heaven ever since good deeds are measured by the number of heads that you  
cut off and the lives that you took  
Now my neck is making your blades laugh  
Like the targets of those FBR fascists in Karbala.<sup>120</sup>

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<sup>117</sup> Ucok, interview, 20 March 2019.

<sup>118</sup> Ucok, interview, 20 March 2019.

<sup>119</sup> Interview, 23 March 2019.

<sup>120</sup> The original lyric in Indonesian is as follows: Adalah bagaimana manusia menyebut nama  
tuhannya: tebas lehernya dahulu baru beri dia kesempatan untuk bertanya  
Pastikan setiap tema legitimasi agama seperti hak cipta  
Supaya dapat kucuci seluruh kesucianmu dengan sperma  
Persetan dengan Surga sejak parameter pahala  
Diukur dengan seberapa banyak kepala yang kau pisahkan dengan nyawa  
Kini leherku-lah yang membuat golokmu tertawa  
Target operasi di antara segudang fasis seperti FBR di Karbala.

Homicide's opener in this song starts by highlighting the violent acts committed by religious extremist groups in Indonesia (McIntosh et al. 2012). Homicide does not specify which religions it is criticizing, rather, the group criticises those who politicise religion for their own benefit, using violence to exert dominance against those who do not hold similar views.

When this song was released in 2002, the political vacuum left by the fall of Soeharto's long-lasting dictatorship widened (Heryanto & Hadiz 2005), with religion becoming a political tool that political elites used to control the Indonesian population (Mudhoffir 2017). One of these new ways was through *tuan guru*, or Islamic leaders: influential figures who act as educators, guardians of traditional culture and social mediators. The use of these religious leaders was similar to the way paramilitary organisations such as Pemuda Pancasila were used as tools to carry out illegal activity on the government's behalf (for instance, Jones 2005; Heryanto & Hadiz 2005; Alamsyah & Hadiz 2017).

While violence among believers of the same religion was rampant, the conflicts between followers of different religions were arguably more severe. This was demonstrated by the rise of several conservative religious organisations, such as FPI (*Front Pembela Islam*) (Jahroni 2004). The goal of FPI is to implement *shari'ah* law in Indonesia.<sup>121</sup> The presence of FPI presented multi-layered problems within local Bandung communities (Barker 2008). While the group is small, is loud and violent (Wilson 2015). Like other paramilitary organisations such as *Pemuda Pancasila*, it is funded by political elites and utilised to serve their agendas (Fealy 2004). For instance, the current vice president of Indonesia, Ma'aruf Amin, is one of the FPI's benefactors. Several high ranking government officials in Jakarta have also been photographed with leaders and members of the FPI (Hatherell & Welsh 2017; Setijadi 2017).

In addition to FPI, Homicide also pointed out FBR (*Forum Betawi Rempug*) as another paramilitary organisation disguised as a social and ethnic club. FBR is a dominant youth organisation based in Jakarta aiming to unite young people descended from the Betawi, who are considered to be native to the region of Jakarta and its surrounding area (Noor 2012). Like FPI, FBR also utilises religion as its primary identity signifier. It claims that it only serves to educate Betawi people about their culture.<sup>122</sup> However, many FBR chapters are exposed as local mafia organisations. There have been reports of FBR members intimidating

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<sup>121</sup> Udet, interview, 31 January 2019.

<sup>122</sup> JJ Rizal, interview, 16 February 2019.

residents and being involved in illegal racketeering activities (for instance, Pratama 2016 & Anton 2021).

When I met Ahmad Persada, the leader of FBR, at one of the cultural activities I attended in Jakarta, he said that his organisation does not ask for money. Instead, it asks for voluntary contributions for “*markosinjana*”<sup>123</sup> (*makan, rokok, bensin dan jajan anak*, or food, cigarettes, fuel and children’s allowance). When I asked him about various reports regarding the protection money schemes that his group ran in various areas of Jakarta, he said that FBR only protects those in need.<sup>124</sup> That might not be the whole truth. For instance, overtly criticising organisations like FPI and FBR can lead to harmful repercussions (Briantika 2020). In the second last line of verse above, Homicide acknowledges this. These violent organisations do not operate according to the law. Ucok suffered severe intimidation from various organisations, namely FPI and *Pemuda Pancasila*, but he noted that none were harmful. He says that many of them only dared to speak but were afraid of doing harmful things.<sup>125</sup>

The second verse of ‘Puritan’ compares the rise of conservatism and fascism in Indonesia to Heidegger and his close relationship to Germany’s Nazi party and ideology:

Worshipping holiness like Heidegger worshipped Nazis  
Outdated propaganda, smelly heavenly revelations  
If purity is a must and differences must be erased  
Then the answer to the blades and violence-filled revelations is gasoline, clothes  
and ketchup bottles.<sup>126</sup>

Ucok<sup>127</sup> explained that he viewed the followers of controversial figures, such as Abu Bakar Ba’asyir<sup>128</sup>, Habib Rizieq (FPI’s leader) and Ja’far Umar Thalib (Laskar Jihad’s leader), as uneducated, having been manipulated into following whatever agendas these figures tell them to follow. This blind worship resulted in the rise of domestic terrorism in Indonesia under the

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<sup>123</sup> Persada, interview, 15 February 2019.

<sup>124</sup> Persada, interview, 15 February 2019.

<sup>125</sup> Ucok, interview, 20 March 2019.

<sup>126</sup> The original lyric in Indonesian is as follows: Mendukung keagungan layak Heidegger mendukung Nazi

Propaganda basi, wahyu surgawi dengan bau tengik terasi

Jika suci adalah wajib dan perbedaan harus melenyap

Maka jawaban atas wahyu parang dan balok adalah bensin, kain dan botol kecap.

<sup>127</sup> Interview, 20 March 2019.

<sup>128</sup> The instigator of the Bali bombings and national terrorist organisation *Jemaah Islamiyah*.

veil of Islamic conservatism (Chacko & Jayasuriya 2018; Wilson 2015). Homicide explicitly claims that FBR, FPI and other extremists were spreading misleading propaganda materials and promised chances to enter heaven to their followers who did not know better.

Homicide also opposed the rise of fascist ideology and the idea that differences must be erased in Indonesia. The verse quoted above references the ethnic cleansing of 1964, where thousands of Chinese Indonesians were murdered to remove communist influences in Indonesia (Dittmer 2002). It also refers to the rapid rise of fascism in Bandung, where they wrote their lyrics in the late 1990s. Homicide's response to the rise of violent acts conducted by the followers of fascist figures referenced in the previous paragraph comes in the following line. They proclaimed that violent acts should be countered in similar measures. Hadisto (2018), however, questions this response. In his thesis, he argues that fighting violence with violence, especially in the context of fascist organisations such as Pemuda Pancasila and FPI, does not work as the members of these organisations do not operate according to the Indonesian laws and regulations.

### **Conservatism and the army**

The second concern of Homicide's leftist politics regards the relationship between religious extremists and Indonesian army officers in the early 2000s. Homicide was afraid that, despite Soeharto's fall, these army officers were slowly consolidating their power behind the scene (De Haan 2020). On many occasions, the group raised concerns about the harsh adherence and application of conservative Pancasila, Indonesia's national ideology and core belief, by Indonesian army officers and cadets. The group also tried to portray right-wing religious organisations as enforcers of Pancasila, whose role was to strongarm the Indonesian citizens, whenever the actions required to do so might be too unlawful for the Indonesian army (Barton, Yilmaz & Morieson 2021). To do that, the group incorporated references to dictators and dictatorships from other countries around the world. From the third verse of 'Puritan':

B-A-K-I-N was never dispersed; they have entered the cultural stream  
Just like the representatives that you chose, and you demand disbanded  
Parties of snake venom, groves of liberals  
Which Genghis Khan can define moral values?  
Fuck arguments that try to peel the centre of the problems

Monopolising the key to suppress arguments with the comprehension of one language.<sup>129</sup>

BAKIN (*Badan Koordinasi Intelejen Negara*), now known as BIN (*Badan Intelejen Negara*), is the Indonesian state intelligence agency (Miichi 2003). Many activists and academics feared this organisation during the New Order regime because of its covert and violent operations (Cribb 2000; Djarot 2006; Purdey 2003). Perhaps the most infamous case is the Petrus (*penembak misterius* or mysterious snipers) operation, in which BAKIN kidnapped, and in some cases publicly executed, activists at the height of the New Order regime. BAKIN has been relatively quiet in recent years, although its operations, which include the killings or forced disappearance of activists such as Munir, Wiji Thukul and others, remain notorious among activists (Clark 2006).

The verse above also criticised the political system in Indonesia. It has been widely documented that the Indonesian government, or perhaps the regime, has difficulty contending with various power struggles among Indonesian oligarchs, such as Soekarno, the military, Soeharto or religious elites (Hadiz 2000). Heryanto and Hadiz (2005) and Heryanto (2018), for instance, argue that the identity politics displayed to the public in Indonesia are covert, well-rehearsed theatrical acts intended to present a semblance of democracy. This well-maintained persona of democracy began to crumble during the 2019 election, in which Joko Widodo, the massively popular president known affectionately as Jokowi, faced off against Prabowo Subianto, an ex-army general and the son-in-law of the late president Soeharto (Tapsell 2015; Mujani & Liddle 2021). Their public personas could not be more different (Muhtadi 2015; Walden & Renaldi 2019).

Jokowi was portrayed in mainstream media as a down-to-earth and ordinary everyday Indonesian who built his businesses and career from scratch. He was the mayor of Surakarta who rose to prominence during his campaign as the governor of Jakarta, with Ahok as his vice governor (Hatherell & Welsh 2017). His love for heavy metal, especially Metallica, was a major marketing point in his campaign. Referencing Star Wars, Jokowi was promised to

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<sup>129</sup> The original lyric in Indonesian is as follows: B-A-K-I-N tak pernah bubar, mewujud dalam nafas kultural

Persis wakil parlemen yang kau coblos dan kau tuntutan bubar

Partai bisa ular, belukar liberal

Gengis Khan mana yang coba definisikan moral

Persetankan argumentasi membakar bara masalah

Dengan kunci pembuka monopoli anti-argumen komprehensi satu Bahasa.



bring a New Hope to Indonesia. In his book, however, Bland (2021) wrote that under Jokowi's presidency, Indonesia has seen a massive decrease in civilians' rights and free speech and an increase in illegal arrests, the persecution of activists, and, most interestingly, the persecution of Jokowi's online trolls. His presidential cabinet resembles a consolidation of power, with representatives from the religious elite (for instance, Ma'aruf Amin), the economic elite (for instance, Eric Thohir and Nadiem Makarim) and army leaders (for instance, Luhut Binsar Pandjaitan, Moeldoko and Tito Karnavian) (Panuju 2019; Hill & Negara 2019).

Meanwhile, Prabowo Subianto embraced his role as the antagonist of the election (Arifianto 2022). During the campaign, he accepted the support of conservative Muslims and promised to enact stricter rules in Indonesia, including a new set of rules that could have established an Indonesian caliphate (Bland 2021). However, after drama of the election subsided, Subianto abandoned his antagonistic role and began to work with Jokowi; Subianto is currently President Jokowi's defence minister (Walden & Renaldi 2019). The monopolisation of media outlets and the manipulation of public discourse that Homicide criticises in the verse above could not be more accurate in 2020.

Gomorra's haters' battalion who tried to purify the world with blood  
Thinning the separation lines between preaching and piles of trash  
If reading Albert Camus is the reason why heads and bodies need to be separated  
Fight fire with fire and let everything burn to the ground.<sup>130</sup>

The verse above further implicates the military and its upper echelons in various conflicts throughout Indonesia. It criticises violent acts conducted by Indonesian military personnel across Indonesia, acts which are often committed in the country's name (for instance Setiarsih & Suharno 2018; Galuwo 2018; Crouch 2017). When 'Puritan' was released, for instance, there were mass killings of civilians in West Papua and Aceh during a rise of caliphate ideology and grassroots revolt. Therefore, Homicide uses Gomorra as a metaphor, drawing on the Old Testament's story of the cities of Sodom and Gomorra.

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<sup>130</sup> The original lyric in Indonesian is as follows: Batalyon pembenci Gomorra sucikan dunia dengan darah

Menipiskan batas antara kotbah dengan gundukan sampah  
Jika membaca Albert Camus menjadi alasan badan-leher terpisah  
Lawan api dengan api dan biarkan semua rata dengan tanah.

According to the Christian Bible's Book of Genesis, both Sodom and Gomorrah were destroyed by fire from God because of their sexual wickedness, which included rape, child sexual abuse, homosexuality and indecent assault. For Ucok<sup>131</sup>, the burning of the cities and the cinder left of those cities were used as a metaphor for the diminishing spaces of freedom in Indonesia. Additionally, burning these cities also refers to the burning of many parts of Indonesia's major cities during the Reform movement in 1998. As an activist in Bandung involved in the populist People's Democratic Party (*Partai Rakyat Demokratik*) (Novianto, Kurniawan & Wibawa 2018), led by Budiman Sudjatmiko, Ucok compares their struggles for freedom with this story. He tried to justify their actions by saying that the only way to fight violence is with violence.

One reference in this verse that seems out of place is mention of Albert Camus. In a song largely about violence, a reference to the famous Absurdist philosopher seems strange (Zufar 2021). When asked about this line, Ucok<sup>132</sup> claims that he refers to the life story of Albert Camus while at the same time referring to many of his works. Camus, a famous leftist who died in an accident at 44, was deemed by Ucok as a perfect symbol of Indonesia's fight for freedom. The figure of Camus is relatable to many prominent Indonesian activists and their family members who protested against Soeharto as many also died or disappeared at a similar age as their idol (Marsha & Sutresna 2018). For instance, figures such as Pramudya Ananta Toer (Liu 1996) and Wiji Thukul (Sen & Hill 2007), who were firm in their disapproval of the government, were either discriminated against, sent to jail or disappeared (Wilson 2006). However, Camus was also a symbol for some activists who chose to join the government and help form a new regime, one still in power in Indonesia as of the writing of this chapter. Prominent activists and students leaders of the Reform movement, such as Amien Rais and Budiman Sudjatmiko, joined the central government in Jakarta (CNN Indonesia 2021; Elson 2010).

### **Conservatism and education**

The third concern that Homicide has regarding the rise of conservative politics in Indonesia is its infiltration into Indonesia's educational system. The group believed that topics such as the ban of Marxism and the erasure of Indonesia's leftist history should be discussed more often

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<sup>131</sup> Interview, 20 March 2019.

<sup>132</sup> Interview, 20 March 2019.

in both mainstream and underground spaces. Heryanto (2018b), for instance, writes about his concern that Indonesians are forgetful of the struggles that many academics experienced during the New Order regime. Robison & Hadiz (2017) also expressed their concerns about this. They noted that many have misplaced their expectations of the Reform era and lost track of how easy it was for the system to be intruded again. These scholars express similar worries to Homicide, namely that Indonesians need to pay more attention to their education system to ensure that the past is acknowledged and not erased from Indonesia's history. Ucok and Aszy articulate this concern in the following verse from 'Puritan':

Because I'm the libido of your anger that was aroused  
By the pools of blood by Shanty's crotch when you say that sharp blades were part  
of prayers  
Devouring the world as if it's a soccer game  
Full of supporters who are ready to kill if the outcomes don't match their  
expectations  
Those talented individuals who inherited the tertiary students' orientation week  
Paranoia because of religious statistics, FAK<sup>133</sup>'s phobia discourses.<sup>134</sup>

Ucok and Aszy understand that writing these lyrics while living in a predominantly Muslim area could be dangerous for them. Indeed, Homicide was the first Indonesian hip hop outfit to oppose the rise of conservative ideologies and the politicisation of religion amid the tumultuous transitional period in Indonesia in the early 2000s (Jurdi 2016). This made the group a target for many religious and militia groups in Bandung and the wider West Java region.<sup>135</sup> For instance, in between 2002 and 2004, Ucok and his family members were constantly stalked and followed by members of FPI and Pemuda Pancasila. They camped in front of his house, waiting and harassing his children and their friends. There were also several occasions where Ucok was physically attacked by several members of FPI. He knew they were members of that organisation because they wore the same attire and drove in cars or motorcycles with clear FPI posters and stickers. He told me that he reported these incidents to the police and was ignored. He recalled several occasions where police patrol cars stopped

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<sup>133</sup> *Front Anti Komunis* (Anti Communist Front) is a right-wing organisation that burned leftist books and burned the houses of activists in Bandung in the early 2000s.

<sup>134</sup> The original lyric in Indonesian is as follows: Karena aku adalah libido amarahmu yang terangsang dalam genangan darah

Selangkan Shanty jika kau menyebut parang bagian dari dakwah

Melahap dunia menjadi pertandingan sepakbola

Penuh suporter yang siap membunuh jika papan skor tak sesuai selera

Para manusia-unggul warisan Pekan Orientasi Mahasiswa

Paranoia statistika agama, wacana-phobia ala F.A.K.

<sup>135</sup> Ucok, interview, 20 March 2019.

near FPI members and had coffee with them. Wilson (2006) and Mudhoffir (2017) express similar findings, noting that their research shows Indonesian police are often closely-related to religious organisations.

In the same verse, Homicide also criticises the way religious conservatism and fascist ideologies get amplified within the tertiary education system (Nadzir 2019; Fakhri 2014). While universities played an important role in nurturing the Reform movement of the early 1990s, in recent years tertiary institutions have become repressive, with those engaging in anti-government rhetoric facing persecution and imprisonment.<sup>136</sup> In 'Puritan', Homicide describes this trend as follows:

Mercury-fueled instructions, reducing poems to their lowest level  
Losing ammunitions, sacred is just an ambition  
Sacrificial lambs of modernisation, Abu Jahal's naming program  
The dystopian mindset that is never patient in reaping storms  
I swear in the name of all bases that you deemed worth destroying  
And in the name of all the books that are more useful when destroyed  
If everything needs to follow your sacred ways  
Hell will be replaced by asphalt until the last ember.<sup>137</sup>

Heryanto (2018a) expresses his concern over the Indonesian masses seemingly forgetful of the horror of the New Order regime. He argues that every book burning, civilian attack and ban on discussions of differing ideologies pulls Indonesia away from the hope of the Reform era and closer to the return of the authoritarian government. In this verse, Homicide accuses the Indonesian government of masterminding attacks on civilians and actively supporting the rise of vigilantism in Indonesia as a tool to control the masses. These beliefs find validation in the work of, for example, Wilson (2015), who has extensively documented how the rise of protection rackets in post-New Order Indonesia serves as the government's extended control over Indonesian citizens. When Soeharto-era oligarchs fell in 1998, the power vacuum was filled with other political elites competing for power and authority (Haris 2014; Winarno

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<sup>136</sup> Ukok, interview, 20 March 2019.

<sup>137</sup> The original lyric in Indonesian is as follows: Instruksi air raksa mereduksi puisi hingga level yang paling fatal

Kehilangan amunisi, sakral adalah ambisi  
Wadal modernisasi, program labelisasi Abu Jahal  
Distopia yang tak pernah sabar untuk menuai badai  
Aku bersumpah untuk setiap jengkal markas yang kalian anggap layak bongkar  
Dan setiap buku yang nampak lebih berguna jika terbakar  
Jika setiap hal harus bergerak dalam alurmu yang sakral  
Sampai api terakhir pun, neraka bertukar tempat dengan aspal

2007). The violent acts that military personnel conducted were replaced by more vicious acts conducted by paramilitary groups masquerading as religious conservatives (Wilson 2006; Heryanto 2016).

Violent acts and intimidation frequently occur in Indonesia (Wilson 2015; Crouch 2017; Heryanto 2018b). For instance, military-backed raids on book stores and religious and entertainment venues are common and paramilitary groups conduct protection rackets (Barton 2021a). Soeharto's suppression of religious groups and differing ideologies created streams of religious extremists who felt the need to exert their agencies following the collapse of his military regime (Fealy 2004; Bamualim 2011). Some of these extremist groups were instrumental in the students' movements that dethroned Soeharto, which led to them receiving public support and followings. However, once taking power, these religious extremists adopted policy positions that were at least as oppressive as those of Soeharto's regime (Bland 2021). The last four sentences in the verse above try to detail the instances where such actions were taken. The censorship of books and "illegal materials" lifted by BJ Habibie post-New Order is now conducted illegally by these government-backed paramilitary groups (Barton 2021b).

This world is the arsehole of history  
A massive septic tank that's married to a piece of the tiny cranium that plays with  
saliva  
If your idealism is your best offer for a chance to enter heaven  
Give me your flags and uniform and I will burn them all.<sup>138</sup>

The verse above is an attack against the fascist ideology reportedly present among some followers of conservative Islam in Indonesia, who have been absorbed into official government policies. Homicide express concern that these groups were trying to replicate the movements of ISIS in the Middle East in the early 2000s, which was similar to the findings of Barton, Yilmaz & Morieson (2021). Ucok and Aszy, who wrote these lyrics after encountering attacks by the Islamic Defenders Front at many bookstores in Bandung<sup>139</sup>, refer to followers of such ideology as septic tanks with tiny brains who play with their own saliva like children. When asked further about Islamic Defenders Front's attacks on bookstores,

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<sup>138</sup> The original lyric in Indonesian is as follows: *Lubang tai sejarah, memang dunia adalah  
Kakus raksasa nikahi bongkah kranium kerdil berpinak ludah  
Jika idealisme-mu tawaran untuk mengundang surga mampir  
Berikan bendera dan seragammu, kan kubakar sampai arang terakhir.*

<sup>139</sup> Ucok, interview, 20 March 2019.

Ucok<sup>140</sup> says that the burned bookstores were mostly alternative bookstores, where material about Marxism, communism and other philosophical thought could be found. McIntosh et al.'s (2012) findings support this statement. They found that the erasure of leftist materials was crucial in establishing the dominance of the conservative beliefs and ideologies in the region.

Apart from expressing concern over bookburning and bans on leftist materials, Homicide also worried about the influence of popular print media on sociopolitical discourse during this transitional period:

A hundred times shallower than Atang Ruswita's articles  
A hundred times worse than the headers of Gatra magazine  
To all idiots who think that all dreams could be achieved  
The world is not as easy as black and white.<sup>141</sup>

Atang Ruswita is an experienced and well-known journalist, and a writer and lead editor of *Pikiran Rakyat* (*People's Thoughts*). This Bandung-based newspaper specialises in building nationalistic sentiment among its readers (Kusnadi 2017). Before being named *Pikiran Rakyat*, the newspaper was known as *Angkatan Bersenjata* (*Armed Forces*). It was formed by general Silingawi Ibrahim Adjie, the leader of the Bandung army base, and was famous for its overtly patriotic news reports and opinion pieces (Hermawan 2007). It was in sync with the news and trends coming from Soeharto and the New Order regime's *Departemen Penerangan* (Ministry of Information), which Doly (2016) argues was the regime's central propaganda and censorship agency.

This verse expresses Homicide's concerns about Indonesia's news outlets' close relationship with the oligarchy and the regime, acknowledging the power of printed material and news outlets to shape public discourse in Indonesia. The group is not alone in having these concerns. Academics including Berger (1997), Crouch (2017), Heryanto (2008) and Wilson (2015) have extensively discussed this relationship. For instance, Wilson (2015) claims that *Departemen Penerangan* was influential in creating and spreading Soeharto's version about the Indonesian Communist Party. Similarly, Heryanto (2008) argues that the modification of

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<sup>140</sup> Interview, 20 March 2019.

<sup>141</sup> The original lyric in Indonesian is as follows: Sratu kali lebih dangkal dari kolom Atang Ruswita  
Seribu kali lebih busuk dari tajuk majalah Garda  
Untuk semua idiot yang berfikir semua ide dapat berakhir diperapian  
Tak ada dunia yang begitu mudah untuk kalian hitamputihkan.

history, including the erasure of Indonesia's leftist past, was started by this organisation. Like these academics, Homicide argues that manipulating public discourse and banning the free circulation of materials within the public sphere aids in the rise of extreme conservative thought and encourages the public to blindly follow fascist ideology.<sup>142</sup> Homicide concludes 'Puritan' in a confrontational manner, directly attacking those who ascribe to fascism:

Yo, good fascists are dead fascists  
Good fascists are dead fascists  
Good fascists are dead fascists  
Wait at the end of the same road when you threaten us.<sup>143</sup>

This closing verse verbalises the pent-up anger that many Indonesians have tried to hide amid the rise of conservative religious beliefs and borderline fascist ideology. It represents the cries for help of the masses devastated by the rampant *premanisme* (or organised crime gangs, see Wilson 2006) that use religion as their modus operandi. Homicide, however, did not stop there. The final line in this song encourages listeners to take up arms and fight back against repression (Cahyani 2016). In doing so, it revisits the song's core theme of *lawan api dengan api dan biarkan semua rata dengan tanah* (fight fire with fire and let everything burn to the ground), which suggests that listeners should not fear fascist and extremist religious groups, and instead gather and organise to reclaim their rights, even without the government's support.

### Countering mainstream culture

It is easy to underestimate the significance of Homicide and its politics. Due to the band's status as an underground rap group attached to an independent record label, many Indonesians do not recognise Homicide's influence on Indonesian hip hop. I would argue otherwise. While other artists' prior releases have been popular among the mainstream and underground listeners, I argue that 'Puritan' was the first song to create significant political change within the Indonesian hip hop scene. Homicide, and specifically this song, created three different approaches to hip hop and protest culture in Indonesia.

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<sup>142</sup> Ucok, interview, 20 March 2019.

<sup>143</sup> The original lyric in Indonesian is as follows: *Yo, fasis yang baik adalah fasis yang mati*  
Fasis yang baik adalah fasis yang mati  
Fasis yang baik adalah fasis yang mati  
Tunggu di ujung jalan yang sama saat kalian mengancam kami.

First, Homicide addressed immediate issues directly, ensuring precise communication between listener and artist. Before the release of ‘Puritan’, Indonesian hip hop songs mainly used metaphor to avoid government censorship (for instance, Iwa K 1993, *Pesta Rap* 1995, Iwa K 1998). Udet<sup>144</sup> says that the “gatekeepers” of the music industry (he did not specify who they were or are in more detail) were strict with the songs’ choices of words and contents.

Following the fall of the New Order regime in 1998 and the disappearances of Iwan Fals and Rhoma Irama as “voices” of the “people” (see Weintraub 2006 and Wallach & Clinton 2013), Homicide was able to communicate the concerns of both working-class and middle-class Indonesians. The band was at the forefront of the resistance movement against fascism in the form of conservatism. While other rappers were afraid of the repercussions of releasing their songs and were constrained by the recording industry<sup>145</sup>, Homicide demonstrated that independent rap songs could build a compelling counterargument to the narrative of the ruling regime.

Second, ‘Puritan’ helped solidify Indonesian hip hop as an independent, underground genre. Prior to its release, established underground groups and bands considered rappers to be “*terlalu kalem*” or too tame to be considered an underground music scene.<sup>146</sup> Many punk and hardcore musicians called hip hop *musik cewek* (girls music genre) and called Indonesian rappers *cemen* (cowards) and *banci* (transgender)<sup>147</sup>, terms considered highly derogatory in Indonesia’s overtly masculine society. These sentiments began to shift with the release of Homicide’s *Godzkillla Necronometry* (2002) and Doyz’s *Perspektif* (2002), and punk scenesters started to recognise the sociopolitical impact of hip hop.<sup>148</sup>

Third, ‘Puritan’ incited conversation and turned one-way communication through songs (for instance, Eckstein 2010 and Stoia, Adams & Drakulich 2018) into communication that reached beyond the scene (for instance, rappers and enthusiasts). Many Indonesians in the mainstream scene were encouraged to have discussions about specific topics that may have been otherwise difficult to broach due to their controversial nature, for instance, the rise of

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<sup>144</sup> Udet, interview, 31 January 2019.

<sup>145</sup> Gerry, interview, 16 April 2019; Balance, interview, 10 April 2019.

<sup>146</sup> Doyz, interview, 23 March 2019.

<sup>147</sup> Alex, interview, 16 April 2019.

<sup>148</sup> Arian, interview, 28 March 2019.



fascism. As such, many Indonesians started to “[N]otice and respect hip hop songs as serious mediums of protest and activism”.<sup>149</sup>

This does not mean that everyone agreed with Homicide’s activism. Some rappers were also involved in the same movement that Homicide criticised in ‘Puritan’. The first notable response came from Thufail Al-Ghifari, a conservative Muslim activist turned rapper who uses his platform to promote his religious beliefs. His response was summarised in a diss track titled ‘Puritan – Fuck Homicide’ (Thufail Al-Ghifari 2004). Thufail claimed that Homicide was not credible and that their commentaries on the conservative movement were unethical. His song’s last verse invites his listeners to take on a “Jihad” mission to erase Homicide and their narratives. Like Homicide’s harsh criticism of conservative Islamic movements, Thufail responded with a call for violence, proving Homicide’s accusations of their behaviour.<sup>150</sup>

The second response to Homicide came from prominent Muslim leaders in Bandung and West Java. Some leaders claimed Homicide, and more specifically Ucok, to be the *dajjal*, or the devil they needed to kill to “purify” Bandung.<sup>151</sup> While there were no physical attacks against Ucok, Homicide or the group’s family members, the group experienced months of mental and physical intimidation. Their wives and family members were followed during shopping trips and school pick-ups, people stood outside of their homes, and their workplaces and studios were illegally searched for “illegal” materials.<sup>152</sup> This was the first time in Indonesian history in which a rap song was taken so seriously that it resulted in such a response from outside the hip hop scene. Homicide was able to provoke responses from the specific groups mentioned and criticised in the song.<sup>153</sup>

## Conclusion

Anti-government sentiment in Indonesia is rising (Mujani & Liddle 2021) and has made its home in Indonesia’s independent hip hop scene. As this chapter’s in-depth analysis of Homicide’s ‘Puritan’ has shown, rap and hip hop played a significant role in providing a space for Indonesians to convey their uncensored criticisms of the government after the fall

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<sup>149</sup> Andy, interview, 31 January 2019.

<sup>150</sup> Ucok, interview, 20 March 2019; Thufail Al-Ghifari, interview, 2 February 2019.

<sup>151</sup> Thufail Al-Ghifari, interview, 2 February 2019.

<sup>152</sup> Ucok, interview, 20 March 2019; Aszy, interview, 30 March 2019.

<sup>153</sup> Iwa, interview, 18 March 2019; Gerry, interview, 16 April 2019; Alex, interview, 16 April 2019.

of Soeharto's New Order regime. Like Tunisian rappers who voiced the despair of their followers after the Arab Spring and the fall of Ben Ali's regime (Gabsi 2020), the group was important in capturing the sociopolitical concerns before the rise of politicised Islam in Bandung (Miichi 2003).

This chapter shows three concerns that Homicide had during the rise of fascist ideologies in their hometown and region in the early 2000s. First, their leftist politics were built upon their concerns of the rise of religious extremism. Like Chalmers (2017), I found that the group and their followers were intimidated with the rapid rise of religious violence. Second, similar to Afrianty (2012), the group also found that these extremist organisations had planted their roots in Indonesia's educational system. It were afraid of the implications of historical manipulation, if these groups were to do so (for instance, Wieringa 2003). Lastly, like Mietzner and Muhtadi (2018) and Wilson (2015), I found a deep concern about the return of the Indonesia army's political supremacy in Homicide's leftist politics. The group's songs often referred to the leaders of the army and warned their listeners to keep a watchful eye on their movements. I argue that this post-mortem study of this defunct hip hop collective enables a richer sociopolitical analysis of popular counterculture following the fall of authoritarian governance and the resulting periods of unrest.

The decline of sociopolitical commentary in other Indonesian popular music genres (Weintraub 2010) and the restriction of activism due to tightening government regulations (Barton 2021b) made room for Homicide and other independent rap groups to provide a safe, unfiltered and economically self-sufficient space for those critical of the ruling regime. Observing how these rappers and this space will respond to the current regime's tightening of media rules, freedom of speech and freedom of expression will be important in the near future, as Bland (2021) notes that the rise of technocrats and oligarchs could be dangerous for Indonesia's future freedom of speech and its supposedly democratic governance.

By viewing Ukok and Homicide through the lens of brokerage, this chapter argues that their resistance against issues that are important to their communities enabled their transformation from an underground group into influential brokers of left-wing ideas in a predominantly right-wing region. The inclusion of political ideas into songs enabled this widespread brokerage as their catchy songs hid them from the watchful eye of the government.

## Chapter 7 Traditionalist politics

There has been a surge of academic research examining rap and hip hop as a medium of sociopolitical activism in recent years (for instance, Bliss 2019; Hafez 2017; Taviano 2016). From investigations into the use of rap to empower minority and segregated communities in the US (Chang 2007, p. 157) to the rap scene as the birthplace of a resistance movement in Tunisia (Barone 2019; Gabasi 2020), academics have studied how rappers are instrumental in creating change in their local communities. These artists empower their local communities in ways that often surpass other community leaders. For instance, the adaptation of rap into the local culture in China enables rappers to bypass the authoritarian regime's censorship (Tang 2019). As the academic literature on the topic grew, the term "raptivism" (Hobson 2009, p. 15), an amalgam of rap and activism, was adopted to describe this aspect of rap. Rappers who participate in such activities are called raptivists.

To date, though, the term "raptivist" has rarely been used to address Indonesian rappers. Nevertheless, I argue that this term is especially important to my discussion of Indonesian hip hop. Indonesian music has always had political agendas. For instance, in the 1970s and 1980s, *dangdut*, Indonesia's most popular music genre, was used to criticise abuses of power by the New Order regime (Frederick 1982). Weintraub (2010, 2013) revisited this notion and found that the protest had shifted from criticising the government to addressing sociocultural problems like alcoholism and prostitution. For their part, Baulch (2003) and Wallach (2002, 2014) argue that death metal and punk artists are influential in creating counter-mainstream discourse in Indonesia. Presently, similar to its underground siblings, Indonesia's hip hop scene is integral to the country's thriving counterculture (Bodden 2005; Marsha & Sutresna 2018; Riyanto 2017).

Following the decline of *dangdut* and Rhoma Irama's transition in the early 1990s from leading voice of the opposition to spokesperson for the regime (Frederick 1982; Dunbar-Hall 2013), underground scenes began to rise as voices of opposition.<sup>1</sup> Among the many independent scenes in Indonesia, punk and metal are perhaps the most prominent and consistent independent spaces hosting socially-conscious artists. Baulch (2002, 2003) has extensively documented this phenomenon. She (Baulch 2002a, p. 289) argues that

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<sup>1</sup> Yacko, interview, 20 February 2019.

participating in these scenes allows young people to “link local communities with foreign discourses which support their resistance to oppressive regimes”. More importantly, participation in underground scenes allows for the growth of a grassroots ethos that is beneficial for the counter-mainstream movement (Wallach & Clinton 2013). Underground musicians and scenesters have formed the networks of a self-sufficient economy built on their “counterculture and counter-mainstream approaches”.<sup>2</sup> These two interrelated aspirations are “authenticity and autonomy” (Luvaas 2013, p. 96); both contribute to growing dissent in Indonesia.

In this chapter, I introduce the notion of “traditionalist politics” in relation to the Jogja Hip Hop Foundation (JHF). By this, I mean that JHF has claimed superiority over other Indonesians and sought to create an exclusive zone open only to those who meet the group’s interpretation of “native” citizens. JHF intends to create a system that favours local working-class Jogjakartans, who it claims have been marginalised by the Sultan’s recent embrace of capitalism.

As this chapter shows, the members of Jogja Hip Hop Foundation are examples of brokers whose politics have shaped and are shaped by their local communities. To support my argument, I distinguish three key themes in their politics: Malioboro and modernity, Javanese masculinity and the palace’s ex-retinues. These themes share some similarities with those of Mayan rappers in Guatemala (Bell 2017). However, unlike Mayan rappers, who use their culture as a way to connect with their wider communities, I argue that JHF adopts a populist conservative approach, one that seeks preferential treatment for local Jogjakartans over migrants or visitors. JHF’s themes convey the desire of their communities for a more exclusive space that offers better financial and social conditions for working-class Jogjakartans. I find that their politics privilege Javanese macho perspectives, which often ostracises some of those the group says it fights for.

Before we discuss how JHF became political brokers, we must first understand Jogjakarta, a unique territory in Indonesia. While part of Indonesia, it is governed by a Sultan and his family (Kurniadi 2009).

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<sup>2</sup> Uco, interview, 20 March 2019.

### Special State of Jogjakarta

Jogjakarta is a city-state with a complex sociocultural history that predates the Republic of Indonesia. After Indonesia declared its independence in 1945, Soekarno granted the city-state special district status (*daerah istimewa*) to acknowledge its support of the young republic's struggle for independence against the Dutch in 1950. In the latest agreement between the monarchy and the state in 2012, Jogjakarta has maintained its monarchy status and hierarchy. The Sultan continues to serve as the governor of Jogjakarta. While other governors in Indonesia have a fixed service term of five years, the Sultan of Jogjakarta can hold their position until their death. When they pass away, they are replaced by their descendants. In some circumstances, they can surrender the power of their own accord.<sup>3</sup> Sri Sultan Hamengkubuwono X<sup>4</sup>, in addition to his status as the official governor of the region, is the absolute ruler of the area. Although the Sultan has considerably less power than its past authoritarian monarch status, he holds significantly more authority than his peers in Indonesia. He has the state's full authority, and the rest of the monarch's familial members serve as ministers.<sup>5</sup>

Jogjakarta is one of the most culturally and socially diverse cities in Indonesia. As a city that lives off the tourism and the education industries, it is arguably the second-largest tourist destination in Indonesia after Bali.<sup>6</sup> While the latter is famous for its rowdy, party-filled atmosphere<sup>7</sup>, Jogjakarta is usually the destination for culturally-oriented tourists.<sup>8</sup> It is the centre of the "high Javanese arts", where local traditions have blended with modernity. The city and the region are host to a plethora of tourist destinations, from Parangtritis Beach on its southern coast to the highlands of Mount Merapi. There are more than one hundred private and public higher education institutions in the region, with the University of Gajah Mada being the region's largest tertiary education provider.

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<sup>3</sup> This happened in 2007 with Sultan Hamengkubuwono X, when the Sultan proclaimed that he would forfeit his position as the governor of the region due to political differences with the central government.

<sup>4</sup> His full title is as follows: His Highness Sultan Hamengkubuwono the Tenth, Commander-in-chief-in-war, Servant of the Most Gracious, Cleric and Caliph that Safeguards the Religion (*Ngarsa Dalem Sampeyan Dalem Ingkang Sinuwun Kangjen Sri Sultan Hamengku Buwono Senapati ing Ngalogo Ngabdurrokhman Sayidin Panatagama Khalifatullah ingkang Jumeneng kaping X*).

<sup>5</sup> Anto, interview, 14 April 2019.

<sup>6</sup> Alex, interview, 16 April 2019.

<sup>7</sup> Ruli, pers. comm., 11 April 2019.

<sup>8</sup> Gerry, interview, 16 April 2019.

Although his followers revere the Sultan, his recent embrace of capitalism and investment by national and international corporations were poorly received by some of the Jogjakartans I met during my fieldwork. As I argue in this chapter, growing unrest is slowly eroding respect for the region's leader. The case study of this chapter is at the centre of the protest movement.

### **The Sultan and the growing unrest**

Presently, the Sultan is a revered figure in Jogjakarta.<sup>9</sup> One street peddler I spoke with in the corner of Malioboro, the city-state's arterial street (see below), told me that the Sultan has "brought changes that benefit the street vendors" and was seen a "major increase in the quantity of international tourists".<sup>10</sup> Many told me that their living standards have increased significantly and that they can now live well by relying on the tourism sector.<sup>11</sup> A young umbrella seller that I spoke with in the Borobudur Temple's parking lot compared the Sultan to God for his role in changing his family's quality of life by promoting tourism and bringing modernity to the region.<sup>12</sup>

However, some respondents made harsh comments about the Sultan and the monarchy. Most of the negative comments came from young people. Many complained about the commercialisation of local culture and traditions, specifically regarding foreign investors and how they ignore local wisdom. Some complained about the massive expansion of large modern shopping malls, which have "replaced and removed working-class cultures running deep in Jogjakartans' veins".<sup>13</sup> Jogjakartans are conflicted over technology and modernity, with many embracing these qualities and many others believing they are harming the city. For instance, some university students note that the massive influx of students from other regions of Indonesia has slowly erased the "Javaneseness" of local Jogjakartans.<sup>14</sup>

JHF is at the helm of Jogjakartan traditionalist politics. In his thesis, Riyanto (2017, p. 162) notes that the Sultan treated JHF as his subjects, while JHF and Juki, the group's leader were "operating with an agenda of professionalism and a business logic which required [them] to consider issues such as branding and copyright". The group's initial clash happened when the

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<sup>9</sup> Riko, pers. comm., 12 April 2019.

<sup>10</sup> Budi, pers. comm., 12 April 2019.

<sup>11</sup> This fieldwork was conducted prior to the global pandemic of COVID19. No doubt the situation will have changed since then.

<sup>12</sup> Riki, pers. comm., 13 April 2019.

<sup>13</sup> Aria, pers. comm., 9 April 2019.

<sup>14</sup> Ridwan, pers. comm., 8 April 2019.

Sultan wanted to include ‘*Jogja Istimewa*’<sup>15</sup> (JHF 2010) as a theme song for promoting a new tourism destination in the region. Instead of obeying his Royal Highness like humble subjects, Juki and JHF demanded royalties (no pun intended). The Sultanate, they retorted, had no right to include their songs in promotional materials.<sup>16</sup> Juki argued that the Sultan should “give an example by empowering the people and paying respect to their hard work and creativity” (Riyanto 2017, p. 163). In their official blog, group member Anto (2014) listed JHF’s demands:

1. To follow a policy of human-centred development
2. To prepare Jogjakarta for the future without leaving behind its cultural traditions
3. To involve the citizens of Jogjakarta in pursuing their development policies

This rift between the Sultan and his unhumbled servants was amplified when the group launched ‘*Jogja Ora Didol*’<sup>17</sup> (2014), calling for the residents of Jogjakarta, both artists and everyday people, to resist the economic and political agendas of the Sultan. JHF argued that their leader had forgotten the region’s arts and traditions. More importantly, it called for their fellow artists and musicians to represent the region’s residents.

### **“Artists, please stand up!”**

This growing dissent created various counter-narratives among Jogjakarta citizens, the loudest dissenters being youth, artists, and students. JHF arguably led the pack, primarily because of their close relationships with the Sultanate. Further, Juki called on artists of the region to “stand up” against the commercialisation of their local culture<sup>18</sup> because artists are “instrumental in advancing and promoting Jogja’s local culture” and cultural preservation “is paramount and should be prioritised above everything else”.<sup>19</sup>

JHF was instrumental in promoting Javanese culture to both national and worldwide audiences. Their songs sample old Javanese songs. Many of the instruments are sampled live

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<sup>15</sup> This song was created and released to oppose the central government’s (under the Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono presidency) proposal to allow regional elections to be held in the special district. Many Jogjakartans, including members of JHF, rejected this proposal. It was seen a central government interference to the God-given privilege of the Sultan and the region.

<sup>16</sup> Anto, interview, 14 April 2019.

<sup>17</sup> Jogja is not for sale in English.

<sup>18</sup> Anto, interview, 14 April 2019.

<sup>19</sup> Juki, interview, 17 April 2019.

by Balance, one of the rappers and the primary producer of the group.<sup>20</sup> Juki, also known as Kill the DJ or Marzuki Mohamad, the group's principal songwriter, says that his lyrics are heavily influenced by ancient Javanese scrolls and books provided by the Sultanate.<sup>21</sup> The group has achieved international success and have toured other Asian countries, Europe, Australia and North America. For those who grew up in Jogjakarta and its surrounding areas, JHF "tell[s] stories and folklore that many listened to while growing up in a modern and concise package".<sup>22</sup> The group's achievements were acknowledged by the Sultan, who awarded them the cultural ambassadorship of Jogjakarta<sup>23</sup> in 2012.<sup>24</sup> Before they were given this award, which contributed to their rise to fame, the group was formed by three different hip hop groups who met at an event called *Angkringan Hip Hop*.

### **From "Angkringan Hip Hop" to JHF**

JHF was formed by Juki in 2003 to promote and encourage Javanese-focused rap in Jogjakarta. Before it morphed into the group that it is today, JHF was a community of rappers and other hip hop enthusiasts in the region. Riyanto (2017) writes that these people met at events Juki hosted called It's Hip Hop Reunion and *Angkringan Hip Hop*, which were held once every fortnight<sup>25</sup> in the early 2000s. This community of enthusiasts became serious in their pursuit of Javanese-influenced rap after Juki organised Poetry Battle<sup>26</sup> in 2007 to explore old and new Javanese poetry through hip hop. This community of enthusiasts continued to expand through these gatherings until eventually becoming JHF. The group's line-up on its first show consisted of Juki, Jahanam, a duo comprised of Mamok and Balance) and Rotra, a duo comprised of Anto and Lukman.

As the group became more popular in the late 2000s, it started to gain the recognition and attention of domestic and international enthusiasts and academics. The group's first international show was a cultural exchange show at the Esplanade, Singapore, in 2009. Building on the positive feedback it received during its first international show, the group released a documentary called *Hiphopdiningrat* (2010) that documented its formation. The

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<sup>20</sup> Balance, interview, 10 April 2019; Anto, interview, 14 April 2019.

<sup>21</sup> Juki, interview, 17 April 2019.

<sup>22</sup> Heryanto, pers. comm., 27 November 2018.

<sup>23</sup> Duta Nagari Ngayogyakarta Hadiningrat.

<sup>24</sup> Anto, interview, 14 April 2019.

<sup>25</sup> Anto, interview, 14 April 2019.

<sup>26</sup> Original event name is in English.



film also documents how and why Jogjakartans perform Javanese hip hop. Even though JHF was still relatively unknown in Indonesia, the movie was a massive hit overseas<sup>27</sup>, leading to invitations to play shows in New York and San Francisco in 2011 as a part of a cultural exchange program by the United States government. This trip was another major success for JHF, and afterwards, the group was awarded a special cultural recognition by the Sultan of Jogjakarta (Varela 2014; Riyanto 2017). The group were then named official cultural ambassador of the region.

In its new position as the cultural ambassador of the Sultanate of Jogjakarta, the group was bombarded with gifts from the Sultanate palace. It was given a section of a building owned by the royal family that, with funding from the Sultan, was renovated into studio spaces and stores. It was also supplied with an array of music-making equipment, which the group eventually used to voice its protest against the Sultan. JHF's first act of resistance against its deity-like leader is based on the city and region's artery, Malioboro Street.

### **Malioboro modernity**

The first theme of JHF's politics that I wish to discuss is the group's recollection of the past glory of the Malioboro Street, prior to the perceived "invasion of modernity". This example demonstrates one key element of JHF's traditionalist politics, namely its wish for preferential treatment for working-class Jogjakartans and the removal of "outside influences" perceived to be detrimental to the region. This shows the group's desire for a Malioboro Street with less tourism and fewer modern stores and stalls, while questioning the values and significance of modernity in the region.

Malioboro Street is the central tourist destination of Jogjakarta. Located in the city centre, Malioboro Street runs east to west, connecting the Sultan's palace to its east and west courtyards, and is home to the largest concentration of street stalls in the region. It is an essential commercial zone where many local Jogjakartans conduct their businesses, such as selling meat skewers to running hostels (Sutopo & Nilan 2018). Like many areas in Indonesia, Malioboro Street is a tourist trap. However, it is an important site embraced by many domestic and international tourists and visitors. My local guide told me that I should "avoid Malioboro at all costs, just walk there to take pictures" because "everything is

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<sup>27</sup> Alex, interview, 16 April 2019.

overpriced and overrated. The *gudeg*<sup>28</sup> is not even real *gudeg*".<sup>29</sup> The area has been turned into a "commercialised tourist destination where locals hardly ever visit and is mostly full of by tourists who don't know they've been scammed".<sup>30</sup>

Aside from being a major tourist destination, Malioboro Street represents the fight for freedom and power struggles among Indonesians after the colonial era. Richter's (2012) thesis on the musical worlds in Jogjakarta focuses on the importance of Malioboro Street, both figuratively and literally. In his study, Richter explicitly mentions the importance of Malioboro Street because it is the central artery of Jogjakarta. For Richter (2012), Malioboro Street "could be said to signify a subcultural identity" (p. 19), and it represents "the theme of local unity" (p. 138) that promotes "harmonious and inclusive social relations" (p. 138) among the residents of Jogjakarta. Malioboro Street represents the cultural, political and economic ecosystem of Jogjakarta that sustains many of its residents as the "real mini Indonesia" (Richter 2012, p. 5).

In a space where hip hop has increasingly become "a popular musical style that has an important place in the cultural landscape of contemporary Jogjakarta" (Varela 2014, p. 387), JHF uses the diversity of the Jogjakarta to question the modernity that the Sultan and the palace have seemingly embraced. The group's ties to the street also signify its intention of "promoting local, Malioboro solidarity rather than national unity" (Richter 2012, p. 136). In doing so, JHF reaffirm their belief that "Jogjakarta is a special entity within the republic that shouldn't buy the central government's bullshit".<sup>31</sup> The group also believes that "focusing on the benefits and lives of the locals should be more important than stuffing the politicians' fat wallets".<sup>32</sup>

The perceived transformation of Malioboro Street from a beloved arterial street into a crudely commercialised space is one of JHF's main criticisms. In '*Jogja Ora Didol*' (JHF 2014), the group first reflected on its experience of the local culture's commercialisation. For JHF, commercialisation and preservation do not go hand in hand and the embrace of

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<sup>28</sup> This is a traditional Javanese dish, made from young jack fruit, palm sugar and coconut milk.

<sup>29</sup> Yudha, interview, 18 December 2019.

<sup>30</sup> Toni, pers. comm., 14 April 2019.

<sup>31</sup> Juki, interview, 17 April 2019.

<sup>32</sup> Anto, interview, 14 April 2019.

commercialisation has “detrimental effects” on the local cultural scene.<sup>33</sup> More specifically, members of JHF argue that “to preserve the culture is more important than attracting tourists” and that “commercialisation erases the Javanese traits of Javanese people”.<sup>34</sup> In ‘*Jogja Ora Didol*’, JHF (2014) first says:

Traditional markets are increasingly marginalised  
Defeated by luxurious malls.<sup>35</sup>

I interpret this verse as criticising the growth of modernity, which has marginalised native Jogjakartans via the construction of modern shopping malls. The group expresses solidarity with their fellow Jogjakartans, pushed aside by chain stores. Anto, the writer of this verse, told me that my initial hypothesis was correct. He said it was important for JHF to “represent the street, where we are from. We are from Wijilan, representing this place”.<sup>36</sup>

JHF’s reclamation of the street “create[s] and affirm[s] solidarities” (Khabeer 2018, p. 143) among Jogjakartans. It also signifies the group’s relationship to the land and its support for increasingly marginalised street peddlers. In this way, JHF reinforces its status as a voice for Jogjakartans. Because of their influential position in the area, members of JHF became brokers of Malioboro Street (Bräuchler 2019, p. 453). Like Bräuchler’s (2019, p. 461) case study of the late Glenn Fredly and the Moluccans’ protest<sup>37</sup>, members of JHF elevate and unite dissenting voices and amplify their issue to their domestic and overseas fans. JHF’s song ‘*Jogja Ora Didol*’ became a “call for a change” within a region where many obediently follow the Sultan and opposing views are suppressed.<sup>38</sup>

The group also appealed to the “lost beauty” of Malioboro Street and Jogjakarta.<sup>39</sup> Its aim was to restore the city to its glorious past. To do so, the group reminded listeners of the natural resources of the land while calling for structural change without pointing fingers at the person in charge. JHF (2014) rapped:

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<sup>33</sup> Mamok, interview, 14 April 2019.

<sup>34</sup> Juki and Anto, interview, 17 April 2019.

<sup>35</sup> The original lyric in Javanese is as follows: *Pasar-pasar padha ilang kumandange*  
Malah kalah karo mall sing padang lampune.

<sup>36</sup> Anto, interview, 14 April 2019.

<sup>37</sup> The protest and brokerage by Glenn Fredly and his fellow Moluccans mainly revolved around the issues of interfaith dialogue, tolerance, pluralism and social justice.

<sup>38</sup> Juki, interview, 17 April 2019.

<sup>39</sup> Anto, interview, 14 April 2019.

Merapi is upset because its beauty is hindered  
Covered by advertisements, making it difficult to admire  
Billboards have swarmed the street  
Visual rubbish that needs to be removed.<sup>40</sup>

In this verse, the group takes a firmer stance. Although it exaggerated the nuisances of billboards and advertisements on the streets of Jogjakarta, its message is clear: that it wants “a return of the past Jogjakarta when modernity has yet to enter and blend into the daily lives of Jogjakartans”.<sup>41</sup> They further argue that the rapid construction of hotels and shopping malls has led to the removal of many local neighbourhoods (*kampung*) and green spaces. In its current form, Jogja is no longer a pleasant place to live in (JHF 2014).<sup>42</sup> The group tries to symbolise this change of scenery as undesirable to the masses—both locals and tourists.

While JHF opposed rapid construction and the shifting space around the street of Malioboro, the group did not entirely oppose change and modernity. After all, its very existence relied on the embrace of modernity and globalisation. The group argued that “modernism cannot be avoided” (JHF 2014), and in some sense, modernity allows for the “restoration and preservation of the local art forms”.<sup>43</sup> For instance, most of JHF’s songs borrow from ancient Javanese literature and poems that are largely unknown to local youth. Through hip hop (a contemporary music style made possible by modern technologies), JHF help attracts more youth to study and embrace their local heritage while allowing the elderly to “reminisce about their childhoods”.<sup>44</sup> Like the preservation of *wayang kulit* (shadow puppets) through hip hop (Varela 2014) in other parts of Jogjakarta, JHF can package traditional wisdom in modern forms for people to enjoy. Like Varela (2014, p. 494), I observed that performers conveyed their protests “...through well-known stories and characters”. However, while Varela (2014, p. 495) notes that *wayang* hip hop performers need to perform within the constraints of traditional storylines to avoid the risk of being accused of altering ancient literature, JHF can perform outside these boundaries.

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<sup>40</sup> The original lyric in Javanese is as follows: *Merapi gregetan, blegere ilang*  
Ketutupan iklan, dadi angel disawang  
Neng duwur dalan, balihone malang  
Sampah visual pancen kudu dibuang.

<sup>41</sup> Juki, interview, 17 April 2019.

<sup>42</sup> The original language from the interview is as follows: *Jogja berhenti nyaman*.

<sup>43</sup> Anto, interview, 14 April 2019.

<sup>44</sup> Heryanto, pers. comm., 16 April 2018.

In many ways, JHF's reflections of Malioboro Street resemble the raptivism of Mayan rappers in Guatemala. According to Bell (2017, p. 181), there are three principal characteristics of Mayan raptivists: (1) "...the use of local instrumentations", (2) "a denunciation of social ills", and (3) "references to pre-contact Maya literature and literary figures". JHF's '*Jogja Ora Didol*' fits this mould. In composing the track, Balance and Juki<sup>45</sup> told me that they borrowed "old gamelan tracks that were used to signify war" to sound their "resistance and tears of blood of fellow Jogjakartans" (also see Brunt & Johnson 2013). Also, Balance<sup>46</sup> says that the sampled material was initially a "solemn hymn that soldiers of the sultanate of Mataram listened to the evening before the civil war in 1745 - 1749 to prepare them for the worst outcome and to remind them of why they are there".

Juki and Balance use "conversational sampling" (Roth-Gordon 2008, p. 69), a technique commonly used to construct a "local identity" and "shared new meanings for rap lyrics". This means that '*Jogja Ora Didol*' was a call for resistance against modernity, which the group viewed as detrimental to the region. Additionally, by infusing ancient Javanese literature and poems with hip hop, the group creates a juxtaposition that teaches the listeners about the importance of Jogjakarta's glorious past. JHF tries to remind local Jogjakartans of their "good manners" (*budi pekerti*) and "Javanese societal values" (*kejawaan*), while at the same time considering how changes to their streets and environments are detrimental to their Javanese values.

### **Javanese masculinity**

While the previous section investigated the way JHF interpreted its supposed culture by recalling Malioboro Street's past glory, the present section highlights how it interpret the characteristics of Javanese masculinity. Here, we find second theme of JHF's traditionalist politics. The group uses the term "the people" (*wong cilik*) to represent its communities while at the same time promote their perceived image of Javaneseness. It shows that JHF take a stance as citizens of the Sultanate, and they do not alienate themselves from their surroundings. Instead, JHF embraces Javanese identities, which it claims has been scared by modernity, as well as its roles as both the Sultan's servants and the leaders of their local communities. The group meticulously crafts a community sphere that Kitwana (2005, p.165)

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<sup>45</sup> Interview, 17 April 2019.

<sup>46</sup> Interview, 10 April 2019.

calls the “political space of hip hop” to “[challenge] prevailing public policy approaches to issues like education, criminal justice, employment, health care and foreign policy”.

Musicians and artists have often opposed the ruling regime, instead choosing to stand with “the people”. In aligning themselves with the working class, musicians build a space where “disempowered masses [can] escape the mundane and repressive conditions of their everyday lives” (Weintraub 2008, p. 368). Pop and *dangdut* musicians often do this to help create a connection to their audiences. For instance, prominent Indonesian *pop Melayu* band Kangen Band used its “*kampungan*”<sup>47</sup> (parochial) traits to appeal to the masses (Baulch 2013). By highlighting its “humble beginnings” and “provincial vulgarity”, the band showed a “rags-to-riches” story and successfully sold a narrative of upward mobility (Baulch 2013, p. 292).

However, the narratives of rags-to-riches rappers and the politics of working-class representation are not common in Indonesian hip hop. Many Indonesian rappers, especially in the 1990s and 2000s, were highly-educated university students or graduates (Bodden 2005, p. 17). Some were graduates from top-ranking overseas universities and lived in upper-middle-class areas of Jakarta, for instance, Menteng and Puri.<sup>48</sup> In this regard, members of JHF are similar to Jakartan rappers. Juki was already a successful travelling artist in the region before forming JHF. Anto is a successful rapper, producer, educator and store owner. Balance is a prominent rapper, beatmaker and composer (Riyanto 2017, p. 105). Mamok was the only group member who relied wholly on hip hop as his full-time job.<sup>49</sup>

Unable to relate to its audience because of its members relatively stable financial positions, JHF (2014) instead appealed to local societal norms by criticising some aspects of modernity that it perceived to be harmful, for instance:

Older women shopkeepers in the markets are forced to take off their *batik*  
Replaced by sexy tight pants as if they are sales promotion girls.<sup>50</sup>

In this case, the modernity of modern fashion is perceived to be pernicious. JHF believe that modernity erodes the identity of Jogjakartans. In referencing *batik*, perhaps the most famous

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<sup>47</sup> This term is usually used to address Indonesians who live outside of the island of Java, for instance, Borneo, Sumatra, Sulawesi, etc.

<sup>48</sup> Erik, interview, 31 January 2019.

<sup>49</sup> Alex, interview, 16 April 2019.

<sup>50</sup> The original lyric in Javanese is as follows: *Simbok-simbok kepeksa nguculi jarike*  
Dha ganti katok games macak kaya SPG.

commodity of the region, JHF performs a mode of identity politics (Heryanto 2018a) that serves to highlight the differences between Javanese high art and popular culture. By appealing to the local identity of Jogjakartans, the group hopes to “portray the importance of being a Javanese in the modern world” and, in doing that, “establishing [JHF’s] position as important figures that should not be ignored by the Sultan”.<sup>51</sup> JHF assumed a leading role within its community, in the manner of protest brokers (Bräuchler 2019). For Bräuchler (2019), the powerful position of a protest broker relies on their ability to mediate and interface “members of several networks” (p. 463) that allow them to build “relationships of trust with a diverse audience and that resonate with its diverging cosmologies, interests and ideologies” (p. 466).

The contradictory statements in the two lines above are worthy of closer analysis. The group categorises its fellow Jogjakartans into two categories: those who are oppressed because they still wear *batik* and those who swapped their *batik* for modern clothing to attract consumers. While JHF first praise high Javanese art forms (in this case, *batik*) and the jobs of shopkeepers, it degrades sales promotion girls and the clothes they wear. In this case, the group utilised a technique Rhoma Irama used in the 2000s when he responded to the rising popularity of sexy *dangdut* dances. In the case of *dangdut*, Rhoma Irama created a narrative of the importance of being *Islami* to perform *dangdut*. Aligning himself with the clerics of MUI (Indonesia’s conservative Islamic Council), Rhoma Irama advocated the official suppression of “*inulfluenza*”, a portmanteau of Inul, one of Indonesia’s most famous female *dangdut* singer, and influenza, to defame the artist and her work (Weintraub 2008, p. 382).

Like Rhoma Irama, JHF’s appeal to traditionalism and conservatism has alienated a significant portion of its fans, many of whom might not have a choice in what they wear at work. On Malioboro Street, I spoke to a 22-year-old sales promotion girl who worked for a prominent cigarette brand in Indonesia. She told me that as a working-class Jogjakartan, she does not “have any other options”.<sup>52</sup> She felt that JHF’s comment was “demeaning because not everyone is rich enough to do and say whatever they want”. A local modelling agency leader, whose main job is to source sales promotion girls to help boost sales of mobile phones and cigarettes, also disagreed with JHF, telling me the group was “disrespectful of people’s

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<sup>51</sup> Anto, interview, 14 April 2019.

<sup>52</sup> Sari, pers. comm., 12 April 2019.

careers” and “sexist, just like those conservatives who want to limit what females should and shouldn’t wear”.<sup>53</sup>

The male Javanese traits of JHF is also shown in their reclamation of the city:

Hey! Return my city  
Hey! My city is not yours  
It’s not just for capitalists  
It’s a home for all Jogjakartans.<sup>54</sup>

The group uses this song as an “object of exchange” to “facilitate[s] changes” (Martí & Revilla 2018, p. 25) within the region. These authors note that artists and musicians do not just perform art; instead, they perform themselves through “musical practices” (Martí & Revilla 2018, p. 29). Similarly, in his study of music culture and territorialism, Gutiez (2018, p. 82) notes that folk music symbolises a “whole range of national meanings that have been represented through folk music since long ago”.

In the other parts of the world, rap is often used to protest a variety of issues. For instance, Guatemalan rappers use their songs as “protest against an extensive history of oppression, racism, and poverty. . .[it] functions as a codified critique of hegemonic culture from the margins” (Bell 2017, p. 181). Bell (2017, p. 182) notes that these rappers are looking to build “a sense of community, exert self-determination, and most importantly, provide a dynamic critique of social norms”. These rappers create a space that is “...affectively charged [with] sonic-social intersubjectivity, that lived social world of empathetic understanding, intuitive communication, and shared values, as developed, expressed, and reproduced in the social experience” (Moore 2013, p. 137).

It is difficult to grasp the intensity of these statements digitally. At first sight, the song sounds just like any other Indonesian rap song. It is sung in formal Javanese language, and most of the references are only meaningful to people familiar with the history of the area. However, after I immersed myself in Jogjakarta for some time, thanks to packs of ‘Surya 16’ cigarettes and homemade moonshine offered to me by my local guides, I began to understand the importance of this song. DeChaine (2002, p. 81) call this realisation the “encounter between

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<sup>53</sup> Rigi, pers. comm., 13 April 2019.

<sup>54</sup> The original lyric in Javanese is as follows: *kuwi dudu nggonmu*  
Bukan hanya milik kalangan kapital saja  
Rumah bersama untuk kita semua.



mind and body, clearing a liminal space that is simultaneously charged with affect and fraught with tension". In framing this composition within Malioboro Street and the residents, I realised that JHF had composed a "musical space" that meshed "physical, sociocultural, historical, and political contexts" and articulated them across "places, bodies, thoughts, and feelings" (DeChaine 2002, p. 93).

As raptivists, JHF fit Bräuchler's (2019, p. 455) definition of brokers because the group has "overcome infrastructural limitations and integrate[d] a broad variety of people with different skills and access" in their activism. Riyanto's (2017, p. 170-173) thesis on JHF's rise and fall<sup>55</sup> argues that the group is a *komunitas* (community) whose members were "born, raised, and had lived in the same geographical and sociocultural locality". JHF was united in balancing "between preserving traditions and maintaining the pace of development and dealing with globalization". JHF was also influential "in paving a way for traditional aspirations to be expressed in the contemporary context". As such, the group helped to convey the messages of their peers, who might not have the same sociopolitical power as them. Additionally, Juki's status as a local celebrity, or, as Riyanto (2017, p. 105) calls him, the "itinerant celebrity" of Jogjakarta, enabled his wide connections to various communities within the borders of the Sultanate and helped him influence the local status quo.

This brings us to the third theme of Juki and JHF's traditionalist politics: their criticism of the Sultan and his rule from the point of view of the Sultanate palace's ex-retinues.

### **The Palace's ex-retinues**

While the previous themes portrayed JHF's recollections of the glory of Malioboro Street and ideal Javanese characteristics, this theme demonstrates the group's disobedience of the Sultan and his ruling. In turning Jogjakarta into an arena of political struggle, JHF violated one of the oldest rules for the retinues of the Sultan, which is to never "disobey any of His Highness' words or question his eternal wisdom".<sup>56</sup>

As previously mentioned, the Sultan reigns supreme in Jogjakarta. For Jogjakartans, the Sultan's name should not be uttered in vain. My host in Jogjakarta told me that the

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<sup>55</sup> This "rise and fall" of JHF is likely to be an over-exaggeration considering that the group is still very much active presently.

<sup>56</sup> Yudha, interview, 18 December 2019.

Sultanate's knights and retainers can take direct action<sup>57</sup> to suppress dissenting voices and "they are free to act as they please because the police can't do anything here". Hakim et al. (2015) also note similar sentiments in their article. Their research shows that the monarch's rulings are often understood as absolute within the boundaries of the Sultanate by the residents of the region (Hakim et al., p. 263-264). In its protest of the Sultan and his Sultanate, JHF did precisely the opposite of the local tradition. Long-standing moral codes in Jogjakarta require all servants of the Sultan to never criticise any of his decisions (Schlehe 2017, p. 2). JHF instead shouted the "often-suppressed dissenting voices brewing in Jogjakarta".<sup>58</sup>

JHF used three different methods to attack the regional leaders. The first was to appeal directly to the authority and pride of the Sultan. JHF (2014) said:

Hey, you leaders, don't be wishy-washy  
You will lose the respect of the people  
Your people have worked really hard  
To prove their love of Jogja.<sup>59</sup>

Apart from encouraging the silent voices in the region to speak up, JHF has been active in gathering support for cultural preservation all around Indonesia. The group has performed '*Jogja Ora Didol*' in locations ranging from big football stadiums in Jakarta to small cafés and bars in Papua. As well-known artists in Indonesia, the group is highly mobile and can "mediate and translate...[crossing] different places and spaces" (Bräuchler 2019, p. 455). During its performances, the group always focuses on Jogjakarta. In doing so, it creates a perception of their imagined Jogjakarta to help strengthen its claims. Therborn (2008, p. 510-512) identifies three social aspects of a place that are relevant for such protest: a fixity and a stable spot; means for contiguity, face-to-face interactions and for rooting relationships of trust and networks; and expression of distinctiveness and source for collective identities, the shaping of memory and tradition, meaning-making and action that also shapes and creates places and spaces. As JHF said, by associating community leaders with the "destruction of

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<sup>57</sup> According to Yudha (interview, 18 December 2019), there are spies everywhere within the walls of the Keraton because most residents actually work for the Sultan.

<sup>58</sup> Anto, interview, 14 April 2019; Alex, interview, 16 April 2019.

<sup>59</sup> The original lyric in Javanese is as follows: *Sing neng nduwur aja leda-lede*  
Mundak luntur kinormatane  
Warga wis golong-gilig nyambut gawe  
Wujud tresna marang Jogja negrine.

Javanese culture”, it was airing the notion that the Sultan and his family did not make decisions with Jogjakartans’ best interests in mind.<sup>60</sup>

Further examination of the construction of this song clarifies this. In her research on language and social discourse in Indonesia, Toomistu (2018) finds that the use of casual language indicates an assumed level of respect in Javanese society. According to Yudha<sup>61</sup> and Sari<sup>62</sup>, the wording that the group used for this verse is not *krama* (the polite and formal style of Javanese, commonly used by persons of lower status to persons of higher status), but rather *madya* (intermediate between *ngoko*—the Javanese dialect used when speaking to people of lower status—and *krama*). This style is commonly used between strangers who meet up on the street, where the two parties do not know their conversational partner’s status. The style is neither too formal nor too informal. JHF’s decision to use this style indicates, I suggest, its reduced level of respect of the leaders who sit in the *keraton*.

To investigate this further, I spoke with a local librarian who specialised in Javanese literature.<sup>63</sup> According to this informant, JHF’s use of *madya* and its rapping about social protests did anger the Sultan. Members of the group were in a dangerous position and were vulnerable to backlash from the Sultan because most of them lived within the walls of the Palace. The informant told me that there were talks among Palace leaders to inflict “damage” on the group.<sup>64</sup> However, the informant also noted that group members were not targeted, apart from having their direct access to the Sultan and his palace removed, because they were too influential within their local communities. JHF was virtually untouchable because the group successfully “[gathered] a substantive crowd behind them, thus overcoming representational issue[s]” (Bräuchler 2019, p. 466).

JHF’s second criticism of *keraton* was its recollection of its personal relationship with the Sultanate Palace after the release of the song ‘*Jogja Istimewa*’ (JHF 2010). The group tried to reminisce by rapping:

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<sup>60</sup> Anto, interview, 14 April 2019.

<sup>61</sup> Interview, 18 December 2019.

<sup>62</sup> Pers. comm., 12 April 2019.

<sup>63</sup> Among all of my participants and informants, this person is perhaps one the closest people to the Sultanate. Their name has been omitted to ensure anonymity.

<sup>64</sup> They did not explain this further, as further information could indicate their level of access and jeopardise their safety.

We have sung *Jogja Istimewa*  
As proofs of our love of the city  
Please stay special for its people  
Please stay special and humble.<sup>65</sup>

In 2010, after the release of '*Jogja Istimewa*', the group was appointed as the Sultanate's cultural ambassadors for Jogjakarta. The group had photo-ops with the Sultan, performed in the *keraton*, and was sponsored to perform overseas by the Sultanate. Once the relationship broke down, the Sultan cut the group out of the Palace. According to Riyanto (2017, p. 167), the relationship was always one-sided: "the appropriation by the Sultan shows the capability and willingness of the bigger structure, in this case, the Kraton [Palace] with the Sultan as the head, to manage its people and subdue them for its interest".

This author provides examples of the Sultan's trip to New Caledonia, where Juki refused to join the Sultan's retinue. The other four group members (Anto, Lukman, Balance and Mamok) decided to follow the Sultan. During the trip, the group was reportedly used to display the Sultan's power, acting as mere "showcases of the Sultan's wisdom"<sup>66</sup>, and the group's identity was "not more than the Sultan's shoes".<sup>67</sup> JHF was an "embodiment of freedom of expression of the Jogjakartan youths' communities and representing equality and freedom".<sup>68</sup> However, after its members enlisted as retainers of the Sultan, the group was used to "strengthen the traditional status quo" (Riyanto 2017, p. 167).

The verse above highlighted precisely this. JHF served as cultural ambassadors of the Sultanate. It already established its proof of duty, establishing its authenticity and the legitimacy of its opposition to the people they represent. Additionally, the group stated that it was not merely the voice of rebellious youth but rather the Sultan's servants who had been involved in his various trips and had devoted their time and lives for the royal highness. While acknowledging that the group acted as servants of the Sultan, JHF at the same time displayed its "social capital" (Bourdieu 1986, p. 242 in Smart 1993, p. 390), which enabled certain access to power through conversations with the palace. While JHF did not claim to be

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<sup>65</sup> The original lyric in Indonesian is as follows: *Telah kunyanyikan Jogja istimewa*  
Wujud perjuanganku dan tanda cinta  
Tetaplah Istimewa untuk warganya  
Tetaplah Istimewa dan sederhana.

<sup>66</sup> Juki, interview, 17 April 2019.

<sup>67</sup> Alex, interview, 16 April 2019.

<sup>68</sup> Anto, interview, 14 April 2019.

on the same level as the Sultan, it established its position as an influential broker in Jogjakarta.

Lastly, the group indirectly criticised the Sultan by challenging the character of Javanese people in Jogjakarta, which it also directly characterised as the reflection of their rulers:

The land gives birth to the throne, and the throne is for the people  
Where the king sits as the reflection of his citizens  
That's why the throne is dignified  
It's standing firm for its citizens.<sup>69</sup>

By using its music to “imagine and negotiate identity” (Bell 2017, p. 181) as Javanese in Jogjakarta, JHF created an “intertextual relationship” (Androutsopoulos 2009 in Gosa 2011, p. 189) between its perceptions of Javanese people with their previous ‘*Jogja Istimewa*’ (JHF 2010) song. In recalling and re-emphasising the previous song that led to the group becoming cultural ambassadors for Jogjakarta, JHF tried to negotiate the cultural values of being a Jogjakartan. By utilising a technique common to *dangdut* called the “communicative function” (Weintraub 2010, p. 133) of popular music, which involves performers assuming the cultural and moral values of their listeners and objects of their music, JHF invited conversation by associating the Sultan with JHF’s protest. In telling the stories of Javanese who lost their pride and honour, the group indirectly attacked the position of the Sultan by questioning his motives and agenda:

Javanese have lost themselves  
Their character has been forgotten  
Their beliefs are changed easily  
Losing their pride and honour.<sup>70</sup>

The group intentionally used vague language in its protest. However, we can trace its targets by focusing the themes of pride and honour. These reoccurring topics indicate their significance. Pride and honour are especially important among both royalty and the working class of Jogjakarta.<sup>71</sup> Throughout my fieldwork, I encountered many participants who told me

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<sup>69</sup> The original lyric in Javanese is as follows: *Manunggal kawulaning gusti dadi siji*  
Bercermin di kalbu rakyatnya ojo lali  
Gugur gunung akeh uwong tandang gawe  
Holopis kunthul baris amrih becike (‘Jogja Istimewa’ – JHF 2010).

<sup>70</sup> The original lyric in Javanese is as follows: *Wong Jawa ilang Jawane*  
Lali marang budi pekertine  
Esuk dele sore tempe  
Suwe, suwe, ilang martabate (‘Jogja Ora Didol’ – JHF 2014).

<sup>71</sup> Juki, interview, 17 April 2019.

that although they were poor, they still had their pride and honour as Javanese. They often commented on their connections to their past elders and heroes. For instance, I often heard their recollections of King Hayam Wuruk and his prime minister Gajah Mada of the Kingdom of Majapahit of the 1300s. They said that they must follow the traditions to prevent upsetting their past relatives. Like JHF, many expressed their concerns about modernity's impact in perhaps diminishing or erasing this tradition among Javanese.

JHF claims morality represents the Javanese people's pride and honour.<sup>72</sup> As such, if we are to compare '*Jogja Ora Didol*' and '*Jogja Istimewa*', the group questions the leadership of the Sultanate over its concerns, as it has said that "the leaders are the reflections of their servants" (JHF 2010). Although group members refused to answer this question, this line directly references the Sultan. If JHF was accusing the leadership of the Sultanate, then the Sultan's and *keraton*'s removal of JHF from their list of cultural ambassadors and restriction of the group's access to the *keraton* might have made some sense. A Jogjakartan<sup>73</sup> told me that JHF angered the Sultan by "accusing the Sultan of having no honour and pride"<sup>74</sup> because he has "accepted modernity and leaving behind his humble servants"<sup>75</sup>. An insider who was active within the walls of the *keraton* said that His Highness's pride was hurt:

Why would they question his stance? His Highness is all for the benefits of the Jogjakartans. They were not in the position to question any of his highness' decision, and they don't have the authority to do so.<sup>76</sup>

In this regard, JHF's questioning of the societal values of being Javanese was perhaps more than just a provocation to those in power—it was a challenge against the monolithic structure of the local community. For Father Franz Magnis-Suseno (1981, p. 42-71), there are two central ethical principles in Javanese society: the avoidance of conflict (*kerukunan*) and respect, in the sense of knowing one's place (*kepatuhan*). JHF's actions and songs contradict these two codes. The group's protest is even more significant when we consider that the person they question is possibly the Sultan himself, who most Jogjakartans view as the

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<sup>72</sup> Juki, interview, 17 April 2019; Anto, interview, 14 April 2019; Alex, interview, 16 April 2019.

<sup>73</sup> SecretOne, pers. comm., 20 April 2019, the name is randomised as per their request.

<sup>74</sup> The original language from the interview is as follows: *Nuduh Sultan ngapunya harga diri, lupa diri*.

<sup>75</sup> The original language from the interview is as follows: *Nyambut modernisasi dan ngelupain hambanya*.

<sup>76</sup> The original language from the interview is as follows: *Engga semestinya mereka nanyain perintah dan pendirian gusti prabu. Wong pemimpin kita kan mikirin buat semua rakyatnya. Ini rakyat rakyat ga pantas buat tanya tanya soal gusti prabu, bukan tempat mereka* (B, pers. comm., 20 April 2019).

descendant and right-hand of God on Earth. JHF's criticism of the palace had indeed rocked the belief of the Sultan's supreme wisdom and the region's monolithic power structure. While the Sultan has politicised JHF's '*Jogja Istimewa*' as a canvas to help legitimise his ruling and help increase his sociopolitical capital, the group responded by using '*Jogja Ora Didol*' to challenge his rule.

This suggests two separate interpretations of traditionalism. First is the viewpoint of the palace. Here, we can see that the Sultan embraced traditionalism in the form of Javanese aristocracy (see Geertz 1957; Schlehe 2017) to maintain his powerful position while welcoming foreign investment.<sup>77</sup> The second interpretation is that of the ex-retinues. For instance, JHF adopt traditionalism and see the embrace of foreign influence as a corruption of Javanese values. Like Mayan rappers in Guatemala, JHF use an imagining of past glory to help strengthen its arguments and protest (Bell 2017). However, JHF and its followers do exactly the opposite of Mayan rappers and their followers. In some ways, JHF's politics are similar to those of rappers employed by the Chinese Communist Party (for instance Flew, Ryan & Su 2019; Zou 2019; Chew 2009). That is, JHF intends to create an exclusive community that rejects modernity and promotes local pride without taking into consideration those who might not have the same opportunities and privileges (for instance, the many participants of this research who are reliant on tourism to run their businesses).

## Conclusion

Indonesian rappers are increasingly more vocal in voicing their sociopolitical protest. Like Mayan rappers in Guatemala (Bell 2017), JHF's Javanese rap songs contain traditional instruments, passages from ancient books and local folklore (Riyanto 2017). Like *wayang* rappers (Varela 2016), JHF's songs are recollections of a glorious past. However, unlike Bell's Mayan case studies, the traditionalist politics of JHF are aimed at creating an exclusive space for working-class Jogjakartans. Viewed this way, JHF and its followers adopt similar approaches to Korean rappers, which Kim & Sung (2019, p. 12) called the "give-up generation". Their case studies showed that young people in Korea, discouraged by economic and financial woes, congregate to voice their mutual frustration. In their frustration of the perceived invasion of their Javanese masculinity (Lette 1996), these ex-retinues of the Sultan overlooked some members of the communities they intended to represent. JHF's focus on

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<sup>77</sup> See Geertz (1957) and Schlehe (2017).

self-reliance and the return of a closed-off Sultanate of Jogjakarta ignored working-class Jogjakartans who rely on tourism, education and jobs from major corporations. As shown throughout this chapter, the group's traditionalist politics (Geertz 1957) promoted an ideal image of a strong and independent Javanese from the past, one that is unattainable for many of the participants of this research.

Though imperfect, Juki, Anto, Balance and Mamok have performed essential roles in the growing protest movements in Jogjakarta. In a city-state that is largely monolithic in its power structure, where the Sultan's rule must be adhered to fully, JHF has created an alternative medium for dissent. As raptivists (Maddex 2014), the group has triggered significant changes in how social politics and social structures are understood by both residents of Jogjakarta and outsiders, both domestic and international (Riyanto 2016, Varela 2014). Using ancient Javanese poems and literature familiar to locals as proof of the importance of moral codes in Jogjakartan society, the group ties its perceptions of diminishing Javanese values in the region to the Sultan's growing embrace of capitalism. Additionally, the group's influence, social position and international network allow its protest and politics to spread beyond Jogjakarta and Indonesia, inspiring responses from various domestic and international popular media (Usada 2015).



## Chapter 8 Regional politics

The findings in Chapter 7 have shown that language is an important tool of protest for Indonesian rappers. While JHF's politics was focused on their region and their perceived Javanese values, this chapter showcases how this centralised approach ostracised other non-Javanese ethnic Indonesians. Research on rap and hip hop as tools to unite and empower marginalised groups and communities has been on the rise. For instance, in South Korea, hip hop scenes host socially outcast youths who want to broadcast their sociopolitical concerns (Kim & Sung 2019). Similarly, Kadich (2019, p. 4) argues that politically savvy youth in Sarajevo, the capital city of Bosnia and Herzegovina, use hip hop as a “grammar for unpolitics” to make political issues accessible and digestible for others by turning them into songs.

In a post-revolution country like Tunisia, Barone (2019) contends that youth have used hip hop to understand past sociopolitical struggles and their effects on daily life. One common feature among these rappers is their use of local dialects and minority languages. For instance, in the case of Mayan rappers in Guatemala (see Chapter 7), Bell (2017, p. 168) argues that the use of Mayan is proof of these rappers' attempts to “[subvert] traditional power structures and offers an otherwise disenfranchised population the opportunity to exercise agency”. This feature is not unique to hip hop in the Global South. For instance, Senger (2018) argues that French rappers incorporate local dialects (in this case, French over English) and musical vocabularies (such as local slang) to depict the personal, cultural and economic issues that they experience daily.

Hip hop is a space where distinct identities are often merged into a group that Alim et al. (2009, p. 3) call the “Global Hip Hop Nation”. It is a “... delineating cultural space for a diverse audience [to come] together” (Olafsen et al. 2017, p. 62). By participating in this subculture, participants help facilitate “...resistance that challenges public fear and repressive state discourse” (Drury 2017, p. 2). This perspective, however, has changed in recent times. Hip hop has been appropriated by rappers, producers, DJs, and enthusiasts in various countries to suit their local needs, such as forming local networks to share resources in Central Europe (Reitsamer & Prokop 2017). It has also been used to contest the importance of the local musical heritage in Singapore (Fu 2015).

Following the adoption of hip hop around the globe, local ethnic languages have become an important site of politics for rappers in non-English speaking countries. Gabsi's (2019, p. 3) seminal work on Tunisian hip hop, for instance, argues that the union of hip hop with the *mizoued* instrument and Arabic language “potentially changes the artist’s personal disposition and history”. By adopting a language they are familiar with instead of English, artists can more freely shape the discourses in their songs to fit their local politics. For instance, various Tunisian rappers often “promise to provide for the mother and offer her a better way of life in exchange for her blessing and forgiveness”, which fits the local Arabic culture “since filial piety is entrenched in the Arabic and Islamic culture” (Gabsi 2019, p. 12). Similarly, for Bell (2017), the use of local Mayan languages in Guatemala helps local rappers “reflect on local conditions and reference contemporary and historical figures” (p. 180) creating storytelling that “insinuates meanings indirectly through cultural codes” (p. 180). For these rappers, hip hop becomes “a dynamic alternative space where categorisation is no longer useful for understanding the appeal of the genre and its message” (Bell 2017, p. 169).

Like rappers in South America and North Africa, Asian rappers have also adopted and used local dialects and ethnic languages in their songs. For instance, Lin (2008, p. 174) argues that local rappers in Hong Kong use local dialect (Cantonese *chou-hau*) as a means to “communicate [their] political message through transposing the Hong Kong working classes’ defiant sentiments to the translocal underclasses’ defiant sentiments”. Similarly, In Jogjakarta, Indonesia, *wayang kulit* (leather puppets) artists combine local ethnic languages and traditional indigenous instruments with hip hop in their performances “to explore a way of making Java’s oldest performance tradition attractive to young people” (Varela 2014, p. 487).

This chapter studies regional politics, which I argue is a response to the attempt to reimagine the “Indonesian identity” of domestic migrants who relocated to Western Indonesia. In their journeys, these domestic migrants experienced racism, discrimination and prejudice. For instance, some mentioned foregoing use of their mother tongues to fit into the societal norms of Western Indonesia. However, some of these migrants try to fight back, as this chapter’s case study, which examines an Eastern Indonesian rap collective called Mukarakat, demonstrates. Mukarakat are brokers of the politics of their listeners and fans.

Rather than being viewed as the “local second-hand copy” (*versi KW*)<sup>1</sup> of US rap songs, Indonesian ethnic language rap songs and rappers have notably different political features than Bahasa Indonesia-based rap scenes. To contribute to this growing academic literature, I draw on my fieldwork in Jakarta, Bandung and Jogjakarta to explore the use of rap and hip hop as tools to unite and empower marginalised Eastern Indonesian groups and communities. By framing my analysis through the notions of ethnic language rap (Bell 2017; Gabsi 2019; Lin 2008) as a grammar of the unpolitics (Kadich 2019), I identify three key political features in their discourse: regionalism, anti-prejudice and cultural preservation.

My research shows that these rappers, displaced from their hometowns, attempt to reimagine their Indonesian identities while promoting the decentralisation of power and governance in Indonesia. To do so, these rappers and those who follow them use ethnic languages as the focal point of their politics. By using ethnic languages from Eastern Indonesia that are nearly extinct, unpopular or unfamiliar to most Indonesians, Mukarakat links the decentralisation of governance and cultural preservation to national prejudice and racism. The collective seeks to bring about change while introducing these issues into popular discourse in an increasingly segregated Indonesia (Siahaan, Nahria & Tampubolon 2021). We will first discuss how social class is associated with music in the Reform era of Indonesia before considering the politics of these Eastern Indonesian migrants.

### **Social class and music in the Reform era**

Toward the end of the New Order regime, the key signifier of its decline was its surrender of its monopoly over TV and radio. This allowed Western pop acts to hold concerts in Jakarta in the 1990s. Also, Indonesia’s major sociopolitical events are often recorded in songs, for instance, the recording of the Bandung Sea of Fire event in *Halo Halo Bandung* by Ismail Marzuki (1946). More recently, the political turmoil during Indonesia’s 2019 general elections was recorded in the release of the ‘Prabowo VS Jokowi – Epic Rap Battles of Presidency’ music video by a group of internet comics (SkinnyIndonesian24 2019) and the song ‘*Goyang Jempol Jokowi Gaspol*’ by Kill the DJ (2019), the leader of the Jogja Hip Hop Foundation.

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<sup>1</sup> Anto, interview, 14 April 2019.

Shifting ideas about class divisions, which occurred because of the regime change from Soeharto's authoritarian New Order regime to the more democratic Reform (*Reformasi*) period, can influence musical consumption practices. The New Order regime's ideology included the idea that social inequality was necessary for economic growth and its developmentalist agenda (Hadiz 2000). Thus, social hierarchy was firmly prescribed, favouring those who lived in urban areas over rural ones, the state over the provinces and social harmony over individual rights (Heryanto 2008, p. 20). Further, musical styles and other popular culture forms mediated through television and radio were limited and restricted by censorship.<sup>2</sup> At the height of the New Order regime, radio was dominated by "commercial hits of melodramatic songs".<sup>3</sup> There was "barely any musical diversity".<sup>4</sup> This changed when MTV arrived in Indonesia in 1993, as it brought "previously-unattainable diverse varieties of songs and musical genres to lower- and middle-class Indonesians".<sup>5</sup> Local adaptations and copies of these artists and bands began to emerge. They gained popularity in conjunction with the rapid growth of Indonesia's underground music scene, such as the punk and hip hop scenes.

As the popular music market and scene grew, social prestige and power influenced genres and artists' politics. Language became the new site of politics for both the artists and their fans. For instance, in the early-to-mid-2000s, imported music and songs from the United States and other Western countries, primarily sung in English, were regarded as superior and were intended to be consumed by middle- and upper-class Indonesians (Wallach 2002, p. 79). On the other hand, the local adaptation of these musical genres, mostly sung in Indonesian or Javanese, such as *dangdut*, *pop Melayu* and, to a certain extent, *pop Indonesia*, were deemed to be for the lower classes (Weintraub 2010).

This trend shifted at the beginning of the 2000s. Previously banned musical genres such as punk, hardcore and metal started to flourish as recording equipment became more affordable for less affluent youth, increasing the accessibility for the creation and consumption of

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<sup>2</sup> Erik, interview, 31 January 2019.

<sup>3</sup> The original language from the interview is as follows: *Lagu sayu dan dramatic tipikal komersil* (Juki, interview, 17 April 2019).

<sup>4</sup> The original language from the interview is as follows: *Engga banyak pilihan waktu itu, musik nya ya itu itu aja* (John Parapat, interview, 5 April 2019).

<sup>5</sup> The original language from the interview is as follows: *MTV itu ngebawa tipe tipe musik yang dulu ga bisa di dengerin sama anak anak ga punya* (Kojek, interview, 29 January 2019).

underground musical subcultures (Saefullah 2017). Luvaas (2013, p. 96-97) calls this “family or a community” by “young, generally middle-class and highly-educated urbanites” the “indie revolution” of Indonesian music. Similarly, Bodden (2005, p. 2) argues that hip hop, especially initially, thrived off a similar network of affluent Jakartan youth.

This chapter proposes that working-class youth played an even more significant role in the indie revolution in the smaller, non-metropolitan cities of Indonesia. While much of the independent scene's academic discourse has focused on the bigger metropolitan cities of West Indonesia (Bandung and Jakarta), my research shows that hip hop thrived in the provinces. In contrast to the familiar Jakarta-centric approach, I would argue that other scenes grew in conjunction with their Jakartan counterparts. One example is the early Javanese rap scene in Jogjakarta. For instance, the first independently organised rap and breakdance show was in early 1989 by English Literature students at Universitas Gajah Mada in Jogjakarta.<sup>6</sup> This show happened just a few months after the first rap show in Menteng, Jakarta.<sup>7</sup> This demonstrates that rap scenes in other cities in Indonesia were not, in fact, lagging behind the Jakartan rap scene (see Chapter 4).

Additionally, the first Javanese-language rap group in Indonesia, G-Tribe (also known as the Geronimo Tribe of the Geronimo radio station in Jogjakarta), was formed in 1991.<sup>8</sup> The group had performed for a couple of years before the first Indonesian rap album, Iwa K's *Kuingin Kembali*, was released in 1993. Their first recorded song, ‘Watchout Dab’, was released as a part of the *Pesta Rap* (1995) compilation album. While other groups in the compilation rapped in Indonesian or English, G-Tribe rapped in Javanese. Anto, the leader of G-Tribe<sup>9</sup>, told me that the group had “two albums worth of materials ready” in the early 1990s but could not record them because of their “technological and financial disadvantages”. From this perspective, their use of Javanese was a political statement to denounce their disadvantages compared to Jakartan rappers who rapped in Indonesian or English.

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<sup>6</sup> Anto, interview, 14 April 2019.

<sup>7</sup> Iwa, interview, 18 March 2019.

<sup>8</sup> Anto, interview, 14 April 2019.

<sup>9</sup> Anto, interview, 14 April 2019.

This was the time when minority language rap by marginalised Indonesians outside Jakarta<sup>10</sup> became a political statement. Anto<sup>11</sup>, G-Tribe and Jogja Hip Hop Foundation (JHF) founder Joki outline three leading motivations behind their Javanese rap in the early 1990s. The first was to “prove the legitimacy of their Javanese heritage”.<sup>12</sup> The second was to “create a distinct and non-Jakarta-centric scene”.<sup>13</sup> G-Tribe and its members were among the first rap artists outside Jakarta to achieve relative success nationwide (as seen, for instance, in their participation in the Jakarta-based *Pesta Rap* compilation series). They created a local subculture that was and still is independent from Jakarta’s rap scene. In 2019, Jogjakarta was one of the powerhouses in the Indonesian hip hop scene, with the production studio Hellhouse being one of the country’s largest independent hip hop labels. The third motivation was to “preserve our local Javanese traditions and familiarise the youths of the area with our local heritage”.<sup>14</sup> JHF’s song lyrics and background music, for instance, were primarily composed of “ancient Javanese works of literature”<sup>15</sup> and “samples of gamelan songs”<sup>16</sup>. Juki<sup>17</sup> explained to me that most of the group’s songs are about “proclaiming that being a country bumpkin is fine. We don’t need to pretend to be cool like those south Jakartan kids”.<sup>18</sup> G-Tribe, and subsequently JHF, motivate rappers from other regional areas of Indonesia to pursue their non-standardised forms of rap. Like these Jogjakartans rappers, Eastern Indonesia rappers have started to embrace their own identity as the focal point of their politics. Before we explore this further, let me first provide some socio-geopolitical context.

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<sup>10</sup> There are also ethnic languages rappers from bigger metropolitan cities, for instance, Kojek Rapper Betawi who raps in Betawi (he is from Central Jakarta) or Sundanis who raps in Sundanese (whose members are from Bandung). However, they are outside of the scope of this research. They belong in the 2010s generation as opposed to G-Tribe’s.

<sup>11</sup> Anto, interview, 14 April 2019.

<sup>12</sup> The original language from the interview is as follows: *Buat ngebukti kejawaan kita* (Anto, interview, 14 April 2019).

<sup>13</sup> The original language from the interview is as follows: *Buat ngeciptain komunitas hip hop yang ga ke Jakarta Jakartaan, yang beda mas* (Anto, interview, 14 April 2019).

<sup>14</sup> The original language from the interview is as follows: *Buat ngejaga dan melestarikan kebudayaan local Jowo dan ngenalin mereka ke anak anak daerah sini* (Anto, interview, 14 April 2019).

<sup>15</sup> The original language from the interview is as follows: *Minjem dari kitab kitab antik*.

<sup>16</sup> The original language from the interview is as follows: *Ngambilin sample sample dari lagu gamelan* (Balance, interview, 10 April 2019).

<sup>17</sup> Interview, 17 April 2019.

<sup>18</sup> The original language from the interview is as follows: *Jadi orang ndeso yo ga masalah mas. Kita ya ga perlu la mejeng sok keren kaya anak anak dari Jakarta Selatan kan?*

## The politics of Eastern Indonesians

JJ Rizal<sup>19</sup>, a Jakartan-native historian and sociopolitical pundit, told me there are three leading reasons behind the separation of Eastern and Western Indonesia. The first is the difference in time zones between the regions. West Borneo, Central Borneo, Sumatra and Java are under Western Indonesia Time<sup>20</sup> with the UTC offset of +07:00. Eastern Indonesia, on the other hand, includes two separate UTCs. The first is Central Indonesia Time<sup>21</sup> (UTC +08:00), which covers South Borneo, East Borneo, North Borneo, Sulawesi, Bali, West Nusa Tenggara and East Nusa Tenggara. The second is Eastern Indonesia Time<sup>22</sup> (UTC +09:00). According to Indonesians across Java and Bali, with whom I spoke during my fieldwork, this zone covers the Moluccas, West Papua and Papua (see Figure 8.1. See also Jurdi 2016 & Winarno 2007).

The second difference is the physical characteristics and daily habits of natives of Eastern and Western Indonesians. For Rizal<sup>23</sup>, the term *pribumi* (native) in the Indonesian language often refers to “mid-light to dark tone brown” skin colour, which is common among most natives of Borneo, Java and Sumatra. *Kulit sawo matang* (ripe sapodilla) colour is the most



**Figure 8. 1** Division between Eastern and Western Indonesia according to research participants. Source: freeworldmaps.com.

<sup>19</sup> Personal communication, 8 July 2020.

<sup>20</sup> The original Indonesian term is as follows: *Waktu Indonesia Barat*.

<sup>21</sup> The original Indonesian term is as follows: *Waktu Indonesia Tengah*.

<sup>22</sup> The original Indonesian term is as follows: *Waktu Indonesia Timur*.

<sup>23</sup> Interview, 16 February 2019.

commonly used description of these physical characteristics. Contrasting this, however, he argues that Eastern Indonesians do not fit such a description.<sup>24</sup> According to Rizal<sup>25</sup>, the Eastern Indonesians are actually Melanesians, who are more physically similar to the islanders of Vanuatu and Fiji than Western Indonesians (see also Siahaan, Nahria & Tampubolon 2021).

Like Rizal, Dandhy Laksono<sup>26</sup> argues that West Papuans and most Eastern Indonesians have a “significantly different way of life”<sup>27</sup> from Western Indonesians. He cites the main food commodity of the region as the most straightforward example of this difference. During *Ekspedisi Indonesia Biru* (Blue Expedition of Indonesia), a year-long journey and grassroots reporting effort he undertook in 2015, he noted that rice is the primary food commodity in most Western Indonesian regions. On the contrary, most Eastern Indonesians consume sago (*sagu*) or sago congee (*papeda*) (Rana 2014). The ways of life of the residents of both regions are also markedly different. Although the Indonesian government has continuously tried to enforce similar living conditions across its region, it is undeniable that the East and West are different.

The terms “Eastern Indonesian” and “Papuan” are often used interchangeably when Western Indonesians refer to the native inhabitants of this region (Savitri 2020). However, it is important to note that these terms are problematic, something I will dissect further throughout this chapter. I argue that the term Eastern Indonesian does not sufficiently capture the breadth of cultures and ethnicities of Eastern Indonesians. For instance, when I talked to members of Mukarakat in 2019, they told me that the Eastern Indonesians that they refer to in their songs are those who live in the Lesser Sunda Islands, Moluccas, Sulawesi, East and West Nusa Tenggara and Papua. More specifically, they refer to those who are of indigenous ethnic groups, including but not limited to *Asmats*, *Botis*, *Sumbawan*, *Wemale* and *Tanimbarese*. It is also important to note that the term Eastern Indonesian does not refer to Western Indonesian migrants in Eastern Indonesia (Nova 2016). Legiani, Lestari and Haryono (2018) argue that these people, who migrated under the Indonesian government’s migration

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<sup>24</sup> Rizal argues that most Eastern Indonesians have darker skin colour and curly hair that are different from the typical ‘Indonesian attributes’ that the Indonesian government promotes.

<sup>25</sup> Interview, 16 February 2019.

<sup>26</sup> Interview, 10 October 2020.

<sup>27</sup> The original language from the interview is as follows: *Gaya hidup orang orang dari Papua Barat dan daerah timur Indonesia itu berbeda dari kita yang dari daerah barat.*



programs, usually associate themselves with their hometowns rather than the places they migrated to.

In their analysis of the grassroot politics of Melanesia, Webb and Webb-Gannon (2016) note that the youth of the region have built their communities to resist the continuous Indonesian oppression of West Papua. More specifically, they have built their communal acknowledgement of oppression and their collective calls for help for their brothers and sisters in West Papua and other regional areas in Eastern Indonesia. Through this lens, the context of regional politics resonates with Heryanto's (2018a) idea of identity politics among Indonesians who live outside of the metropolitan areas of Jakarta, Bandung, Surabaya and Makassar. However, this stance of the members of Mukarakat is problematic, as I argue below. While calling for the liberation of their oppressed community members (Titifanue et al. 2016), the group also participated in a song called 'Indonesia VS Everybody'<sup>28</sup>, which was sponsored by Urbain, a Jakarta-based distro.

Initially, Papua and West Papua were not a part of Indonesia. According to JJ Rizal<sup>29</sup> (see also Hakim et al. 2015 & Siahaan et al. 2021), when Soekarno and Hatta declared Indonesia's independence in 1945, Papuans were not invited to participate in the preparations for the declaration of independence or the independence ceremony. They did not take any part in the war for independence either. Dutch colonialists handed Papua over to Soekarno's regime in 1962 through the New York Agreement. According to that document, the United Nations would temporarily oversee a referendum of Papuans in which they were given two options: to remain part of Indonesia or become an independent nation. The referendum resulted in one of Papua's provinces, Irian Jaya, remaining a part of Indonesia.

The referendum for West Papua and much of the Eastern Indonesia region has generated much discussion (Webb-Gannon & Webb 2019). For human rights activists, West Papuans and other Eastern Indonesians, a referendum for West Papuans under the watchful eye of the international press is essential for West Papuans to decide their future. Laksono<sup>30</sup>, for

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<sup>28</sup> Indonesia VS Everybody was a music collaboration of Mukarakat, Tuantigabelas, Ras Muhammad and Urbain (a streetwear distro based in Jakarta). The song promoted a theme of unity amongst all Indonesians by encouraging them to stand together in their fight against foreign influences. These artists promote nationalism and try to evoke a sense of togetherness amidst the increasingly segregated communities across the nation.

<sup>29</sup> Interview, 16 February 2019.

<sup>30</sup> Interview, 10 October 2020.

instance, notes that his media company (Watchdoc) has received many reports of grassroots calls for such a referendum. Similarly, Veronica Koman<sup>31</sup> told me that many West Papuans are “longing for a change” and have often called Indonesia their “coloniser”. According to West Papuans that they spoke to, Indonesia’s occupation of West Papua needs to end, as the “life toll” of the “domestic colonisation and occupation” are too much for them to endure. For many West Papuans, the West Papuan occupation by the central regime is a “crime against humanity” and any dissident voices are “silenced with bullets and guns”.<sup>32</sup>

Aside from these sociopolitical struggles, Eastern Indonesia’s lack of infrastructure led to many young Eastern Indonesians migrating to Western Indonesia. Many of these displaced young migrants, who migrate to unfamiliar places hoping for a better future, face daily challenges. This chapter will look at a rap group called Mukarakat, whose members consist of young people from various areas of Eastern Indonesia. While there are other active Eastern Indonesian rap groups, Mukarakat is at the forefront of the conflict because of their fame and influence. These displaced young people initially migrated from their hometowns to metropolitan cities in Western Indonesia and, as of 2018, have all migrated to Bali. The next section will discuss their displacement and how they negotiate their identities amid their personal and cultural history.

### **Mukarakat and domestic migrants**

Mukarakat is a rap collective from Flores, East Nusa Tenggara, a province located in one of the Lesser Sunda Islands in Eastern Indonesia. As of November 2021, the group consisted of Lipooz, D’Flow, DJ Geramar, Dirty Razkal and Iam Rapholic. Before becoming full-time rappers, they each worked in different occupations, ranging from debt collector to farmer to local government official to Catholic deacon. While others refused to provide details of their pasts, Lipooz said he was close to being ordained as a Catholic priest but was expelled from the seminary for insubordination. Most of Mukarakat’s members hail from Ruteng, a small town on Flores’ western end in the highlands. Before forming Mukarakat, many of the members were involved in RRC (Republic Ruteng Clan), the local scene’s leading collective. When Lipooz relocated to Bali for work in the mid-2010s, he reunited with D-Flow and other

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<sup>31</sup> Pers. comm., 8 March 2021.

<sup>32</sup> The original language from the interview is as follows: Indonesia itu penjajah. Korban jiwa dari penindasan dan penjajahan domestik, kejahatan terhadap kemanusiaan, suara orang yang engga setuju itu dibungkam dengan timah panas dan senapan (Koman, pers. comm., 8 March 2021).

former members of the Ruteng hip hop scene. These youths formed a rap group called Mukarakat in 2016 to “help solidify the movement for the future of Eastern Indonesians”.<sup>33</sup>

The name Mukarakat comes from the word *muka* (face) and *rakat* (short for *masyarakat* or residents).<sup>34</sup> Although seemingly a harmless word, Western Indonesians often use *rakat* as a slur against Eastern Indonesians (Putra, Legionosuko & Madjid 2019). The name effectively means “the faces of the people from the Eastern regions of Indonesia” (*muka orang orang Timur*).<sup>35</sup> It signals the group’s embrace of their “Eastern heritage” (*kebudayaan Timur*)<sup>36</sup> that “represent[s] everyone from East Nusa Tenggara, Ambon, Papua in their fights for legitimacy and rights”.<sup>37</sup> At the same time, the group also proclaim that they represent “*dewata hip hop*”<sup>38</sup>, a nickname for Bali’s hip hop scene. For instance, aside from championing causes that impact people from Eastern Indonesia, such as fighting prejudice and marginalisation against Eastern Indonesians, the group also champion local Balinese causes such as the fight against the reclamation of the Benoa Bay<sup>39</sup> (Bräuchler 2020).

In their songs, members of Mukarakat rap in their native tongues. According to Lipooz<sup>40</sup>, they grew up with these languages, and despite having moved to Bali, they still use them daily. For instance, Lipooz raps in the *Manggarai* language group in many of Mukarakat’s songs, specifically the *Werana* and *Rajong* languages. *Rembong* was used in many of D’Flow and Iam Rapholic’s verses. Dirty Razkal, on the other hand, raps using ethnic languages from West Papua, such as *Nafri* and *Tobati Enggros*. Examples of wordplay in these different ethnic languages can be found in many Mukarakat songs, as the group slices up their songs into different sections.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> The original language from the interview is as follows: *Untuk membantu membangun gerakan bersama demi masa depan kita orang timur* (Lipooz, interview, 17 February 2019).

<sup>34</sup> Lipooz, interview, 17 February 2019.

<sup>35</sup> D’Flow, interview, 17 February 2019.

<sup>36</sup> Lipooz, interview, 17 February 2019.

<sup>37</sup> The original language from the interview is as follows: Mewakili semua teman teman dari Timur, mulai dari Nusa Tenggara Timur, Ambon dan Papua dalam perjuangan mereka untuk bebas dari penindasan dan pelaksanaan hak asasi mereka semua (Lipooz, interview, 17 February 2019).

<sup>38</sup> Lipooz, interview, 17 February 2019.

<sup>39</sup> Tolak Reklamasi Telok Benoa.

<sup>40</sup> Interview, 17 February 2019.

<sup>41</sup> For instance, in the first verse of ‘Name of Survivors’ (Mukarakat 2020), Dirty Razkal raps ‘*Sa masuk obrak abrik kam pung trick lagu lama*’, while in the second verse D’Flow raps ‘*Tara pu...tar balik, Ni sa ka...si panik, buat kau su...sah naik yo!*’. In ‘*Toki Sloki*’ (Mukarakat 2020) first verse, Dirty Razkal raps ‘*Mino pake tambo, lebe sarbo, tanga naka jari kube lembo-lembo. Wei no kalo pake*

All members of Mukarakat are *perantau* (domestic migrants, see Marta 2014). They moved to Western Indonesia (most commonly to metropolitan cities in Java) to “chase a better future for themselves and their families”.<sup>42</sup> During and after their migrations, they all encountered difficulties. For instance, apart from the systematic and structural political oppression that they faced due to the central government’s domestic colonisation, they also faced severe discrimination and racism from the residents of Jakarta, Jogjakarta, Malang and Bandung (Savitri 2020). Many of the Eastern Indonesians that I met said that it is common for them to be called monkeys (*monyet*), hairy baboons (*babon bulu*) or society’s trash (*sampah masyarakat*). It is important to note that these slurs and demeaning statements come from all levels of local society. A private dorm owner in Jogjakarta told me that their dorm does not accept Eastern Indonesians because they are “smelly” (*bau*), “thuggish” (*kaya preman*) and “messy” (*berantakan*). Similarly, a local *warteg* (street-side restaurant) owner in Bandung told me that Eastern Indonesians are “difficult customers to have because they often owe us money”.<sup>43</sup>

I spoke with a Moluccan in the Plaza Indonesia mall, Jakarta, to investigate this further. He told me that he was just called a provincial monkey (*monyet kampung*) and “thoroughly frisked” (*diperiksa habis-habisan*) by the mall’s security officers before our meeting. It happened because he got agitated when the security guard whispered, “your people don’t belong in this kind of high-end mall (*orang kalian kagak pantas ada di tempat mewah*)” when he entered the mall. Unfortunately for domestic migrants, this is not a rare incident, it is an “everyday occurrence” (*kejadian sehari-hari*).<sup>44</sup> When I spoke with these young migrants throughout the course of my fieldwork, they said that Western Indonesians always view Eastern Indonesians as a single, homogenous group, ignoring the fact that “Eastern Indonesians are probably even more diverse culturally than the Javanese”.<sup>45</sup> For instance, although they might have a similarly darker skin colour, Ambonese and Papuans have

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*campo nenti mabo jo cari pekara bua kaco*’ while in the fourth verse, Iam Rapholic raps ‘Over sloki macam over bola. Di pojok tu ko jangan lupa’.

<sup>42</sup> The original language from the interview is as follows: *Mencari masa depan yang lebih baik untuk keluarganya dan diri mereka sendiri* (Lipooz, interview, 17 February 2019).

<sup>43</sup> Sering kagak bayar tagihan.

<sup>44</sup> Bimo, interview, 19 February 2019.

<sup>45</sup> The original language from the interview is as follows: *Orang timur lebih banyak variasi budaya dari orang orang Jawa*’ (Ranggit, interview, 21 February 2019).

significantly different cultural, political and economic backgrounds (Romdiati & Gusti Ayu Ketut Surtiari 2020).

When I asked Jakartans and Jogjakartans from diverse backgrounds (security guards, restaurant and private dorm owners) about racism, they expressed different answers with the same underlying theme. They told me that Eastern Indonesians are “just different from us, the Javanese” (*orang mereka itu beda mas sama kita orang dari Jawa*). They said that “[Eastern Indonesians] are behind us [Western Indonesians], many are uneducated, they don’t know manners”.<sup>46</sup> They claimed that it is useless to care about them (*ngapain sih di urusin*). They further said “why would you care if a monkey is different from a baboon? They are all animals”.<sup>47</sup> In essence, some people I met during my field work do not consider Eastern Indonesians with different physical characteristics to be fellow Indonesians or even, in some cases, humans; they view them as monkeys and baboons (also see Wiratraman 2021). During my travel to several major metropolitan cities and areas, I found such acts of racism and discrimination to be normalised, with only those who faced discrimination finding this unacceptable.

For many of my research participants, Bali was the only place where such racism was not displayed publicly (Fajriyah 2017). On this island, the domestic and foreign cultures that tourists, locals and migrants bring are melted into a shared scene that differs significantly from any other island or area in Indonesia. Everyone, “no matter what they look like, what they sound like and what their styles are, is accepted as long as they do not interfere with the Balinese way of life”.<sup>48</sup> Furthermore, Bali is considered the “antithesis of Javanese refinement, which epitomised the official version of Indonesian high culture” (Baulch 2002, p. 210). Although he was rejected in Surabaya, Iam Rapholic<sup>49</sup> says that he was “more accepted” (*lebih diterima*) in Bali because he looks “different” (*berbeda dari yang lain*).

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<sup>46</sup> The original language from the interview is as follows: Orang orang timur itu gitu mas, sering banget di belakang kita. Banyak dari mereka itu engga terpelajar, jadinya mereka ga tau diri lho, ga bisa kaya orang dari kota.

<sup>47</sup> The original language from the interview is as follows: Apa urusan coba kalo monyet itu beda sama babon? Sama sama binatang.

<sup>48</sup> The original language from the interview is as follows: Engga peduli tampangnya gimana, suaranya gimana atau gayanya gimana, selalu di terima di sini, yang penting ya mereka engga coba ngerubah atau ngehalangin gaya hidup orang Bali (Koming, interview, 9 October 2019).

<sup>49</sup> Interview, 17 February 2019.

Mukarakat's connection to and appreciation of Bali are shown in the following two examples. The first is '*Toki Sloki*' (Mukarakat 2020). This song revolves around the idea of alcohol consumption and the lax life on the Island of Gods. Portrayed as being under the influence of alcohol, Mukarakat notes that "even though you are drunk, you need to follow good etiquette". I argue that this is an attempt to counter the continuous attacks by Western Indonesians against residents of Bali. For instance, Suwiknyo (2020) writes about the central government in Jakarta legislating the banning of the sale of alcohol.

The second example is a song titled '*Mari Jua Naik*', or 'Let's Get High' (Mukarakat 2019). The title of the song is a wordplay on being intoxicated from marijuana. In the accompanying music video the group released on its YouTube channel portrays, the members are shown smoking, having fun and chilling at a riverside club in Bali. I argue that this is another attempt by the group to denounce the stigmatisation of the use of recreational drugs on the island (for instance, Suranata 2013). The group sings that, unlike alcohol, marijuana does not make its users aggressive. Instead, the group argues that the consumption of marijuana, especially on a busy and packed island such as Bali, helps reduce traffic and aggression, as it relaxes its users and reduces their depression.

As these young rappers reinvent and renegotiate their identities as Indonesians, and specifically as Eastern Indonesians, they develop an alternative political approach that I call regional politics.

## **Regionalism**

The first feature of regional politics is, as the term implies, its regionalism. Followers of *rakat* politics fight for the "recognition of East Indonesia"<sup>50</sup> as more than just a source of "natural resources and thugs"<sup>51</sup> and for the recognition of Eastern Indonesians as fellow "citizens of the state"<sup>52</sup>. In participating in the growing unrest in Indonesia following the newly announced alliance of political powerhouses Joko Widodo and Prabowo Subianto (Walden & Renaldi 2019), Mukarakat hopes to represent the voices of their fellow "eastern people"<sup>53</sup> and

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<sup>50</sup> The original language from the interview is as follows: *Daerah timur*.

<sup>51</sup> The original language from the interview is as follows: *Engga cuma tambang, emas dan preman*.

<sup>52</sup> The original language from the interview is as follows: *Penduduk negeri* (Dirty Razkal, interview, 17 February 2019).

<sup>53</sup> The original language from the interview is as follows: *Orang timur*.

others who live outside of Java. Their regional politics is a framework for Eastern Indonesians to equalise their position among their fellow Indonesians.

Further, being *rakat* involves opposing the role of Indonesia's central government in "denying the rights of fellow citizens, for allegedly being less authentically Indonesian" (Heryanto 2018, p. 607). Instead of embracing diverse cultural heritage and preserving cultural traditions, some Indonesian politicians have tried to enforce "sets of standards" that some ethnic minorities needed to follow (Heryanto 2018, p. 607). Within its territory, the state enforces a strict use of officially accepted language (*Bahasa wajib*) in state schools (for instance, the *Teochew* language is banned in all schools that follow the national education program). It also bans certain religions (*agama terlarang*), such as *Ahmadiyah* and *Inkar Sunnah*. Followers of these religions have been illegally persecuted, attacked, and not protected by the state.<sup>54</sup> This contrasts with the state's constitution, which states that every citizen is "entitled to believing religions of their choice" and that their "beliefs are protected by the constitution" (Article 22, paragraph 1 of legislation number 39 of 1999).

At first, Mukarakat's *rakat* politics seems to address this. A group member (whose name has been omitted for fear of prosecution for treason) says that the group promotes "equal rights" (*persamaan hak asasi manusia*) for their fellow *rakat*, and more specifically, for those whose rights have been continuously "oppressed since 1945" (*dijajah sejak tahun 1945*). In some sense, this person denounced the "local colonisation" (*penjajahan local*) of West Papua by the Indonesian central government (Suryawan 2020). It was also mentioned that although they cannot publicly declare their support of the movement, they have mentioned their support of Benny Wenda, a West Papuan leader currently living in exile in Britain because of his role as the United Liberation Movement leader in West Papua (Wenda 2011).

While Mukarakat supported the liberation movement mentioned above, the group also appeared in an overtly nationalistic rap song titled 'Indonesia vs Everybody' (Urbain Inc 2019). This term translates to unity in diversity, a motto used by Indonesia's central government to promote peace throughout its territory by promoting specific cultural heritages, most commonly Javanese cultural traditions. In fact, some of their lyrics are close

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<sup>54</sup> Followers of *Ahmadiyah* and *Inkar Sunnah* were attacked Indonesian government's endorsed organisation such as *Pemuda Pancasila* and FPI. There were videos of these attacks on them and they displayed how police officers were accommodating towards the attackers as opposed to protecting the followers of these religions.

to Zou's (2019) analysis of patriotic rap songs in China, especially in their nationalistic call for unity against all odds.

Other rappers and many of Mukarakat's fans, especially those directly affected by the central government's actions, strongly voiced their concern about the group's intention with this song. For instance, Aldi<sup>55</sup> says that while Mukarakat stands for its fellow Eastern Indonesians, the group's participation in the song could prove that it no longer identifies as Eastern Indonesian.<sup>56</sup> Similarly, Jeffri<sup>57</sup>, an ex-fan of the group from Bandung, expressed his concern that the group's actions seemingly "prioritise profits over their fights for Eastern Indonesians' rights" because it has "sided with Jakartans' politics".<sup>58</sup> However, upon further analysis, I found several layers of *rakat* politics in this song.

Mukarakat's participation in such a collaborative performance could be considered as undermining its earlier calls for decentralisation of governance. It also undermines its calls for the importance of human rights in some areas of Indonesia. The group claims still to uphold the cause of regional authority and pride. Lipooz<sup>59</sup> says that the group's participation in the video was "an opportunity that we could not refuse" (*kesempatan yang kita ga bisa tolak*). He continues by claiming that it would be better for Eastern Indonesians to spread a message of unity because that at least "allows Eastern Indonesians to represent us instead of not being represented in the mainstream media".<sup>60</sup> While Mukarat's decision to join the collaboration might not fit the group's original goal, it might be an attempt "to combat their voicelessness" (Bell 2017, p. 191) in the mainstream space. Owing to the influence of Urbain and Mukarakat's fellow collaborators, the video has more than 1.6 million views on YouTube as of 4 February 2022. As such, Lipooz's statement might be true. However, it has been challenging to find anyone who agrees with him.

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<sup>55</sup> Aldi, pers. comm., 8 October 2019.

<sup>56</sup> The original language from the interview is as follows: Mereka kok kayanya uda ga mikir kalo mereka orang timur yang sudah di tindas bertahun-tahun oleh Indonesia ya?

<sup>57</sup> Jeffri, pers. comm., 19 August 2019.

<sup>58</sup> The original language from the interview is as follows: Kayanya sekarang mereka lebih mikirin duit sih mas. Mereka milih duit dan ketenaran, makanya jadi sesuai dan sejalan dengan politik Jakarta.

<sup>59</sup> Lipooz, pers. comm., 26 November 2020.

<sup>60</sup> The original language from the interview is as follows: Ada diajak berpartisipasi seperti ini itu kesempatan yang ita ga bisa lewat. Kita ikut di sana karena kita ga mau orang Jawa yang jadi muka kita. Paling engga ini memberi kesempatan orang timur untuk berbicara untuk mereka sendiri (Lipooz, pers. comm., 26 November 2020).



When analysing these changes in Mukarakat's messages, it is important to return to the word *rakat*. This word serves as the group's base of politics. Its meaning is similar to the term *houma* (neighbourhood) that Tunisian rappers use to refer to their community connections (Gabsi 2019). However, unlike Tunisian rappers, who use the term *houma* to "construct a street-conscious identity, allowing them to stay connected to the street" (Alim et al. 2009, p. 288), Mukarakat do not use the term as a representation of their authenticity.

Instead, the term *rakat* is proof of the group's protest. More specifically, Mukarakat aims to give voice to Eastern Indonesians and draw attention to their plight. Given that a nationwide audience unfamiliar with Mukarakat may have heard 'Indonesia vs Everybody', it is arguable that the group successfully performed its politics. Besides, this "manoeuvre" by Mukarakat might be another political move in disguise. This is similar to the interactions between *wayang hip hop* and traditional *wayang* (shadow puppet theatre). The former is "not in competition with traditional *wayang*, since it helps bring more audiences to traditional shows" (Varela 2014, p. 502).

Like the Mayan rappers studied by Bell (2017, p. 191), Mukarakat and others who engage in regional politics are "heavily burdened with a history of oppression, discrimination, violence and genocide". As a creative way for youth to "cope with the vicissitudes of their increasingly difficult and dangerous lives" (Dimitriadis 2009, p. 163), rap music enables oppressed youth to interact with ideas that might be prohibited in the popular scene. For Mayan rappers, rap music is used to reclaim "their cultural past through youth-centred, contemporary storytelling" (Bell 2017, p. 191). Similarly, this chapter shows that members of Mukarakat are using songs to negotiate and analyse their Indonesian identity.

In renegotiating those identities, both as Indonesians and as Eastern Indonesian, members of Mukarakat perform two separate actions. First, they try to convey that there is no meaningful difference between Indonesians. To do so, they rap about fishing, farming and taking care of their *toko kelontong* (small groceries stores). Second, by saying "differences exist, but we're all family"<sup>61</sup>, they indirectly question the identity politics in the mainstream media. The question of identity politics in Indonesia "has always been a soul-searching question, a

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<sup>61</sup> The original language from the interview is as follows: *Perbedaan itu ada, tapi kita semua tetap keluarga.*

central and highly emotional topic of heated public debate and communal conflict, sometimes fatally so” (Heryanto 2018b, p. 361).

I observe two distinct responses from viewers of the video by analysing its comment section. The first is from nationalistic Indonesians, who interpret the song as a call for unity. For these people, the nation must stay united and “another Timor Leste has to be avoided at all costs”.<sup>62</sup> Contrasting this, others interpret the song as a call for a referendum for West Papuans. One commenter says, “if these are the standards of being an Indonesian, doesn’t that mean that those who are different aren’t included? Then shouldn’t they be allowed to choose who they want to be?”.<sup>63</sup> Perhaps these discussions are the group’s aim. The music video and song might be intended to spread “political messages through the lyrics” (Lin 2008, p. 174) that can be interpreted differently by each listener (Newman 2009, p. 195).

It is understandable that fans in both Eastern and Western Indonesia will be perplexed by Mukarakat’s stunt. I argue that this is where Mukarakat’s *rakat* politics become convoluted, as the group’s intention of supporting fellow Eastern Indonesians is stumped by its drive for publicity (common in hip hop, see Vito 2019). While group had earlier expressed support for referendums and its members had accepted their role as political brokers for their fellow Eastern Indonesians, Mukarakat participated in a song that promoted the “unity” of Indonesia over everything else. For instance, in this song, a member of Mukarakat raps “no matter who challenges us, Indonesia will be here to respond”. This statement is obviously the opposite of the call for a referendum, which could potentially see the secession of West Papua from Indonesia (Lantang & Tambunan 2020).

Furthermore, Lipooz also raps Indonesia’s official national motto, which comes from the old Javanese saying *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika*, or Unity in Diversity (Dewantara 2019). This statement contradicted all the work that the group have done previously to promote the betterment of Eastern Indonesians. As Lipooz and Mukarakat<sup>64</sup> told me, this was their

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<sup>62</sup> The original language from the interview is as follows: *Nah ini bagus, kasus kaya Timor Leste jangan sampai kejadian lagi deh* (Dikta, pers. comm., 9 December 2019).

<sup>63</sup> The original language from the interview is as follows: *Kalo ini standar jadi orang Indonesia, yang berbeda ga di anggap indo? Kalo engga, ya kasi la mereka milih mereka mau jadi siapa* (Regita, pers. comm., 29 December 2019).

<sup>64</sup> Pers. comm., 26 November 2019.

attempt to “speak on their own terms” through a medium that was otherwise out of their control.

The provincial politics of Mukarakat also affect the group’s fellow rappers. For instance, Tuantigabelas, one of Indonesia’s most prominent rappers, held a tour of various Eastern Indonesia cities in late 2019. Tuantigabelas<sup>65</sup> told me that some of his fellow rappers from Eastern Indonesia, namely Lipooz and Joe Million, made the tour possible. He also told me that as a Jakartan native, he was previously “uninformed and uneducated (*engga tau dan engga terpelajar*)” about the sociopolitical struggles of Eastern Indonesians.<sup>66</sup> This close interaction with Eastern Indonesians and their politics affected him. As a domestic migrant from Sumatra, Tuantigabelas<sup>67</sup> felt that he was “represented by Mukarakat’s regional politics” although he was “obviously not the target audience of the song”.<sup>68</sup> By touring the region with his fellow Western Indonesian rappers and artists, he wished to “highlight the severe human rights issues” that he noted as “too inhumane to be called humane”.<sup>69</sup> This shows how exposure to *rakat* politics could alter the politics of the uninformed.

Similarly, Joe Million, a Jayapura (West Papua) native rapper who currently lives in Bandung, Java, also recalled the impact of Mukarakat’s regional politics on both his musical career and personal ties to his hometown of Jayapura.<sup>70</sup> Joe is perhaps one of the most outspoken Eastern Indonesian migrants in Western Indonesia. In an interview, Joe said that he agrees that “Papuan should receive their freedom, as long as they are independent and can ensure that their citizens are educated” (March News 2017). Joe also notes that there are several interpretations of *rakat* politics. For instance, when I spoke with him in 2020, he said that OPM (*Organisasi Papua Merdeka* or Free Papua Movement, see Gault-Williams 1987) and Mukarakat inspired him in different ways. According to Joe<sup>71</sup>, Mukarakat fights for their

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<sup>65</sup> Tuantigabelas, interview, 31 January 2019.

<sup>66</sup> Tuantigabelas, interview, 31 January 2019.

<sup>67</sup> Tuantigabelas, interview, 31 January 2019.

<sup>68</sup> The original language from the interview is as follows: Aku juga merasa diwakili oleh Mukarakat mas, sebagai sesama orang perantau ya. Aku tau sih kalo mereka bukan nulisin ini lagu buat kita dari Sumatra, tapi ya ngerasa juga mas.

<sup>69</sup> The original language from the interview is as follows: Aku dan teman teman itu berharap kalo tur kita keliling itu bisa nge bawa isu isu penindasan dan kebebasan kita sebagai manusia lebih ke atas mas. Biar orang orang tau. Tindakan pemerintah kita di banyak daerah daerah ini itu terlalu kejam untuk di bilang hubungan antar manusia (Tuantigabelas, interview, 31 January 2021).

<sup>70</sup> Joe Million, interview, 19 June 2020.

<sup>71</sup> Joe Million, interview, 19 June 2020.

freedom by “using word crafting and cultural diplomacy” (*lekuk bahasa dan diplomasi kultural*), while OPM uses “explosions and ammunition” (*ledakan dan amunisi*). Although their approaches to *rakat* politics differ, Joe says that both these groups fight for Eastern Indonesians.

If being a *rakat* does not implicitly mean assuming complete opposition to the central government’s regime in eastern Indonesia, what could *rakat* politics mean? Outside of possible support for the West Papuan referendum and other human rights struggles for those oppressed for the ruling regime's benefits, could it be a call for support of fellow Eastern Indonesians? The following section, which explores resistance to regional prejudice, might offer a possible answer to this question.

### **Racial prejudice**

The second feature of *rakat* politics is its representation of Eastern Indonesians as outsiders in Western Indonesia. Eastern Indonesians who migrated to Java or other Western Indonesia areas often face differential treatment. For instance, many are refused accommodation in student dormitories, are not accepted into public universities despite good grades and are often unable to find jobs(see Ubaidillah 2019).<sup>72</sup> Many Eastern Indonesians believe that they are treated this way “...because we look different. We have curly hair, darker skin and different voice tones. We don’t even speak like Indonesians, you know”.<sup>73</sup> As such, I would argue that regional politics attempt to change such prejudice by encouraging Eastern Indonesians to assert themselves within Indonesia’s popular culture sphere. Differing from its first feature, this aspect of being a *rakat* seems to accept the status of Eastern Indonesians status as Indonesians while at the same time questioning their status and benefits. I also see *rakat* politics as an attempt to diminish the influence of the centrally-focused politics that Hadiz (2000, p. 11) calls the “legacy of the New Order”. In this frame, regional politics offers a different perspective, seeing unity not as being inherently “Indonesian” but rather an enforced political movement that seeks the Indonesian central government's domination over its territory (Siregar 2014).

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<sup>72</sup> Mukarakat, pers. comm., 17 February 2019.

<sup>73</sup> The original language from the interview is as follows: Karena kita keliatan berbeda mas. Rambut kita keriting dan ikal, kulit kita gelap dan nada suara kita berbeda. Kalo di bandingin, cara kita ngomong aja beda mas sama orang Indonesia lain (D-Flow, interview, 17 February 2019).

Despite the promised governance improvements of the Reform movement, regional politics attempts to prove that human rights and equality are not prioritised in Indonesia. Following the Reform movement, Vedi Hadiz correctly predicted that the Reform era was destined to fail. He notes that “Indonesia’s social and political framework is being remoulded through relatively insulated negotiations between political party elites (plus the military) largely drawn from the middle layers of the New Order’s former network of patronage” (Hadiz 2000, p. 28). Revisiting the same topic in 2017, Robison and Hadiz (2017, p. 906-907) again argue that such a structure is inherently problematic, as the “dominant political forces” of the country have successfully promoted an “inward-looking nationalist and populist” approach so as to maintain their “oligarchic domination”.

One such action was the purging of “official history and public memory of the leftist movements, including the Indonesian Communist Party, President Sukarno in the later years of his presidency and their respective supporters” (Heryanto 2018b, p. 608). This legacy of Soeharto is still relevant in 2022. *Taman Mini Indonesia Indah* (Beautiful Indonesia in Miniature Park), a culture-based recreational area in East Jakarta built by Siti Harsinah, Soeharto’s wife, is one such actual example of Indonesia’s enforced unity and uniformity (Wulandari 2013). Weintraub (2010, p. 202) argues that this park shows that “social inequalities based on ethnic, racial, class, and gender differences were edged aside for the sake of national homogeneity”. Spectators of this park “were encouraged to recognise themselves as equivalent to all others, as a way of sublimating social differences” and that “social differences and inequalities were contained in the service of symbolic unity” (Weintraub 2010, p. 202).

Mukarakat disagrees with the supposed “culture” that the central government enforces, as well as with its depiction of a “typical Indonesian”.<sup>74</sup> Despite the regime’s attempt to include Eastern Indonesians as part of the nation, they still feel like “outsiders in their land”.<sup>75</sup> For Mukarakat such an attempt at inclusion must be at a “grassroots” level.<sup>76</sup> The “superficial” level of sociopolitical outreach undertaken by the Indonesian government over the past 50 years has not worked. More precisely, Lipooz states that “I mean, so far [Eastern Indonesia]

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<sup>74</sup> Mukarakat, pers. comm., 17 February 2019.

<sup>75</sup> Pendatang di tanah sendiri.

<sup>76</sup> Pers. comm., 17 February 2019.

has been one of the largest providers of foreign investment funds in Indonesia, yet we are rarely acknowledged as such in the media and by the government”.<sup>77</sup> D’Flow adds:

[O]n paper, we’re Indonesian. But, to be honest, we don’t feel the same way. When we go to Plaza Indonesia, people look at us like we are a group of monkeys. Like we don’t belong to the same country as them.<sup>78</sup>

This is an intriguing point. While some Indonesians are proud of their “politeness” and “Javanese-ness”<sup>79</sup> (see Chapter 7), many inside the country do not enjoy such treatment. For instance, despite an *Expat Insider* report (Saputra 2019) ranking Indonesia as the eighth most polite country globally and another report ranking it as the most polite country in the Southeast Asia region (Intan 2020), such behaviour is arguably reserved for foreigners. Additionally, these kinds of surveys are often conducted in Indonesia’s metropolitan cities like Jakarta, Bandung and Surabaya, or major international tourist destinations like Jogjakarta, Bali or Lombok. Indonesians who do not originate from Jakarta or other major cities in Java often experience discriminatory treatment because of their dialects or looks. The riot in Surabaya at Papuan tertiary student dormitories, for instance, was a clear example of Eastern Indonesians’ unequal treatment in society (Akib 2022).

In 2019, violent riots broke out at Papuan student dorms in Jogjakarta and other metropolitan cities in Java. Indonesian nationalists attacked these young students for flying the Morning Star flag that signified support for the Free West Papua movement (Belau 2019). The attack was supported by the local police, the Indonesian army and religious militia thugs (Harsa & Rofil 2021; Belau 2019). Only two attackers were charged; they were sentenced to prison for five and seven months. No army members were charged or arrested. According to Mukarakat<sup>80</sup>, this event was another example of the racism and discriminatory treatment that Eastern Indonesians experience every day. The group also notes that Papuans often receive even crueler and more sadistic treatment in West Papua (see Elmslie, Webb-Gannon & King 2011; Elmslie & Webb-Gannon 2014). However, this treatment has not been reported on

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<sup>77</sup> The original language from the interview is as follows: Gini ya mas, selama ini daerah kita itu udah menjadi salah satu provinsi yang masukin devisa terbesar di Indonesia, tapi biarpun begitu, kita jarang banget di perhatikan oleh media dan pemerintah (pers. comm. 17 February 2020).

<sup>78</sup> The original language from the interview is as follows: Di atas kertas, kita semua di bilang orang Indonesia. Cuman jujur aja, kita ga ngerasa begitu. Contoh nya deh, pas kita pergi ke Plaza Indonesia, kita di liatin kaya pertunjukan monyet. Seolah olah kita bukan satu negara (D’Flow, interview, 17 February 2019).

<sup>79</sup> The original language from the interview is as follows: *Ramah tamah dan kejawaan*.

<sup>80</sup> Mukarakat, pers. comm., 17 December 2020.

publicly since the Indonesian regime blocked international news reporters from the region (BBC 2019).

Early in its career, members of Mukarakat championed regional politics to combat the regional prejudice that many *orang perantau* (Indonesian migrants) experienced by creating a local community in their new, strange environment. This initiative stemmed from their experiences migrating from the highlands of Ruteng to various metropolitan cities in Indonesia for education or work. For instance, Lipooz moved to Surabaya because he found a job at a music label. Upon arriving, he was barred from staying at *kos-kosan* (private dorms) because he was no longer a student, even though the dorm was open to the public. He also said that many *kos-kosan* in the city banned Eastern Indonesians from renting a room. Iam Rapholic<sup>81</sup> says he also experienced similar treatment. As migrant university students from Eastern Indonesia, many were forced to unite (*ngumpul bareng*) because they could not find places to stay.<sup>82</sup> One of the students who lives in a Papuan dorm in Surabaya told me that these students feel safer in greater numbers because they can support one another.<sup>83</sup>

Upon their members' migration to Bali, Mukarakat's understanding of *rakat* politics shifted slightly. In Surabaya (for Lipooz, Iam Rapholic and D'Flow) and Jakarta (for DJ Geramar and Dirty Razkal), being *rakat* means uniting with their fellow Eastern Indonesians in new locations in order to avoid discrimination and prejudice. It is a way to "stand up by themselves"<sup>84</sup> and avoid relying on locals of the area. For Mukarakat, being *rakat* in Bali means assimilating and representing *Dewata* hip hop, Bali's local scene. For instance, in *Rompes* (Mukarakat 2018), the group proudly embraces the "drunkards and good for nothing"<sup>85</sup> depiction of Eastern Indonesians. They rap:

When we get together, quickly pick up your glass shots  
Finish your drinks, feel the heat of the alcohol, then come closer  
This is Mukarakat.<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>81</sup> Pers. comm., 17 February 2019.

<sup>82</sup> Iam Rapholic, pers. comm., 17 February 2019.

<sup>83</sup> The original language from the interview is as follows: *lebih aman bang kalo kita ngumpul. Kalo ada apa apa, ada abang yang bisa bantu* (Albert, pers. comm., 17 April 2019).

<sup>84</sup> The original language from the interview is as follows: *Berdiri sendiri* (Lipooz, interview, 17 February 2019).

<sup>85</sup> The original language from the interview is as follows: *Pemabuk dan orang orang tidak berguna* (Lipooz, interview, 17 February 2019).

<sup>86</sup> The original lyric in Indonesian is as follows: *Sa pu rakat, sloki moke cepat su ko angkat kas panas dada sedikit habis tu ko merapat*

Embracing stigma and using it as a political tool is not a new phenomenon in Indonesia, or indeed elsewhere. As I have said previously, Indonesian popular music has always been a highly politicised space. Let us take *dangdut* music subculture as an example. Despite their differences, in terms of markets and cultural practices, *dangdut*, a well-researched and well-studied Indonesian popular music subculture, and hip hop are similar—their politics are a form of resistance against the domination of class politics (in this example, Javanese aristocracy, see Kartodirdjo 2014). For lower class Indonesians, *dangdut* is an important signifier of their belonging to their community. For instance, Moore (2013, p. 147-148) argues that *dangdut* was often dismissed as a music genre for the domestic migrants (*pendatang luar pulau*) and Javanese in the low-income labour force. Similarly, Bader and Richter (2014, p. 174-175) argue that *dangdut*'s often-used *kasar* (coarse) language also acts as another class signifier for its fans. Weintraub's (2006, p. 414) seminal work on Indonesian *dangdut* music identifies these five characteristics of the politics of *dangdut*:

1. Roots in the melodies, rhythms, and vocal style of Melayu popular music (*orkes melayu*)
2. Indonesian-language lyrics
3. Relatively simple style of dance (*joget* and *goyang*)
4. Straightforward and easily comprehensible lyrics
5. Texts which deal with everyday realities of ordinary people

While building on similar characteristics to those identified by Weintraub, regional politics differ slightly. For instance, regional politics use ethnic languages unfamiliar to most Indonesians and the topics of Mukarakat's songs mainly deal with the issues faced by those born outside of Java. Unlike *dangdut* artists and fans, those who practice regional politics embrace their outsider status instead of trying to fit in with Indonesian society. In doing so, they denounce the central government's unjust actions and denounce social prejudice that they experience as *pendatang* (outsiders). In denouncing the prejudice of Western Indonesians against domestic migrants and other minority groups, those who follow *rakat* politics also promote cultural preservation, which I will discuss further in the following section.

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Ni Mukarakat (Mukarakat 2018).



### Cultural preservation

The third feature of regional politics is its embrace of its supporters' local identities. For instance, those who practice regional politics call to preserve the ethnic languages in Indonesia's provinces. While I might be the first to identify this as one of the features of Indonesia's regional politics, research on the connection between identity, societal segregation, and rap music is well-established. For instance, Rose (1991) argues that African Americans in the United States use rap music as a political tool to connect with their ancestors. More recently, Ratner's (2019) research on the rap scene of young Israeli-Ethiopians in Tel Aviv offers a closer, although still significantly different, point of comparison for rap scene politics. Like Mukarakat and other Eastern Indonesian migrants in Indonesia, Israeli Ethiopian youth were segregated due to their status as outsiders. They used rap to echo "the youngsters' experiences in the Israeli society. It comforts them and helps them to develop and articulate ways of coping with their situation" (Ratner 2019, p. 107). Additionally, these young people also use rap music as a "symbolic bridge" (Ratner 2019, p. 107) to connect to their historical roots, a site of politics similar to Mayan youths in Guatemala (Bell 2017).

Research on ethnic-language rap in Indonesia is not new, although as of 2022, the discourse is hardly well-established. For instance, Varela (2014, p. 482) argues that *wayang* (shadow puppet) hip hop is "constructed as a deliberate and sophisticated interaction of Javanese heritage and global youth music". He also describes *wayang* as having a similar mission to ethnic-language rap: to help preserve a dying cultural form (Varela 2014, p. 491), specifically the craft of *wayang* and the Javanese language. Similarly, Riyanto's (2016) study of the rise and fall of the Jogja Hip Hop Foundation<sup>87</sup> (JHF) found an established network of rappers who have used ethnic languages since the early 1990s. Anto<sup>88</sup>, a JHF and G-Tribe member, says that in the 1990s, ethnic languages rap was a tool for Javanese to "weaponise their culture in opposing the central regime".

Juki, JHF's leader and founder, concurred, saying that JHF was created to "preserve Javanese cultural heritage and as a space for those who want to use their mothers' languages".<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>87</sup> This 'rise and fall' term is somewhat of an exaggeration, as the group was still touring and performing on national TV and festivals in 2019.

<sup>88</sup> Interview, 14 April 2019.

<sup>89</sup> Juki, interview, 17 April 2019.

Javanese rap was created as an outlet for “outsiders who don’t feel any belonging to the centralised Indonesian culture”.<sup>90</sup> Although *rakat* politics share some similarities with the Javanese rap scene in Jogjakarta (for instance Riyanto 2017), Mukarakat uses a much more comprehensive range of ethnic languages to help represent the diverse cultural and sociopolitical backgrounds of Eastern Indonesia. Additionally, Mukarakat’s *rakat* politics argues against the cultural imperialism of *priyayi-ism* (Javanese aristocracy, see Geertz 1957, Kartodirdjo 2014) in Eastern Indonesia, which Javanese rappers often support.

Those who follow *rakat* politics use a wide range of ethnic languages, with the aim of promoting and maintaining them. Additionally, Mukarakat<sup>91</sup> hopes to restore local tribal ethnic languages that are either nearly extinct or already extinct. While many popular news outlets have written and classified the group as a rap group that uses Eastern ethnic languages, or *grup rap daerah timur*, I argue that this term insufficiently covers its language diversity. Thus, if we compare the group with JHF and Sundanis, two other well-established ethnic-language rap groups, Mukarakat uses a more comprehensive range of languages. Members of JHF mainly use a combination of formal Javanese (*Kromo*), informal Javanese (*Ngoko*) and intermediate Javanese (*Madya*)<sup>92</sup> (see Chapter 7). While these three distinct Javanese registers are different, they still belong to the same Javanese language. Similarly, Sundanis, a rap group based in Bandung, uses Bahasa Sunda, or Sundanese, as its primary rap language. On the contrary, Mukarakat uses at least five different ethnic languages: *Ambonese* (from the island of Ambon), *Jayapuran* (from Jayapura of West Papua), *Rutengnese* (from the Ruteng highlands of Flores), *Nafri* and *Sentani* (tribal languages from near the border of Indonesia and Papua New Guinea).

Each member often writes their lyrics in their native language, and, most of the time, other members do not even understand the lyrics.<sup>93</sup> They also accept suggestions for lyrics from their other Eastern Indonesian friends and fans. For instance, when I attended one of the group’s shows in Jakarta in 2019, the performing members had significant difficulties memorising parts of their songs because one member could not attend, meaning the

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<sup>90</sup> The original language from the interview is as follows: Cara untuk orang tersingkir yang engga merasa menjadi bagian dari kultur Indonesia yang di sentralisasikan (Alex, pers. comm., 16 April 2019).

<sup>91</sup> Pers. comm., 17 February 2019.

<sup>92</sup> Anto, interview, 14 April 2019.

<sup>93</sup> Iam Rapholic, interview, 17 February 2019.

remaining members needed to learn a new language unfamiliar to them. Mukarakat<sup>94</sup> told me that the lyrics were not written in different dialects but different languages.

Apart from its use of different languages, Mukarakat also samples and uses sounds and rhythms that are native to the Eastern Indonesia region. For instance, in ‘*Rompes*’ (*Rombongan Pesta* or the party crew), Mukarakat (2018) uses two different samples and instruments from West Papua. The first is the introduction, which samples a “song that resembles the vastness of the wilderness of the jungles of Eastern Indonesia”.<sup>95</sup> This short three- to four-second loop is repeated continuously throughout the song, helping build an atmosphere and a soundscape. Secondly, the song also relies heavily on a percussion track that samples a tifa, a native percussion instrument of the Moluccans (Candra 2021). When I asked Lipooz about this sample, he said “the sounds of tifa resemble our culture, and I believe that it is important to use instruments that represent us in our songs”.<sup>96</sup>

Mukarakat also seeks to explain the vastness of Eastern Indonesia. By adopting the term Eastern Indonesian, the group seeks to draw attention to the diverse ethnic groups of the region, as highlighted in the previous sections and throughout this chapter, while at the same time demystifying the “Eastern” myths that many Western Indonesians still have to this day. Apart from its attempts to preserve and restore local ethnic languages, the group also seeks to promote its region. While the group is often referred to as a group of Eastern Indonesians, the term insufficiently covers the region’s size and diversity (Bubandt 2014). The adoption of the term Eastern music is itself, in my opinion, relatively problematic and perhaps too Jakarta-centric. By applying and expanding on the notion of identity politics in Indonesian popular music (in this case, *dangdut*) by Weintraub (2006, p. 412), I argue that the adoption of *rakat* politics by Mukarakat and its followers is an attempt to broaden the understanding of Eastern Indonesia by Western Indonesians.

The term Eastern Indonesian is an extension of identity politics, one that seeks to differentiate Indonesian citizens while favouring those that fit the national narrative set by the central regime (Wibowo & Wahono 2017). This term’s adoption is arguably more than just geographical. It is a play on Indonesian sociohistorical narratives. This is a similar discourse

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<sup>94</sup> Pers. comm., 17 February 2019.

<sup>95</sup> Lipooz, interview, 17 February 2019.

<sup>96</sup> Lipooz, interview, 17 February 2019.

that Heryanto (2018a, p. 607) identifies as a critical example of the Indonesian central government's essentialist and nativist notion of the "true" Indonesians. The Indonesian central government tend to treat this concept of "otherness" as a threat (Anwar 2018; Shofa 2016). For instance, to fend off the rise of any such counter-ideology, many people have been referred to as *orang kiri* (leftists). This technique refers to the purging of "left" ideologies in 1964-1966 (G30S/PKI) as necessary to defeat "Communism and Marxism" and not because of Soeharto's power grab manoeuvres. As Wilson (2006) argues, this is a useful categorisation (for the central government) that could outlaw anything they considered to oppose to their agenda.

For Mukarakat, the term "the left", promoted by regional politics, is also a statement against "repeated acts of physical violence...against minority groups" (Heryanto 2018a, p. 607) experienced by Eastern Indonesians. Such discrimination, and even the term Eastern Indonesian itself, fit into Heryanto's classification of Indonesia's postcolonial violence. Since Indonesia's independence, there has been a popular illusion that some Indonesians, especially those who live in Western Indonesia, are "...more authentically—and thus more legitimately—Indonesian than others" (Heryanto 2018a, p. 610). Those who are deemed as inauthentic Indonesians are pushed aside (Magh'firoh, Noviadjji & Halim 2021).

*Rakat* politics is also used to highlight the displacement of Eastern Indonesian youth in Western Indonesia. The migration of Eastern Indonesians to western parts of Indonesia is a countercultural political statement that opposes the *transmigrasi* (transmigration) policy encouraged by the central government since the Soeharto era (Levang 2003). This policy was enacted to promote Javanese aristocracy (*priyayi*) politics (Robison & Hadiz 2017; Heryanto 2018a; Reeves 1999). It is important to note that the central government's *transmigrasi* agenda was not specific to Borneo, Sulawesi and Sumatra, but also Papua and other provincial areas. Heryanto (2016) and Wilson (2015) suggest that this *transmigrasi* agenda, which involved the government sending Javanese people to various parts of Indonesia, was intended not just to reduce population density in Java, but as a form of cultural imperialism that sought to spread and promote Javanese *priyayism* as the main cultural form of Indonesia. This *transmigrasi* also promotes Javanese and Jakartan superiority over other islands and regions (for instance, Nova 2016).

This internal colonialism helps to position regional discourse in Indonesia in favour of Java and the central government in Jakarta. It is Jakarta-centric as opposed to Western Indonesia-centric. For instance, in the small municipal town of Ketapang, West Borneo, transmigrant doctors and teachers amount to nearly 50/60% of total active workers. As they migrate to this small country town for work, they often convey the superiority of life in Java and the advancement of Jakarta, Bandung, Semarang, Surabaya or Jogjakarta over Ketapang. This has huge implications for the local youths. For instance, many high school graduates in this small town decide to permanently migrate to Java for the promise of “better living”<sup>97</sup>, a “better and safer environment”<sup>98</sup> and “non-backwards community members”<sup>99</sup>. By encouraging local youth to favour Java and Jakarta, the central government ensures that their centralised development and governance model will not be challenged by the call to decentralise power (Rosana 2012). Despite living in Western Indonesia, these youths from Borneo do not receive the same benefits as Western Indonesians who live in Java.

According to Mukarakat, there are three disadvantages of being Eastern Indonesian. The region has a severe lack of jobs<sup>100</sup>, inadequate education systems<sup>101</sup> and inadequate to non-existent health care facilities<sup>102</sup>. Despite these difficulties, the group argues that being a *rakat* in Western Indonesia is a form of cultural resistance. The group members note that Eastern Indonesians are “not inferior to Indonesians who live in Java”.<sup>103</sup> Their cultural heritages are not “inferior to those Javanese aristocrats”.<sup>104</sup>

When I attended their concert in Jakarta in 2019, I saw the way Mukarakat promoted the significance of preserving Eastern Indonesian cultural forms. The group did this in two steps. Before starting its set, Mukarakat told audience members about some of the local ethnic languages it uses in its songs. Lipooz then explained to the audience that the group used these ethnic languages to “represent our cultural heritage”. He mentioned that while most members

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<sup>97</sup> Erik, pers. comm., 30 April 2019.

<sup>98</sup> Joni, pers. comm., 18 August 2019.

<sup>99</sup> Rendy, pers. comm., 6 June 2019.

<sup>100</sup> Lipooz, interview, 17 February 2019.

<sup>101</sup> Iam Rapholic, interview, 17 February 2019.

<sup>102</sup> D’Flow, interview, 17 February 2019.

<sup>103</sup> D’Flow, interview, 17 February 2019.

<sup>104</sup> DJ Geramar, interview, 17 February 2019.

migrated from their hometowns to Bali, they still hold on to their cultural roots, spreading throughout Eastern Indonesia.

In addition, by explaining the diverse ethnic languages they used, he wished that “Western Indonesians, especially those asshole music producers in this city, would understand that we are not all the same”.<sup>105</sup> He also added that classifying all Eastern Indonesians as one homogenous group is “racist and should have no place in such diverse hip hop scene”.<sup>106</sup> Before the set started, Lipooz and the group then taught the audience a short tribal dance that Papuans practice before going to war (Howay 2018). He noted that all members of Mukarakat are representatives of their fellow Eastern Indonesians, who did not have the opportunities to be in Jakarta to promote their cultural heritage.

The warrior dance was “the proof of Mukarakat’s dedication to Eastern Indonesians. No matter where we are standing, we fight for all injustices against our fellow citizens, especially those silenced and murdered by the regime”.<sup>107</sup> After the set, I asked a group member about the word “murdered” that Lipooz used. He said Lipooz’s statement was meant “both figuratively and quite literally”. He said that the Indonesian regime in Jakarta is killing their “natural resources, people and culture simultaneously”.<sup>108</sup> While I spoke with Lipooz at the show’s outro, someone in the crowd, severely intoxicated, began chanting “Free West Papua (*Bebaskan Papua Barat*)”, and the crowd joined in. The organiser quickly shut down the sound system and ordered security to disperse the crowd. Police batons were used as they shut the event down and a physical brawl between police officers and some crowd members ensued. This was when I realised that members of Mukarakat are brokers of protest for their fans. Through their performance, they brought the protests of their surroundings (fellow Eastern Indonesians) to a broader audience in Jakarta.

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<sup>105</sup> The original language from the interview is as follows: Orang Indonesia barat, apalagi tengik tengik sok sokan jadi produser di sini mesti ngerti kalo kita itu berbeda beda (Lipooz, interview, 17 February 2019).

<sup>106</sup> The original language from the interview is as follows: Menganggap semua orang dari daerah timur itu sama itu rasis banget mas, ga pantas ada di ruangan skena hip hop dimana ada beragam orang dari sudut belakang yang ga terhitung (Lipooz, interview, 17 February 2019).

<sup>107</sup> The original language from the interview is as follows: Ini bukti dedikasi Mukarakat untuk orang orang timur. Dimana pun kita berdiri, kita akan selalu berjuang untuk orang orang kita, terutama untuk yang di buat diam dan di bunuh (Lipooz, interview, 17 February 2019).

<sup>108</sup> The original language from the interview is as follows: *Sama sama ngebunuh sumber daya alam, manusia dan budaya.*

## Conclusion

Ethnic languages are important resources to enact identity politics in Indonesia. Like Jogja Hip Hop Foundation (Riyanto 2016) and *wayang* rappers (Varela 2014), the rappers in the case study of this chapter relied on their cultural traits to enact their politics. Their regional politics resemble the politics of migrant youth in Sweden (Kaminsky 2015) and France (Benson 2013). Like British youth in rural France, Mukarakat and its followers had to engage with culture shock and prejudice from locals. By using their mother tongues and the traditional sounds of their hometowns, similar to Jewish and Romani youth in Sweden, members of Mukarakat fought racism while preserving their cultural heritage.

Mukarakat is perhaps the first Indonesian ethnic-language rap group to use its agency to support fellow Eastern Indonesians and others who might not have thoroughly benefited from living in Indonesia. In representing domestic migrants, Mukarakat has successfully challenged three features of politics. The group continues to embrace its outsider (*rakat*) status while opposing prejudice from Western Indonesians as aliens (*pendatang*). Furthermore, the group's regional politics encourage resistance to prejudice and offer criticism of the Indonesian government's centralised sociopolitical structure. At the same time, Mukarakat preserves and promotes its local cultural heritage. CNN Indonesia (2020) reports that one of the ethnic languages used in one of Mukarakat's songs was declared extinct by the Indonesian Ministry of Education and Culture.

This chapter sheds light on three aspects of regional hip hop politics: regionalism, racial prejudice, and cultural preservation. I have identified these aspects of *rakat* politics in order to enable richer sociopolitical analysis of global ethnic-language rap while also taking on Indonesian society's growing dissident discourse. For instance, I have identified the features in this research similar to Korean rappers' identity politics (Kim & Sung 2019) and Mayan rappers' cultural politics (Bell 2017). Like Mayan rappers, Mukarakat and its fans are using their cultural heritage to signify their protest (also see Chapter 7). Similarly, Mukarakat's depiction of Indonesian citizenship portrays the racial prejudice that its members had to endure during their visits to other parts of the country. The group's songs, actions and activism are all part of its role in contesting the identity politics (Heryanto 2018) of Eastern Indonesian migrants.

## Chapter 9 Conclusion

Indonesian hip hop is becoming an increasingly important space that hosts different ideologies and groups. It is a place where ideas deemed dangerous and forbidden in Indonesia's mainstream and popular spaces can grow and flourish. In this thesis, I have shown how ideas and discussions about conservatism, socialism, racism and secessionism were often discussed in this space. It also served as an incubator, where sociopolitical ideas and debates spread from within the scene to outsiders. Indonesian hip hop is a radicalising space, as shown in my map of politics (see again Figure 1.1), that pulls its denizens into many different directions. Like other Indonesian popular music genres, Indonesian rappers, their fans and other hip hop enthusiasts functioned within the ecosystem of their local communities.<sup>1</sup>

This PhD began with the research question: *how and why do Indonesian rappers perform their politics as sociopolitical brokers?* My answer, which is also my contribution to the field of hip hop scholarship, is a map of the politics of Indonesian hip hop that pinpoints the complexities of these *interactions* and *processes*. To start the discussion and as a proof of concept, this thesis has introduced four examples of politics, each with different sociopolitical and geographical contexts. I have argued that Indonesian rappers are sociopolitical brokers of their communities who accommodated *processes* of negotiations of values, where the cross-pollination of ideas and ideologies happened.

In order to begin my exploration, I first reviewed the history of this emerging scholarly field. I have proposed and traced four different periods of significant change for Indonesian hip hop, stretching from the late 1980s to the millennial era, thereby providing sociocultural and ethnographic context for my work. Chapter 4 helps present a historical analysis of this scene, critically reviewing and connecting the work of Golpushnezhad (2017), Nasir (2018, 2020), Riyanto (2016) and Varela (2014).

After establishing this historical narrative, I have argued that we should not consider the mainstream and underground hip hop in Indonesia to be separate. They are, in fact, two sides of the same coin. This prevailing dualism acts as a distraction, preventing us from gaining a

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<sup>1</sup> Other examples of popular music include *dangdut* (Weintraub 2008), punk (Wallach 2014) or *pop Indonesia* (Baulch 2014).



richer understanding of this dynamic field. In its place, I have proposed the concept of politics. To articulate this, I have drawn a map of four different axes in Chapter 1, ranging from liberal and conservative ideologies on the vertical axis, and internal and external approaches on the horizontal axis (see earlier Figure 1.1).

At this point, it is important to note that this thesis has only discussed four domains of politics. Although they will not cover every permutation of Indonesian hip hop politics, I believe these four examples are good starting points for this model. As there are still many more political positions to chart, it is crucial to design a flexible and expandable map. While my four examples serve to open new vistas onto Indonesian hip hop research, I believe that future researchers in this field will most likely add more examples and further context. I hope future hip hop scholars in Indonesia, and indeed elsewhere, will find this model to be valuable as a foundation for more extensive research. This is sorely needed in this emerging field. By viewing these politics in action, as the four core chapters of this study do, the following manifestation of politics emerged.

First, the notion of peer politics has revealed that notions of authenticity in Indonesian hip hop were initially constrained within their own spaces. I found that outside interference hardly influenced perceptions of Indonesian hip hop during its earlier stages. Through rap battles, and in particular live dissing and diss tracks, the notions of superiority and seniority came to be highly valued. As Indonesian hip hop entered the internet era, these strict moral codes shifted and millennial rappers took to YouTube and other social media platforms to claim their territory. This chapter found that the older generations of Indonesian rappers shunned attempts to commercialise rap and hip hop, while younger artists saw commercialisation as necessary to earn a living.

Second, a leftist politics lens revealed the influence of Bandung rappers in the early 2000s. Here, members of Homicide were pivotal in establishing a network of resistance against the rise of right-wing Islamism in the region. I demonstrated a period of complex sociopolitical struggles, as this case study occurred after the fall of the New Order regime, a period marked by acute sociopolitical uncertainty. It captured the emergence of leftist ideologies in Indonesian hip hop after the genre was banned in popular culture. Just as Muslim rappers articulated the concerns of Muslims in Indonesia, leftist politics articulated the concerns and fears of Bandung rappers and their fans. Here, I posited that these rappers were concerned

with the rise of right-wing violence, a conservative military and a religion-influenced education system.

Third, my example of traditionalist politics showed that these right-wing ideas have also taken hold in some Indonesian hip hop quarters. In contrast to the other examples, where rappers sought to build more inclusive communities, the traditionalist politics of rappers in Jogjakarta aimed at creating an exclusive space for their followers. Here, I have found that those who followed traditionalist politics adopted an approach closer to that of the conservative Javanese ideologies that resisted the Sultan's embrace of capitalism. In some ways, they exhibited and demanded more "Javaneseness" than the Sultan himself. In promoting their politics, I have recorded their recollections of the past glory of Malioboro Street, the city-state's arterial street. The ex-retinues, headed by the Jogja Hip Hop Foundation, wanted a return to their glorious past by focusing on notions of Javanese masculinity. These rappers and their fans pined for an unspoiled Jogjakarta and evoked a nostalgia for their past glory. However, in taking a closer look, they did not represent everyone in the region. Those who needed to work for major companies, for instance, were left behind and viewed as lesser by these people.

Finally, the regional politics case study has examined Eastern Indonesian rap group Mukarakat's call for a decentralised Indonesia. Here, it was shown that the flexibility of the politics of Indonesian hip hop, with the group and its followers reimagined their identities while navigating sensitive issues such as Free West Papua and the racism-fuelled attacks on their dorms in Jogjakarta and other major cities across Indonesia. I found that by reasserting the need for a more regional approach instead of a Jakarta-based politics, the group and its fans tried to combat the prejudice that they experienced as domestic migrants in Western Indonesia. These youths did that by using and promoting languages, sounds and musical instruments from Eastern Indonesia.

By bringing the concept of brokers into my analysis of Indonesian hip hop, I could argue that my model of politics, where Indonesian rappers are considered sociopolitical brokers, allows for a multifaceted analysis of this growing space. Unlike the current focus on famous rappers, producers or artists, my model of politics paid closer attention to the processes around them. In other words, the focus was not on the music stars but on the ecosystem in which they live. This uncovered the ways the politics of Indonesian hip hop are driven and motivated by these

rappers and are negotiated by their fans and listeners. The definition of the politics of Indonesian hip hop and how to use them are up to listeners' interpretation.

The concept of brokerage enables a deeper understanding of how Indonesian protest is articulated. By looking into the process of how someone with relatively low sociopolitical power transformed into a powerful and well-connected broker, we can determine that an individual does not have to have huge political powers at first. If the cause and the communities support them, then (as this thesis has shown) they could be transformed into one.

In addition, the concept of brokerage helps us understand how social movements work in Indonesia. As this thesis has highlighted throughout its chapters, social movements could either come from a group, an individual or born because of specific issues. While this thesis is not capable of capturing all iterations of how social movements work in Indonesia, its inclusion of the concept of brokerage gives the readers insights into how some of these social movements were created.

The discussion on brokerage also presents an insight into how power and the notions of gatekeepers came to be in Indonesian hip hop. As discussed in Chapter 4 and 5, several prominent rappers from the late 1980s still hold important positions in the scene. Though some younger rappers and performers have tried to counter this trend (for instance, Young Lex and Ben Utomo), there is still a resistance from the older and more senior rappers.

Finally, by viewing the politics of Indonesian hip hop through the lens of brokerage, this thesis argues that Indonesian hip hop is not a monolithic structure. Though the gatekeepers still hold some power, there is continuous resistance from newer and younger rappers. The focus on brokerage sheds light on the inconsistencies within Indonesian hip hop. While some fought for more liberal ideologies (see Chapters 6 and 8), others tried to promote conservative ideas (Chapters 4, 5 and 7).

### **Recommendations for future studies**

Further research into this growing music space, its performers and fans needs to be undertaken. As a follow-up to this study, I propose three different areas of research that could be explored to help further our understanding of Indonesian hip hop and the politics of hip hop generally.

One avenue of study could examine the conflicts between fans of opposing political fields, especially if their politics are impacted by their idols. For instance, this thesis focused on Homicide and rappers in Bandung and their resistance against right-wing ideologies. Near the end of Chapter 6, I mentioned how members of Homicide and their family members were intimidated by students and followers of right-wing preachers. It would be interesting to study how these right-wing followers view leftist rappers and their conflicting ideologies. This would extend Saefullah's (2017) study on the Islamisation of punk in the region but applied to hip hop, and could build upon the work of Golpushnezhad (2017) and Nasir (2020) on Asian hip hop and Gabasi (2020) and Valassopoulos & Mostafa (2014) on Middle Eastern hip hop.

When considering the scope of the history of Indonesian hip hop, it is clear that more extensive documentation is needed. This would require a more comprehensive work that focuses on documenting the intricate details of each period in Indonesian hip hop. I have laid down the groundwork for such an undertaking in Chapter 4. However, I believe that an even more expansive approach to this would benefit current and future Indonesian hip hop scholars. Projects investigating the intricate details of each phase, for instance, focusing on the 1980s era, would be important as we move forward to understanding and expanding this area of study.

It is important to locate the politics of hip hop within the broader global resistance ecosystem. As I have shown in this thesis, the politics of Indonesian hip hop cover various ideologies and include participants from both inside and outside of the scene. I am particularly interested in how hip hop reaches beyond the politics of, in this regard, music. Could Burmese rappers play a major role in deciding and resisting military authoritarianism, as the country's punk legends Rebel Riot did?

In conclusion, we can view the politics of Indonesian hip hop as lens of the politics of specific groups at a particular time and place. Indonesian hip hop is a dynamic space where direct actions, songs, albums, music videos and social media posts illuminate the subtleties of struggles and fights at a grassroots level. The politics of hip hop, following my framework, demonstrate how individuals and collectives develop their interpretation of identities and build groups to support their causes. In the case of Indonesia, as I have shown in my map, I have argued that the politics of Indonesian hip hop showcase the internal struggles of many

### *Chapter 9 Conclusion*

Indonesians who are yet to position themselves within Indonesia's growing political divide. These processes of aligning and discovering anchor themselves on the ideas that Indonesians already hold about their diverse history and culture. Ultimately, the politics of Indonesian hip hop showcase how Indonesians construct and reconstruct their understandings of this vast archipelagic nation through music, art and actions.

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## Appendix A Ethics approval



College Human Ethics Advisory Network (CHEAN)  
College of Design and Social Context  
NH&MRC Code: EC00237

### Notice of Approval

Date: **12 October 2018**

Project number: **CHEAN A 21734-09/18**

Project title: **'Affective Performance in Small Scale Dangdut Hip-hop Concerts'**

Risk classification: **Low risk**

Chief investigator: **Dr Shelley Brunt**

Status: **Approved**

Approval period: **From: 12 October 2018 To: 12 October 2021**

The following documents have been reviewed and approved:

Title	Version	Date
Risk Assessment and Application Form	2	10 October 2018
Participant Information Sheet	2	10 October 2018
Participant Information Sheet (Bahasa Indonesian)	2	10 October 2018
Verbal and Social Media Recruitment Strategy	1	10 October 2018

The above application has been approved by the RMIT University CHEAN as it meets the requirements of the *National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research* (NH&MRC, 2007).

Terms of approval:

- Responsibilities of chief investigator**  
It is the responsibility of the above chief investigator to ensure that all other investigators and staff on a project are aware of the terms of approval and to ensure that the project is conducted as approved by CHEAN. Approval is valid only whilst the chief investigator holds a position at RMIT University.
- Amendments**  
Approval must be sought from CHEAN to amend any aspect of a project. To apply for an amendment use the request for amendment form, which is available on the HREC website and submitted to the CHEAN secretary. Amendments must not be implemented without first gaining approval from CHEAN.
- Adverse events**  
You should notify the CHEAN immediately (within 24 hours) of any serious or unanticipated adverse effects of their research on participants, and unforeseen events that might affect the ethical acceptability of the project.
- Annual reports**  
Continued approval of this project is dependent on the submission of an annual report. Annual reports must be submitted by the anniversary of approval of the project for each full year of the project. If the project is of less than 12 months duration then a final report only is required.
- Final report**  
A final report must be provided within six months of the end of the project. CHEAN must be notified if the project is discontinued before the expected date of completion.
- Monitoring**  
Projects may be subject to an audit or any other form of monitoring by the CHEAN at any time.
- Retention and storage of data**  
The investigator is responsible for the storage and retention of original data according to the requirements of the *Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research* (section 2) and relevant RMIT policies.

K:\R and I\Research Office\Human Ethics\_RMIHE\_DSC\2018 Applications\21734 - S Brunt\CHEAN A 21734-09-18, Dr S Brunt - Notice of Human Research Ethics Approval.doc



## **Appendix B List of formal and informal research participants**

This list is sorted in an alphabetical order. It includes both formal and informal research participants. Where interviews were planned and scheduled in controlled settings, I have listed them as “interviews”. “Personal communication/personal conversation” means that the conversation was unplanned and was conducted in an informal manner either in-person, online videocalls, phonecalls or text messages.

All formal interviews were conducted offline and face-to-face unless stated otherwise.

Below is a list of participants (both formal and informal):

Aci, interview, 17 February 2019	D-Flow, interview, 17 February 2019
Adit, interview, 22 March 2019	Erik, interview, 31 January 2019
Aldi, pers. conv., 8 October 2019	Gerry, interview, 16 April 2019
Alex, interview, 16 April 2019	Heryanto, pers.conv., 16 April 2018
Almanah, pers. conv., 20 April 2019	Iqbal, interview, 21 February 2019
Anto, interview, 14 April 2019	Iwa, interview, 18 March 2019
Arian, interview, 28 March 2019	Jeffri, pers. conv., 19 August 2019
Aszy, interview, 30 March 2019	JJ Rizal, interview, 16 February 2019
Balance, interview, 10 April 2019	Joe Million, interview, 19 June 2020
Bimo, interview, 19 February 2019	John Parapat, interview, 5 April 2019
Brenk, interview, 21 February 2019	Juki, interview, 17 April 2019
Dandhy Laksono, interview, 10 October 2020	Kojek, interview, 29 January 2019
Derry, interview, 12 June 2019	Koming, interview, 9 October 2019
Dikta, pers. conv., 9 December 2019	Krowbar, interview, 7 August 2020
Dindot, interview, 11 April 2019	Laksono, pers. conv., 9 September 2020
Dirty Razkal, interview, 17 February 2019	Lipooz, interview, 17 February 2019
Doyz, interview, 23 March 2019	Macan, interview, 22 March 2019

Mario Zwinkle, interview, 14 April 2019

Mukarakat, personal communication, 17 February 2019

Pampam, interview, 16 April 2019

Pandji, interview, 15 March 2019

Persada, interview, 15 February 2019

Rand Slam, interview, 26 March 2019

Ranggit, interview, 21 February 2019

Regita, pers. conv., 29 December 2019

Rigi, personal conversation, 13 April 2019

Sari, personal communication, 12 April 2019

Saykoji, interview, 5 May 2019

Thufail Al-Ghifari, interview, 2 February 2019

Toni, personal communication, 14 April 2019

Tuantigabelas, interview, 31 January 2019

Ucok, interview, 20 March 2019

Ucok and Aszy, interview, 23 March 2019

Udet, interview, 31 January 2019

Veronica Koman, pers. conv., 8 March 2021

Wiesa, interview, 4 February 2019

Yacko, interview, 20 February 2019

Young Lex, interview, 10 October 2019

Yudo, interview, 9 August 2019

Yudha, interview, 18 December 2019

The table below details all formal and planned interviews that I conducted for this research:

Interview respondents	Role	Location	Information
8Ball	Rapper	Bekasi	Second generation rapper
Adit A2Kill	Rapper	Tanjung Priok, North Jakarta	Rapper, Tanjung Priok youths leader.
Angga	Talent agent, manager	Jakarta	Manager of Pandji

Anto GNTZ	Rapper, producer	Jogjakarta	Member of JHF
Baguz Gilaz	Rapper + Producer	Jogjakarta	Music producer and label owner. One of the first <i>dangdut</i> hip hop producers in the region.
Balance JHF	Rapper	Jogjakarta	Producer, beatmaker and member of Jogja Hiphop Foundation
Boy Jahanam	Rapper	Jogjakarta	Member of Jahanam.
Brenk	Record label owner	Bekasi	Owner of Do It! Management
Derry NEO	Rapper	Jakarta	Member of NEO. Outspoken.
Dindot LSista	Rapper	Klaten	Member of the Kulonprogo-native LSista.
Donnero DPMB	Rapper	Jogjakarta	Alex. Member of DPMB. Touring manager of JHF. Designer. Filmmaker. Beatmaker. Producer.
Doyz Blakumuh	Rapper	Jakarta	The second half of Blakumuh. Primary song writer of the group. Currently living in Bekasi.
Erik Blakumuh	Rapper	Jakarta	Member of Blakumuh.

Iwa K	Rapper	West Jakarta	Iwa Kusuma, the most famous rapper in Indonesia and often considered the godfather of Indonesian hip hop
Joe Million	Rapper	Jakarta + Bandung	Jayapura native.
John Parapat	Rapper	Jakarta	Founding member of Sweet Martabak.
Juki JHF	Rapper	Online	Kill the DJ, the leader of Jogja Hiphop Foundation
Kojek	Rapper	Central Jakarta	Betawi-native, rapping in Betawi dialect, radio host and member of Jakarta's department of arts and culture
Krowbar	Rapper	Bandung	Rapper. Known for playful and political lyrics. Member of Grimloc Records.
Mario Zwinkle	Rapper	Jogjakarta	Member of Hellhouse.
Pandji Pragiwaksono	Rapper	West Jakarta	Comedian, rapper and businessman.
Ramengvrl	Rapper	Online	Millennial rapper.
Rand Slam	Rapper	Bandung	Member of Grimloc Records.

Rheza Westwew	Label executive	West Jakarta	The touring and stage manager of Tuantigabelas.
Rizka LSista	Rapper	Klaten	Also Kulonprogo-native. Older sister of Dindot.
Sandios Pendhoza	Rapper	Jogjakarta	Member of Pendhoza. One of the pioneers of <i>dangdut</i> rap. Jogjakartan.
Saykoji	Rapper	Jakarta	Producer. Beatmaker.
Tuantigabelas	Rapper	West Jakarta	One of Indonesia's most famous rappers. Member of Westwew. Known for his sociopolitically conscious rap songs.
Ucok Homicide	Rapper + producer	Bandung	Leader of Grimloc Records, Bandung. Known for outspoken lyrics. Music producer. Beatmaker. Activist.
Udet NEO	Rapper	Jakarta	Member of NEO.
Xaqhala BGNB	Rapper	Jogjakarta	Real name Gerry Konaedi. Member of the first generation of Indonesian rap. Known as one of the OGs in the scene. Acting as the police of the scene.
Yacko	Rapper	Jakarta	Rapper. Member of the 1990s generation.
Yugo Westwew	Label manager	West Jakarta	Publication and leader of Westwew.

## Appendix C Interview questions

These were the starting points for broader conversation with interviewees. These interviews were conducted in a semi-structured manner, and they were designed to be flexible. For instance, during formal interviews, I would ask the first question, and depending on their answer, I would jump to question number 8. Similarly, informal interviews would often steered away from these structure as the time and place did not allow for a lengthy conversation. I would ask question number 11 and build the conversation depending on their answers.

1. What is Hip Hop for you?
2. What is Indonesian Hip Hop?
3. What are the differences between mainstream Hip Hop and *Skena*?
4. According to you, how did Indonesian Hip Hop culture got started?
5. What are your favourite Hip Hop Indonesia songs? Why?
6. Who are your favourite Hip Hop Indonesia performers? Why?
7. What are the topics covered within Hip Hop Indonesia?
8. What makes your music ‘Hip Hop Indonesia’?
9. What are the distinctions between *Skena* and mainstream in Hip Hop Indonesia?
10. How is Hip Hop Indonesia scene?
11. How political is Hip Hop Indonesia?
12. How interwoven is Hip Hop with your life?
13. What was the first interaction that you have with Hip Hop?
14. What are your views regarding the notion of ‘underground’ Hip Hop in Indonesia?
15. What is *skena* Hip Hop Indonesia?
16. What is mainstream Hip Hop Indonesia?
17. What is your view regarding YouTubers turning rappers in Indonesia?

## Appendix D List of rappers/groups discussed in this thesis

1. 8Ball/Iqbal

8Ball is one of the most famous rappers in Indonesia. He is currently based in Bekasi, East Jakarta. In his youth, he was one of the founding members of *Bakutumbu*, one of the premier Eastern Indonesian rap groups in the early 2000s.

2. Adit A2Kill

Adit is one half of the notorious Tanjung Priok (North Jakarta) rap duo A2Kill. Adit is a member of the infamous violent motorcycle gang *Gen-Y* in Jakarta. He runs a youth fashion store in North Jakarta that also functions as a small recording studio.

3. Anto Gantaz

Anto is member of Jogja Hip Hop Foundation (JHF). He is one of the founders of Hellhouse. He is considered as one of the pioneer music producers in Indonesia. He is considered as the Dr Dre of Indonesia by many because of his record of producing music since the early 1990s. He was the founder of G-Tribe, a Javanese rap group that participated in the first *Pesta Rap*.

4. Bagus Gilaz

Bagus is record producer/guitarist based in Central Java. He focuses on producing *dangdut* hip hop. He is the producer/manager of *Pendhoza*, a famous *dangdut* rap group from Central Java.

5. Balance Perdana

Balance is a record producer, DJ, composer and rapper. He is also a member of the internationally famous Jogja Hip Hop Foundation (JHF). He is one of the founding members of Hellhouse.

6. Batik Tribe

Batik Tribe is a Jakarta-based group whose members have been active since the early 2000s. Its members consist of DJ S-Tea, Della MC, Wizzow and Cool B. They released their first album *Melangkah* in 2008.

7. Blake

Blake is a Jakarta-based rapper who was also involved in the first *Pesta Rap*. Known for his abrasive attitude and lyrics, Blake studied in Australia and spent much of his youth there. He has since returned to Indonesia. He is currently producing and releasing singles in collaboration with various indie artists in Jakarta.

8. Boy

Boy is member of *Jahanam*, one of the premier rap groups in Jogjakarta that ended up merging with a couple other groups to form JHF. He has since left the scene but still actively participates in Hellhouse.

9. Boyz Got No Brain

BGNB is a prominent Indonesian rap duo that has been performing across the nation since the early 1990s. The members are Gerry and Ruly. The group achieved their first major success when they participated in the first *Pesta Rap* album. Since then, the group has released various albums both collectively and individually.

10. Derry NEO

Derry is a member of Neo. He is most known for his positive attitude and networks in Indonesia.

11. Doyz

Doyz (or Aday) is one of Indonesia's premier rappers. His nickname is Prime Minister Doyz, as he is considered one of the most skilful rappers in the country. He is a member of Indonesia's famous rap group *Blakumuh*. His first solo album titled *Perspektif* was released in 2002. This album was also the first independent rap album released in Indonesia at the time.

12. Erik

Erik is the other half of rap duo *Blakumuh* with Doyz. He goes by the name MR EP and Erik Probz. He is known for his hard-hitting political lyrics. He also performs with Native, a rap group that consists of older first-generation rappers.

13. Gerry Konaedi

Gerry is a member of Boyz Got No Brain. Also known as Xaqhala or *Papi*. His first album titled *Xaqhala* was released by Guest Music in 2004. He is an active leader of Hellhouse, a Jogjakarta-based record label and group.

14. Homicide

Homicide was a prominent Bandung rap group that disbanded in 2007. The group released four studio albums and was the main catalyst for the growth of Bandung's hip hop scene in the early 2000s. Members of this group included Herry Sutresna (Ucok), Aszy Syamfizie (Sarkasz), Ridwan Gunawan (DJ-E), Punish (Adolf Tirasmoro) and Kiki Assaf (Kassaf).



15. Iwa K

Iwa was the first rapper in Indonesia to release a full-length album. He was first featured in Guest Music's 1990 hit track. His first album titled *Kuingin Kembali* was released in 1993. Most commonly known for his mainstream hit '*Bebas*' (1995).

16. Joe Million

Joe is considered by many as one of the best up-and-coming rappers in Indonesia. He is known for his socio-politically conscious lyrics. Though involved with both Grimloc and WestWew labels, Joe has remained an independent artist.

17. John Parapat

John is a member of Sweet *Martabak*. He participated in the second edition of *Pesta Rap* and is still currently active in Jakarta's hip hop scene. He works full-time as a manager at one of Jakarta's most famous radio stations Motion975FM.

18. Juki

Juki is the leader of Jogja Hip Hop Foundation (JHF). He also goes by the name Kill the DJ. He is an active rapper who lives in the outskirts of Jogjakarta. He is a painter and a graphic artist who is famous across various communities in the country. He is also a full-time farmer and advocate for the farming communities in Central Java.

19. Kojek

Kojek is a *Betawi* rapper who uses his music to advance people's understandings of his *Betawi* heritage. He is also active in the Jakarta's hip hop space. Though he said his music is apolitical, he has a close relationship with the governor of Jakarta, Anies Baswedan. He works as a producer/radio broadcaster at one of Jakarta's radio stations.

20. Krowbar

Krowbar is a rapper from Bandung. He is active in both the city's underground hardcore and hip hop space. Krowbar is active in Grimloc as a producer and a designer.

21. Lipooz

Lipooz is the leader of Mukarakat. He has been producing, performing and recording rap songs since the mid-2000s. He runs a label called 18Bar that is based in Bali. He also runs a YouTube channel under the same moniker.

22. Macan *Guest Music*

Macan is the main producer of *Guest Music*. He was the first person to 'discover' and produce Iwa K. He is currently still active as Iwa's manager.

23. Mamok

Mamok is a member of Jogja Hip Hop Foundation (JHF). He is also a member of DPMB (*Dua Petaka Membawa Bencana*) who is active in producing and performing with Hellhouse.

24. Mario Zwinkle

Mario is a rapper from Jogjakarta. Mario is core member of Hellhouse. He was a street thug turned professional MMA fighter with no losing record in one of Southeast Asia's most famous leagues. He released his first album *Soul Plane* in 2020.

25. Mukarakat

Mukarakat is an Eastern Indonesian rap group, currently based in Bali. Its members hailed from Ruteng, East Nusa Tenggara and other Eastern Indonesian cities. They are currently one of the most famous rap groups in Indonesia. Its members are Lipooz, DJ Geramar, 4PRIBEAT and D'Flow. Some of its ex-members include I'm Rapholic, Sun D and Dirty Razkal.

26. Pandji Pragiwaksono

Pandji is a famous comic who released many rap tracks and albums in the late 2000s and early 2010s. He is most known as the most famous stand-up comic in the country. His songs are political and focused on criticising the Indonesian police and politicians.

27. *Pesta Rap*

*Pesta Rap* was the name of a series of compilation albums. It was also the name of a group of rappers who were gathered by a Jakarta-based label called Guest Music. The group released three self-titled compilation albums in 1995, 1996 and 1997. Members of the group came from all around Java, including Malang, Bekasi, Jogjakarta, Semarang, Bandung and Jakarta. Within the context of this thesis, I will be referring to *Pesta Rap* as the compilation album and not as a group.

28. Ramengvrl

Ramengvrl is one of the most famous female rappers in Indonesia presently. She is signed with the Underground Bizniz Club, a Jakarta-based label. She has released a few studio albums and her videos are massive hits on YouTube. Her newest promo was showcased in the New York Time Square, showcasing her first step into the international market.

29. Rand Slam

Rand Slam is one of the best up-and-coming rappers in Indonesia. Personally tutored

by Ukok and a few other Bandung-based rappers, he is considered as one of the most technically proficient rappers in Indonesia. He is also an active activist in the region, actively protesting and standing in the front line of fights against land-grabbing and forced-relocation in Bandung and West Java. His latest album *9051* was released in 2020.

30. Saykoji

Saykoji is one of Indonesia's most famous rappers. Saykoji (or Igor) is most commonly for his playful and commercialised lyrics. He is most successful rapper in Indonesia in terms of monetisation because his lyrics are crafted to suit the mainstream needs.

31. Sindikat 31

Sindikat 31 are a rap group from Jakarta. They were active in the early 1990s before the *Pesta Rap* era. The group was disbanded in the early 2000s, but they have re-entered the scene in 2019.

32. Tuantigabelas

Tuantigabelas is one of the most famous rappers in Indonesia. Hailing from West Jakarta, he is one of the leaders of WestWew, an up-and-coming record label and community of creative workers in Jakarta. He is known for his strong resistance against illegal logging and deforestation and criticisms of mining companies in Indonesia.

33. Ukok/Herry Sutresna

Ukok was the leader of Homicide and the co-founder of Grimloc Records. He has released his solo album titled *Fateh* as Morgue Vanguard. He is a big-time player in Bandung's music scene and is largely considered as the one of most influential gatekeepers of Indonesia's underground and independent music scene. Ukok is also active in various activist communities in the city and across the country.

34. Udet NEO

Udet is member of NEO, one of the most famous rap groups in Indonesia. He has since taken a *hijrah* turn and founded Hiro, a rap group focused on promoting Islamic values.

35. X-Calibour

X-Calibour was a Surabaya-based group who in the early 2000s started a feud with Homicide and Bandung rappers. Though they never released an album, they

participated in *Perang Rap* which competed with *Pesta Rap* in the early 2000s. They have since morphed into *Das Aufklärung*.

36. Yacko

Yacko is one of the premier female rappers in Jakarta. She has been rapping since the early 1990s. She participated in the second *Pesta Rap* as a member of the Pumpkins Hardcore Crew from Surabaya. She works as a Head of Campus at a private university in South Jakarta.

## Appendix E List of publications

Parts of this thesis have appeared in the following publications:

Yanko, W 2022, 'Politik kekirian: Ukok and Homicide's brokerages of protests in Bandung, Indonesia', *Journal for Cultural Research*, vol. 1, no. 1, pp. 1-19, <<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/14797585.2021.2018662>>.

Yanko, W 2022, *Rap Sopan: Menilik Hip Hop Indonesia Pada Periode 1990–an*, Penerbit Semut Api, Yogyakarta, Indonesia.

Yanko, W [forthcoming August 2022], 'Tracing generational authenticities of Indonesian hip hop: from the 1980s to 2020', *Antropologi Indonesia*.

Yanko, W [forthcoming September 2022], 'Regional politics in Indonesian hip hop', *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies*