



MAKING SCENES

Reggae, Punk, and Death Metal in 1990s Bali

EMMA BAULCH

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For Mama and Mei

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NOTE ON SPELLING, NAMES

All Indonesian terms and names should use new spelling (by which *u* replaces *oe*, *j* replaces *dj* and *c* replaces *tj*) except for names of people who prefer to retain the old spelling. In this book they are Megawati Soekarnoputri, Soekarno Sabdo Moelyo, Soeryadi, and Pramoeoya Ananta Toer.

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I began to write this book as a PhD student at Monash University in Melbourne in 2000. The faculty of arts at Monash funded the final six months of the writing of the dissertation. The Monash Research Graduate School gave me an office and two travel grants. My father, Geoff Baulch, bought me a car.

Under Pete Lentini's supervision, I was awarded a degree in the summer of 2003. I could not have achieved this without his skillful editing, as well as his enthusiasm and optimism, which always helped me emerge from the postpartum slumps that followed the completion of chapters. Ed Aspinall, Chaerul Putra, Sue Blackburn, Yonas Sentakresna, Ariel Heryanto, Benny SWR, Liz Gunn, Degung Santikarma, John Hartley, Agung Alit, Andre Syahreza, and a number of anonymous referees all read chapters in progress and offered valuable critiques. Tony Mitchell and Krishna Sen examined the thesis, and both included in their reviews suggestions for improvement, for which I also am grateful.

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In 1996 the sidewalks of Jalan Raya Kuta¹ were like lips: cracked, broken, split open; a gaping frontier land of which anthropology rarely spoke. Throughout the tourist boom of the 1990s, these lips voiced Kuta's edge, for they raged with charged encounters between tourists and street-side watch sellers, drug dealers, drivers, pimps, and whores. Sucked to Kuta from neighboring islands, East Java, or Lombok to seek their fortunes in this "Gateway of Indonesia" (official tourism publication-speak for "Bali"), many of those who made a living on Kuta's main street slept five to a room in boardinghouses on the back blocks, but they spent the bulk of their days on the sidewalks. This

Introduction frontier land was pumped with an angry optimism, a persistent hope. At the southern end of the street, punk jams chafed against the pop soundscape emanating from the Hard Rock Cafe across the road. Mohawks, feigned brawls, Bad Religion, metal spikes, hefty jackboots, and leather jackets thrived.

The building where these punk jams took place was the main hangout for members and fans of the Kuta-based punk band Superman Is Dead. Superman Is Dead is central to the narrative of this book, for its role in pioneering the independent Balinese punk scene that emerged in the late 1990s, largely inspired by the emergence of a pan-Indonesian underground music scene around 1996. In that year, distinctive styles of dress and posture associated with punk and death metal subcultures became evident in the streets of Java's major cities: Malang, Yogyakarta, Bandung, and Jakarta. The punk aesthetic was very textured, aggressive, and sharp, and included mohawks, chains, jackboots, and leather accessories studded with metal spikes. The plainer death metal style featured jeans, long hair, and black T-shirts adorned with illegible band names. Across Java, both styles could be seen at shopping malls where, on Saturday nights, punk and metal enthusiasts

came together in ritual gatherings, as if to exhibit themselves. During the week, punk and metal fans gathered in merchandise outlets to exchange self-published 'zines, badges, self-produced albums, t-shirts, and stickers, as well as to socialize and plan “underground” concerts. These people came from all over Java, and nearly all of them were amateur musicians who found opportunities to perform at such independently organized gigs, which furthered interprovincial solidarity among them. Unequivocally, enthusiasts defined their underground in opposition to music television and major recording labels.

Although death metal developed in Bali as early as 1992, an underground scene similar to that in Java, in which punk and metal converged, did not emerge until around 1997. In the beginning of 1996, the Balinese band scene had been invigorated by the establishment of the island's first-ever biweekly, pangenre show, which took place in Denpasar and catered to a growing number of amateur death metal and punk bands as well as professional reggae bands that played in tourist bars. It was at this event, Sunday Hot Music, that I first saw perform many of the reggae, punk, and death metal musicians cited in this book.

In early 1996, I encountered Balinese reggae, punk, and death metal enthusiasts who often unproblematically subsumed our discussions about music beneath broader identity discourses which attributed certain moral and ethical qualities to Jakarta, the metropolis, Balineseness, and the tourism industry, respectively. This did not surprise me. Balinese regionalist sentiment, voiced by the local press, had been gathering momentum during the 1990s. My own initial inquiries concerned the link between young men's music-related activities and this regionalist discourse, and my questions must have prodded our discussions in this direction. But in my early chats with Balinese musicians, the inconsistent moralities musicians attributed to this regionalism's cornerstones—Jakarta, tourism, and Balineseness—inspired queries different from those I had formulated in preparing to go live in Bali. These questions seemed more complex and sustaining than the simple one of how and why youths' ideas about music referred primarily to Balinese regionalism.

Although regionalism seemed to form a core toward which musicians gravitated in expressing their ideas about reggae, punk, and death metal in

early 1996, they variously constructed Balineseness and frequently defied the dominant regionalism's routine center-periphery dichotomies. In hindsight, and on reflection some months later, I recognized generic patterns in these divergent views which enabled me to later characterize these young peoples' choices to play reggae, death metal, and punk as distinct political strategies. But in early 1996, seeing them with the kind of optimism newcomers briefly inspire, I embraced those divergent views as a magnificent mess which defied Suharto's thirty-year-old, stodgy, and acharismatic New Order regime and its totalizing aspirations. Here was something different, suggesting that the state's capacity to control was less than I had been taught as a student of Indonesian politics in the early 1980s. In 1996, I encountered young Balinese musicians whose sensuous, performative, music-related identities seemed to feed their more cerebral, yet no less heartfelt and insistent political opinions. Such synergies bore intricate sociocultural nuances too confounding for more farsighted lenses, such as those of officialdoms and formal political oppositions.

The very complex sociocultural nuances of the scenes this book describes—particularly those of punk and death metal—owe much to an uncertain political climate, for these genres flourished at the very end of the New Order period. In 1997, just as an underground music scene began to emerge in Bali, the last election under the New Order system took place. In March of the following year, presidential elections, in which members of the People's Constituent Assembly would vote for or against the seventy-six-year-old Suharto's return to the presidency for another five-year term, were due. In the lead-up to this vote, the question of presidential succession pervaded discussion of Indonesian politics. The president's age made it a question impossible to ignore.

Megawati Soekarnoputri, the daughter of Indonesia's first president, Soekarno, became inextricably associated with the issue of succession in the final years of the New Order regime. In 1994, she assumed the leadership of the Indonesian Democratic Party (Partai Demokrasi Indonesia, PDI).² In 1996, Megawati began to hint publicly that she might stand as candidate in the 1998 presidential election.³ The government responded by ousting her from the leadership of the PDI in a rigged party election that replaced her with Soeryadi, who was more sympathetic to the government.

Megawati and her supporters established a rival PDI, which they called the Indonesian Democratic Party of Struggle (PDI-Perjuangan), and which was not officially recognized. In the lead up to the 1997 election, the group's Jakarta headquarters became a center where opposition groupings of various hues would gather and speakers opposed to the government could air their views. On 27 July 1996, the military and hired thugs stormed and ransacked the PDI-Perjuangan headquarters, provoking the worst riots in the capital in more than a decade and increasing support for the new party. As I discuss in chapter 1, the PDI-Perjuangan was enormously popular in Bali, and in 1997, just as the underground music scene began to emerge there, Denpasar swelled with red—the color of the PDI-Perjuangan. The underground music scene, then, took shape in the anticipation of Megawati's succeeding Suharto.

When the presidential elections were held in March 1998, the People's Consultative Assembly voted to return Suharto to the presidency for another five-year term. By that May, however, abandoned by his closest allies, and as the plummeting rupiah plunged Indonesia into deeper economic crisis, Suharto resigned in favor of his vice president, B. J. Habibie, who became Indonesia's third president. As this book will make clear, in the more liberal climate of Habibie's presidency, the Balinese underground music scene flourished.

Readers may infer that the title of this book defies the reprimand to which parents of willful youth often resort ("Don't make a scene!"), or that it revels in the spectacular lashing out so often attributed to adolescence. But "making scenes" refers, rather, to something quieter: the pivotal role of space and territory in the articulations of the music-related identities we will examine. The young men cited in the book consumed global musical texts by "radically territorializing" them (Olson 1998).⁴

Therefore, my references to "music" in the book implicate not just sound but also, in important ways, visual and spatial dimensions, which were central to how reggae, punk, and death metal were received and reworked in Bali. Such reworkings, that is, were visually and spatially present because they were expressed sartorially. In the book, I consider how subcultural dress styles can be read, and observe that death metal, reggae, and punk enthusiasts' sartorial manipulations frequently correlated with the extent of

their control over other important cultural resources, primarily, particular Balinese territories.⁵ Furthermore, as a result of their territorial conquests, they mastered, and ironically manipulated, dominant and elite discourses of identity.

The importance of territorial claims and struggles to all of the scenes in question certainly turns our enquiries away from the “cultural impact” of global media and toward the discursive intricacies of young peoples’ attempts to gain control of particular territories in which to celebrate their music-related identities: as soon as we consider the struggles of Balinese enthusiasts to claim local territories, their interactions with official and metropolitan “Indonesian” ideologies inherent in “Balinese” discourses of space seem difficult to ignore.

Official and dominant ideologies infused Balinese punk, reggae, and death metal spaces and subjected scene participants to discourses of youth that favored the powerful. In the final decade of Suharto’s rule, such discourses were in flux and unstable. Throughout the book, I frequently refer to “media deregulation” as a pivotal event which prompted certain shifts in the dominant discourse on Indonesian youth. In chapter 1, I foreground this gloss by elaborating on some important mediatic changes in the final decade of the Suharto regime. These changes implicate several symbiotic developments, including the establishment of private television in the early 1990s, a consequent advertising boom, and the globalization, in the late 1990s, of the Indonesian recording industry. They gave rise to a new media environment which promoted consumerism and caused an ideal image of young, wealthy, hedonistic Indonesians to eclipse more established, official idealizations of patriotic youth. As I also discuss in chapter 1, these celebrations of consumerism signaled a shift away from preexisting tropes of Indonesian rock fandom, cast as lower class and exclusively masculine. By the late 1990s, a deregulated media constructed rock fandom as a (feminized) realm of consumerism, and rock fans as stereotypically bourgeois.

I view the very different paths by which each genre reached Bali as separate instances of globalization; hence I refer to them as “global” media texts. Insofar as music is a medium, all are examples of media globalization, but state policies of media deregulation did not allow all of them to enter Bali. Reggae, for example, rode tourism’s wake, and its commercialization

indicates deregulation of that industry in the late 1980s, as I discuss in chapter 3. Balinese death metal enthusiasts established links to global underground extreme metal networks in the early 1990s, prior to the arrival of private television and the globalization of the Indonesian recording industry. In the late 1990s, however, the death metal scene was revitalized as enthusiasts began to identify, along with Balinese punks, as part of a pan-Indonesian underground music scene. Balinese punk, on the other hand, had no late-1970s or early-1980s precedent, and the scene's emergence in the late 1990s may be understood as a direct consequence of media deregulation policies.⁶

Rather than as a requiem or postscript to consumerism, then, the practices described here ought to be understood as part of its celebration and, by extension, as a subset of a broader bourgeois identity quest which the media does not freeze, but to which it gives voice. In this sense, this book may be seen to join a body of literature which applauds media globalization for its fragmenting, hybridizing, and diversifying cultural consequences. I will frequently cite Arjun Appadurai's *Modernity at Large* (1996), which also has been an important reference for other studies of global music codes' indigenization. This extensive use of Appadurai may be attributed to the particular attention he pays to electronic mediation, central to his argument for a theory of rupture, and which differentiates his work from Benedict Anderson's (1983) earlier study of the role of print media in the imagination of a postcolonial future, and in providing conceptual bases for nationalist movements. In Appadurai's view, the electronic media offer qualitatively different resources for the constitution of imagined selves that can more easily transcend discourses of state and nation—discourses to which the print media so significantly contributed earlier in the century.

In certain respects, the cases presented in this book epitomize Appadurai's characterizations of the "global modern." For example, they attest to the revolutionary potential of electronic media with global reach, and they refute the possibility of cultural homogeneity resulting from media globalization. However, these cases also attest to metatheories' inability to leave room for the specificity of local scenes, particularly the uncertain dynamics of control among consumers, market forces, and the state that take place in them. This failing, I argue, can be seen as a result of the polarization of the debate about media globalization's cultural effects. That is,

used as a measure for cultural forms spawned by global media products, the “homogenous-hybrid” dialectic can blind observers to more complex interplays of power and nuances of meaning at the local level. As the cases I will present show, there is an urgent need to acknowledge both the continued salience of state power in mediating the global, and the continued importance of center-periphery dynamics in nation-states, as well as the potential for irony and agency in identity practices spawned by media globalization. For example, in Balinese reggae, punk, and death metal scenes, discourses of the nation-state endured in the form of center-periphery dynamics, to which musicians were sensitively attuned. Although they expressed their understandings of such dynamics in different ways, it was nevertheless consistently Jakarta, and not “the West,” which drew their attention first and foremost. These love-hate relationships with the metropolis only reinforce its centrality as a primary reference point.

In consuming these “global” media, then, young Balinese men edged around “Jakarta” in tentative ebbs and flows, and the scenes presented in this book do not epitomize the Appadurai mode of electronic media’s localization, in which global fandoms may be expressed as locally rooted, diasporic spheres of global texts (Appadurai 1996). That is to say, the enthusiasts whose stories fill this book did not engage with global media texts as a way of bypassing discourses of identity imposed by a national center. With one hand firmly gripping the national center and the other busily making scenes on its fringes, the young men I discuss contest Appadurai’s argument that discourses of the nation-state are weakly expressed in localized consumptions of global electronic media.

But Jakarta was much more than a malleable resource readily available to Balinese musicians and which served them well in their scene-making endeavors, for the center often flowed with more force toward them than they toward it. That is, the New Order state retained a determining role in how Balinese youth engaged with global media. This was particularly true of the reggae and earlier death metal scenes as described in chapters 3 and 6, respectively. State developmentalism impinged on and marginalized these scenes, inspiring more rational articulations of death metal and reggae identities in Bali, in contrast to the rather ludic practices initially displayed.

In the late 1990s, as New Order legitimacy began to give way to that of *reformasi*—as the veiled calls for Suharto’s resignation and broader political

change that emerged in the mid-1990s are often glossed—the Balinese underground scene enjoyed greater freedom of movement than had earlier death metal and reggae scenes. In other words, the center’s capacity to impinge on Balinese music scenes appeared to wane as the New Order regime neared its end. In 1998, during the regime’s final months, punk and death metal musicians relaxed into Denpasar by putting down deep and lasting roots in the provincial capital. Uninterrupted now by obsessive developmentalism and ordering state discourses—each of which bear the power holders’ hopes for particular spatial orderings—Balinese underground enthusiasts more freely territorialized global media texts in their attempts to exert local control over them. That their capacity to do so increased as the state declined suggests that state ideologies act as more forceful agents of cultural homogeneity than does transnational capitalism.

Balinese reggae, punk, and death metal scenes reproduced established power dynamics inherent in discourses of masculinity in addition to those of the nation-state. In their references to predominant identity discourses, the musicians I discuss attempted to rework preexisting notions of masculinity, and the gendered (exclusively male) character of all the scenes I study is notable. This maleness may be partly attributed to the masculine character of the guitar, which served young men as a cultural resource in their efforts to gain mastery over public space and, by extension, their public selves. In Bali, very few women play the guitar, but most men do, and they use them at street-side jams which, all over Indonesia, gel around “base camps” where young men drink and jam into the wee hours. It was at street-side jams in the 1990s that Balinese men practiced reggae and punk repertoires. Death metal was rarely rehearsed at these jam sessions, and was reserved for the more exclusive realm of the practice studio. At street-side jams in the 1990s, people covered music by the celebrated Indonesian folk singer Iwan Fals, as well as Green Day and Bob Marley, but not death metal. Nevertheless, in the early 1990s, these jams nurtured death metal identities, and enthusiasts closely identified with street-side gatherings. Undoubtedly, the centrality of *arak* (palm wine) to these gatherings made them distasteful to women hesitant to take on a transgressive persona, such as *cewek nakal* (naughty girl)—a trope by which men identify women who booze, especially those who drink with men on the street, as sexually active and, by extension, voracious.

But the Balinese underground communities that began to emerge in the late 1990s were not street-side jams. In many ways they innovated on the legacy of street-side jams. Such innovations did not, however, extend to including women. In these later scenes, masculinities were upheld in different ways, including the way participants related to predominant or official discourses of youth identities. As I have mentioned, media images of rock fandom underwent important shifts in the late 1990s. At this time, in media imagery, rock/pop distinctions came to be increasingly conflated, and more women began to appear in images of fandom which associated rock/pop with emerging bourgeois ideals of hedonism and consumerism. This contrasted with the formerly dominant images of rock fandom as an exclusively male realm with underclass connotations.

Balinese death metal and punk enthusiasts saw these later images of rock/pop fandom as commercialized and Othered them. This Othering testifies to underground participants' concerns about being ordered by commercial forces which they understood as beyond their control. But in their Othering, they also frequently conflated commercialization with feminization. For example, among underground enthusiasts, a particular band could be discounted as part of a commercial, mainstream Other due to its female fan base.⁷ This suggests that underground enthusiasts' concerns about recuperation may be understood as a peculiarly male ambivalence about the opportunities for self-expression that an emerging and increasingly dominant bourgeois discourse of Indonesian identity, which idealized consumerism, offered to young Indonesian women in general, regardless of their class position. I prefer to characterize the Othering of women in the scenes under question as expressions of ambivalence rather than as intent to subjugate women. The exclusive maleness of Balinese death metal and punk scenes, that is, may be read as an attempt to root themselves in preexisting and stable identity discourses, such as those of masculinity (which necessarily contain discourses of domination) while they experimented with others.

Punk and death metal enthusiasts staked out their relationships both to actual women and to an imagined feminized commercial culture through orchestrated presences in and absences from mall space. Young Balinese women's interest in using an emerging consumerist ideal, upheld in new images of rock/pop music fandom, became evident in how they claimed the

mall as a feminine realm. *Ngeceng* or *mejeng* refers to a ritual hanging out at the mall, and to how young men and women engage one another in mall space by means of exhibitionary practices. Such interactions are different from the kinds of interactions that take place between young men who drink on the street and female passersby. Feigning suggestive tones, the men would call out to these women, “Hey *cewek* [girl],” and the women would respond by feigning disinterest and/or disgust. The men took pleasure in watching the women squirm.

The male–female interactions at the Matahari mall in central Denpasar during my time there exemplify *ngeceng* and show these objectifications to be much less one-way, and much more mutual, than those described above. To step off the escalators in Matahari’s basement on a Saturday night and glide through the walkway that separates the laminex booths of Swensen’s from those of KFC, is to cut a path that separates the *cewek* from the *cowok* (boys). Regular Matahari boys take the shortcut that leads from the escalator straight to the back of Swensen’s. This allows them to scan the space and quickly decide which table to head for before they are singled out as a friendless geek. Prepare the required (as if) narcotically induced, unstable gait. Position the sunglasses. Slick back the hair. Make for one of the booths of four or five boys who have arrived early enough to be already slumped in forced relaxation, scratching, sniffing, exhibiting their not-quite-thereness.⁸

When girls enter, the never-ending hum of Muzak, interspersed with its indiscernible, husky-voiced announcements, suddenly becomes audible as the boys cease their one-upmanship, the drug tales each has prepared for that night. They lower their shades ever so slightly to get a better view of the sway of the girls’ hips under their slinky, polyester flares. The boys group together at Swensen’s, but the tables in front of the KFC counter harbor the girls’ solidarity. From there, they return the boys’ gazes and eye them too as they pass by, and revel too in watching them squirm.

Young Balinese women used the mall to consent to their assigned roles as consumers and simultaneously to reject virtuous ideals. That is, the mall offered itself as a space for young women to gather, and to express and exhibit themselves relatively free of the fear that in doing so they would be cast as *cewek nakal* by their male peers. Here, they could appear to be in place,