

God is not only in the holy scriptures, but also in the arts: music, cultural policies and Islam in West Java, Indonesia

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1. Introduction

In this essay I would like to look at the discourse on music and Islam in Indonesia, and discuss the musical practice of groups in West Java. In particular I shall describe the cultural policies of the Cianjuran regional government and the involvement of the music group *ath-Thawaf* in launching their policies.

Although Indonesia is the country with the largest number of Muslims (about 200 million), it is not an Islamic state. This has been laid down in the five principles of the Indonesian state, Pancasila, in 1945 and it has never been changed. The general feeling is that Indonesia is, and should remain, a nation state: there is no privilege for the adherers to a specific religion. This does not mean that there is no discussion about the relation between the government and Islam. Cees van Dijk starts his inaugural address in 1986 as follows:

“For more than one reason, we see in present-day Indonesia a process of re-defining the relationship between Islam and government. This concerns the demarcation of the fields in which Islam can play a role, and the fields in which it should not play a pronounced role. The problem is not new. [...]”
(van Dijk 1986:3).¹

Since then it seems that little has changed.

However, there were major changes in the last 20 years. The Suharto government fell in 1998, and this started a process of reformation (*Reformasi*) of the state, including a decentralisation of the governmental system and granting a certain degree of autonomy to the different regions (*otonomi daerah*) and more freedom of expression in the media. Although religion (and foreign politics, defence, security, etc.) has remained the responsibility for the central government, this meant that in certain regions Islamic law was enforced more strictly than in other ones. The developments after Suharto stepped down as president caused some concern in progressive Muslim circles. “Religious intolerance has loomed. We hope, in the near future the visionary and moderate ulema [sic] of NU [Nahdatul Ulama], Muhammadiyah and other Islamic groups cognizant of this development will take actions to overcome it.” (Herdi Sahrasad 2006).

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¹ “Om meer dan één reden vindt er op het ogenblik in Indonesië een herdefiniëring plaats van de relatie tussen de Islam en de overheid. Het gaat hierbij om de afbakening van die gebieden waar de Islam zich mag en kan profileren en die terreinen waarop hij niet nadrukkelijk naar voren mag komen. Het probleem is niet nieuw.”

The events of 11 September 2001 and the subsequent attacks on Afghanistan and Iraq also triggered a discussion on the position of Islam in Indonesia.² Abdul Mun'im (2003:8) advocates that the scientific debate on Islam should be based on empirical reality (*sumbur yang bersifat waqî'iy*); the argumentation based on just ratio (*akal*) and revelation (*wahyu*) should be abandoned. Most Indonesian authors stress that Islam in Indonesia is not the same as Islam in the Middle East. In his book with essays about the cultural crisis in present-day Indonesia, Saini (2004:25) points out that a religion is always "coloured" by the local culture and historical time in which its followers live. Therefore Islam, like other religions, is never monolithic.

Imdadun Rahmat *et al.* stress that there are many forms of Islam, including Islam in Indonesia (*Islam pribumi*, indigenous Islam). The problems facing indigenous Islam are the claims for universalism and authenticity that will lead to Islamic fundamentalism. Like many other Indonesian authors, they do not support the claim that the "pure" Islam has to be found in Arabic countries. They stress that in the Indonesian context the "right" Islam is the one that understands the needs of the Indonesians, their problems and the challenges to come, without changing the essence of Islamic teaching. Islam in southeast Asia has a special character: overall it is tolerant, moderate and inclusive, not excluding non-Muslims. Moreover, it is more oriented to culture than to political structure. An Islamic state is not to be considered. The Indonesian "nation state with a democratic system gives enough opportunity to make it a nation of Islamic people (*negara yang Islami*), that is, a nation that can protect the wellbeing of its citizens, including non-Muslims, so that their civil rights can be fully fulfilled, including the right to express their religion in all aspects" (Imdadun Rahmat *et al.* 2003: 9, 11, 13, 18-19, 31-32).

However, these voices of "liberal Islam" are not the only ones to be heard, as I shall discuss in the next section.

2. Liberal Islam and *fatwa*: fighting pornography or muzzling creativity?

Abdurrahman Wahid (*alias* "Gus Dur"), the president of Indonesia from 1999-2001, plays an important role in the discussion about Islam in Indonesia. Wahid studied at the Al-Hazar University in Cairo from 1964-66 and at Baghdad University from 1966-70 (Abdurrahman Wahid 2007: Curriculum Vitae). In an interview in The Wall Street Journal of 7 April 2007 he comments on his Cairo period:

"These old sheikhs only let me study Islam's traditional *surras* in the old way, which was rote memorization, [...] Before long I was fed up. So I spent my time reading books from the USIS [United States Information Service], the Egyptian National Library, and at the cinema. I used to watch three, four movies a day." (Stephens 2007).

In the early 1980s Abdurrahman Wahid was head of an Islamic school (*pesantren*) and he became leader of the Nahdatul Ulama [or Nahdlatul Ulama], one of the largest

² These events and the reactions of some Dutch politicians, who reduced Islam to what is written in the Koran and equated it with Islam in the Middle East, were also reasons for the present author to give more attention to music and Islam. In 2005 I gave a presentation at the ICTM conference in Sheffield and also at the ESEM conference in Cologne, based on fieldwork in West Java since 1976 and more particularly in March-April 2005. Some of this has been written down in van Zanten (*to be published*).

Islamic organisations in Indonesia with some 40 million members. Before he became president, he led the Partai Kebangkitan Bangsa (National Awakening Party, PKB).

Apart from his role in the discourse on the position of Islam, Abdurrahman Wahid has also played a role in cultural policies. In 1981 he became member of the Art Council of Jakarta (Dewan Kesenian Jakarta) and he has been its president from 1982-85. From 1986-87 he was a member of the jury of the Indonesian Film Festival (Abdurrahman Wahid 2007: CV) and earlier he contributed an article on "Films for spreading the Islamic faith: a variety of viewpoints and freedom of form are needed" (Abdurrahman Wahid 1983). From the many films that he saw in Egypt in the 1960s (see above) he could compare the different approaches in films about religious issues in Indonesia with other parts of the world. Wahid criticised some Indonesian filmmakers for making one-sided films: they presented the issue too much from a formalistic religious (*formalitas agama*) viewpoint. He gives the example of a film in which the hero embraces the Islamic faith at the end of his life and utters the words: "There is no God than Allah." Wahid comments, "As if without that [those words] he would remain an infidel and not be accepted by God at his side!"³ According to Wahid, in some *dakwah* films "we become a congregation attending a sermon about the subordination of science to the religious truth."⁴ He rather wants a real discussion about the important issues involved and from several viewpoints, not just the one-sidedness of a fight between a boxer and a sack of sand! (Abdurrahman Wahid 1983: 53-55).

In 2001 Wahid started his website, which was transformed into the website of the Wahid Institute in 2004. The Wahid Institute wants a "civil Islam" in Indonesia. In the article "Right Islam vs. wrong Islam" on his Internet site, published in The Wall Street Journal on 30 December 2005, Abdurrahman Wahid (2007) writes, "All too many Muslims fail to grasp Islam, which teaches one to be lenient towards others and to understand their value systems, knowing that these are tolerated by Islam as a religion." He strongly opposes the view that there is only one Islam.

This does not mean that all Muslims in Indonesia take this liberal stand. The Indonesian Islamic Council (Majelis Ulama Indonesia, MUI) has made several controversial religious advises (*fatwa*) in 2005. For instance, they ruled that for Muslims it is forbidden to marry with someone, who belonged to another religion. Further, to show understanding for pluralism, secularism and religious liberalism was forbidden (*haram*) for Muslims.⁵ The MUI also ruled that the Muslim sect Ahmadiyah was an unlawful religion (MUI 2007: Fatwa).

The MUI was heavily criticised, for instance, on the website of the Jaringan Islam Liberal (JIL 2007; Network for Liberal Islam) and on the website of Abdurrahman Wahid. Abdul Moqsith Ghazali (2007) wrote:

"By issuing such fatwa, MUI has sought to restrict interpretations of the Quran to only those that it approves of. Without realizing it, the MUI has adopted a view that there is only one truth, the truth that comes out of one textual interpretation of the Quran and Hadits."

³ "Seolah-olah tanpa itu ia akan tetap kafir dan tidak akan diterima Tuhan di sisinya!"

⁴ "... dalam film-film dakwah kita menjadi forum khotbah akan subordinasi ilmu pengetahuan kepada kebenaran agama."

⁵ "Umat Islam haram mengikuti paham Pluralisme Sekularisme dan Liberalisme Agama"

Ghazali stated that the MUI, strongly supported by the Indonesian president Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono, had taken over power that belonged to the Supreme Court. He pleaded for more distance between government and MUI, “an institution outside the state bureaucracy and politics”. MUI “should hold no formal authority in Indonesia apart from the informal authority it has over the religious groups it represents.”

Wahid’s website also contains an article by Herdi Sahrasad (2006) “Is NU shifting toward intolerance?” that appeared in *The Jakarta Post*, 8 May 2006. Abdurrahman Wahid led the NU (Nahdlatul [also Nahdatul] Ulama from 1984 to 2000, and Herdi Sahrasad argued that the Nahdlatul Ulama organisation was now at a crossroad: “the country’s biggest Muslim organization long known as a moderate group [...] has begun to depart from its original character toward religious intolerance.” He quoted Zuhairi Misrawi, a young intellectual of NU as saying:

“... that NU’s support for the implementation of *sharia* in some regions and the pornography bill marked a setback and even violation of the organization’s 1926 *khittah* (founding principles), which view pluralism and multiculturalism as *rahmatan lil alamin* (a blessing for all humankind and the universe).”

Already for many years, pornography has been a concern of the Indonesian governments.⁶ From many newspaper articles, it is clear that the pornographic industry is involved in the illegal VCD (video CD) circuit. Nevertheless, Barendregt and van Zanten (2002: 91, fn 46) called this concern an “obsession” of the Indonesian government, as it does not recognise that the Internet, computer games and VCDs also offer Indonesian youths the possibilities “for expressing a desire for modernity and cosmopolitanism at the same time.”

The concept-law on pornography (RUU-APP, *Rancangan Undang-Undang Anti Pornografi dan Pornoaksi*; see, for instance, *LBH APIK* 2006: RUU Pornografi), published by the Indonesian government in early 2006, led to demonstrations and a heated discussions in the media. In a demonstration of thousands of people in Jakarta on 22 April 2006, the demonstrators wanted to “reject pornography, without the concept-law [on pornography]”⁷ Sinta Nuriyah Wahid, the wife of Abdurrahman Wahid, spoke to the demonstrators, among whom were well-known artists like Garin Nugroho, Inul Daratista and also Goenawan Mohamad (*Kompas*, 22 April 2006). In an interview announcing this demonstration Ratna Sarumpaet was quoted as saying, “If you want to stop pornography, then the state has to regulate the dissemination of pornographic materials, and not regulate morals and ethics. Looking after morals and ethics is the competence of religious and cultural institutions.”⁸

⁶ An anecdote may be illustrative. When I arrived at Halim airport in the beginning of 1976 for starting to teach at the University of Indonesia, I thought the customs officer asked me (in English) whether I had books in my suitcase. I faithfully answered, “Yes, many.” So, the the officer asked me to open my suitcase and started to search it carefully. Apparently he could not find what he expected, so he asked me in a low voice: “Where is the pornography?”

⁷ “*Tolak pornografi tanpa RUU.*”

⁸ “*‘Kalau mau menghentikan pronografi, maka seharusnya negara mengatur penyebaran barang-barang pornografi, bukan mengatur soal moral dan etika. Pengaturan moral dan etika adalah kewenangan lembaga agama dan budaya,’ demikian Ratna Sarumpaet.*” (*Kompas*, 20 April 2006).

On 15 March 2006 there had been a demonstration against the concept-law on pornography in Surakarta during which about a thousand people danced the *tayub* dance for men and women together. They warned the government not to take repeatedly initiatives to exert political control over the creation of art works. The demonstrators included the dancer Didik Nini Thowok and choreographers Miroto, Mugiyono and Eko Supriyanto. They did not want this concept-law on pornografi to become law “because it was considered to have the potency to become a muzzle for the creativity of the people.”⁹

The MUI, Indonesian Islamic Council, had taken many initiatives leading to this concept-law. In 2001 they had made a *fatwa* about pornography and pornographic behaviour (MUI 2007, Fatwa). In March 2005 the MUI had taken the decision to establish a “committee to oppose pornography and pornographic behaviour” (*Kompas*, 25 March 2005). In November 2007 the president of the MUI said that he wished that the law on pornography would be finished before the end of term of president Yudhoyono, that is, before October 2009. The subtitle of this newspaper article reads, “the presence of the concept-law on pornography could become a shield for the whole religious community.”¹⁰ In the mean time, on 6 November 2007, the local authorities of Jambi province expressed their wish to have a regional law about the “prevention and fight against pornography and pornographic behaviour” in force by the end of 2007. They were still studying similar regional laws that existed in Bali, Padang and Banten (*Kompas*, 6 November 2007).

An interesting newspaper article was written by Umdah El Baroroh (2006), who said that this concept-law on pornography was not in the interest of women. First of all this law was not about the effect someone’s conduct had on others (positive or negative), but just about the way someone expressed his/herself in clothing and conduct. According to Umdah El Baroroh this was not in line with what religion teaches us: physical sanctions can only be applied when someone’s actions are violating the rights of others. This law was also “very gender-biased, patriarchal and still positioned women as sexual objects, so that it was not able to touch the heart of the matter.”¹¹ The law did not make clear that the victims of pornography were women, and women were always seen as the ones who seduce men. As long as this male-biased approach existed, whether from people pro or contra this concept-law, it would be impossible to solve the issue of pornography, according to Umdah El Baroroh.

After discussing these general issues, I shall now turn to West Java.

3. Islam, mysticism and music in West Java

The performing arts have always been used to spread Islam, even though trance and mysticism are part of the performing arts of the Javanese and Sundanese, like the puppet play (*wayang*), the gamelan orchestra, masked dances and trance performances, usually organised in the context of ritual meals. This has been accepted until this day in spite of some misgivings in orthodox Muslim circles. The discourse is rather about the *degree*

⁹ “... karena dinilai berpotensi menjadi alat pemberangus kreativitas rakyat” (*Detikcom*, 15 March 2006).

¹⁰ “Kehadiran RUU Pornografi bisa menjadi perisai bagi semua umat beragama.” (*Republika*, 9 November 2007).

¹¹ “...sangat bias jender, sangat patriarkis, dan masih memosisikan perempuan sebagai obyek seksual sehingga tidak mampu menyentuh akar persoalan yang sebenarnya.”

of acceptability of trance and mysticism in the performing arts than in absolute terms of acceptable and not acceptable. Even the rather conservative MUI, in its *fatwa* of 3 December 1983 about the use of holy verses of the Koran in [artistic] singing, considered that “in principle the Islamic religion will accept all art products that are not violating the teachings and laws of Islam” and “to spread the faith may also be done via the medium of the arts”¹² (MUI 2007: Fatwa). We shall come back to this *fatwa* later.



Figure 1: A hobbyhorse dancer, who has participated in a procession with boys to be circumcised, is taken out of his trance by the leader (*malim*). The *malim* does this by blowing (cigarette) smoke in the face of the man in trance, massaging his neck or sprinkling water over him as on this picture. Ujungberung, 11 September 1982.

Agus Setiawan (1996) wrote about the use of the gamelan Sekaten in Cirebon as a means of spreading the faith (*sarana dakwah*). The name of one of the early Muslim saints (*wali*), Sunan Kalijaga, is always mentioned in this respect: he was the one who spread Islam by using music, and in particular the gamelan orchestra and the *wayang* puppet play. The gamelan music was used to call the people to Islamic ceremonies, like the celebration of the birth of the prophet Muhammad (Sekaten).

¹² “...pada dasarnya agama Islam dapat menerima semua karya seni yang tidak bertentangan dengan ajaran dan hukum Islam; [...] berda'wah juga dapat dilakukan melalui media seni.”

“When the people were near and close, only then they moved on to the main point of the programme, that is, spreading the Islamic faith. When the gamelan played, there was no missionary work. Similarly, when the call for faith went on, the gamelan stopped. This went on in turns.” (Agus Setiawan 1996:93)¹³

The performing arts are part of Sundanese life. This is also reflected by my experience when visiting the library of the State University for Islamic Religion (IAIN, Institut Agama Islam Negeri) of Ujungberung in the eastern part of Bandung in March 2005. I asked the head of the library about BA theses on music and Islam by their students. He had never seen such theses, and he said that this was not really an important topic for the IAIN. Music and other performing arts were generally accepted in Islamic circles. There were only discussions about the way in which some performers behaved. For instance, in Islamic pop music the movements of the female performers were quite often considered “not decent.”

Suharno (2004:96) holds the view that anyone may use art (*seni*) for whatever purpose, including religious purposes. However, if religion becomes part of the art form, it should not highlight dogmatic texts, but rather explain what lies behind these texts. If art is used to spread faith (*dakwah*) it may be that this religious purpose will not be reached and that the art will not appeal to the audience. God is not just in the holy scriptures, but also in all the aspects of life. According to Suharno (2004:100-101) it is the task of the artist to “read” this presence of God and to reword this in his artistic language. The artist needs “aesthetical sensibility” to carry out this task. He points out that the dogmatic texts, as written in the holy books, are too black and white for the artist. What is needed is a *religious* text that explains what is behind these dogmatic texts, or what its essence (*sari*) is (Suharno 2004:103.)

What is Islamic music? Deni Hermawan (2000:74-75) distinguishes a few parameters for Sundanese/ Indonesian music to be called “Islamic”: for instance, the tonal material, the use of the voice and the instruments may be from the Middle East, the language may be Arabic, but the texts should always be inspired by Islam. For Indonesia he wants to make a distinction between *musik Islam*, that is, (Islamic) music in Indonesia that was imported from the Middle East – like *gambusan* and *qasidahan* – and *musik islami*, that is, music with Islamic characteristics. Deni Hermawan points out that *musik islami* cannot be purely instrumental, because it is only in the vocal part, the sung text, that the Islamic themes can become clear. Therefore, two purely instrumental pieces with titles referring to Islam (Aqidah and Malongan) on the 4th album *Takbir & Sholawat* (2000) of the Sambasunda music group would not qualify as “Islamic music” (*musik Islam*) or “Islam inspired music” (*musik islami*) according to Deni Hermawan. It is interesting to note that with the expansion of “Islam inspired” music, in which the vocal parts are generally very important, at the same time there is an increase in purely instrumental music in West Java, in which zithers and bowed lutes play an important role.

4. The power of music: sacredness, humour and killing by singing

Different types of solo singing using special verse forms, called *macapat* singing, Cigawiran or *beluk*, have been used for Islamic teachings since Islam entered West

¹³ “Sesudah dekat, akrab, baru pada acara pokoknya, yaitu dakwah agama Islam. Gamelan dilagukan, dakwah berhenti, begitu pula dakwah berjalan, gamelan berhenti, saling bergantian seterusnya.”

Java. Some older forms of music inspired by Islam are still actively practised and new forms and performance practices are being created, like Islamic pop music. On 14 August 1981 I recorded the Cigawiran song *Sinom Pangapungan*, sung solo by Mohamad Amin, in a *Limbangan* Islamic school (*pesantren*) near Garut.¹⁴ The text is about circumcision that is compulsory for Muslim boys¹⁵ when reaching the age of fifteen years:

Sinom Pangapungan

Hukum sarat anu lima
Éta wajib da pasti
Dilampahkeun ku sadaya
Jaman nu Islam tur akil
Nya éta nu geus nepi
Umur limawelas taun
Mimiti datang paréntah
Larangan jeung anu mesti
Wajib sunat tuna makruh reujeung haram

The five demands of the Islamic law
Those are really compulsory.
It has to be done by all,
[Who enter] the Islamic era and become adult,
That means those who have reached
The age of fifteen years.
The command has come
About what has to be done with the genitals:
They should be circumcised, failing [to do so] should
not happen and is forbidden.



Figure 2. Recitation of Islamic stories (*beluk*) by Udung.
Ciapus village, Banjaran, 26 September 1982

The grandfather of today's Sundanese popular music is often understood to be Koko Koswara (1915-1985), referred to as Mang Koko, whose popular songs for solo voice accompanied by a small *gamelan* orchestra or *kacapi* zither (the *kacapi* music) became

¹⁴ Audio example 7 on the cassette tape with van Zanten 1989.

¹⁵ Sundanese girls are circumcised when they are 10 days old; it is a light operation and not accompanied by street processions or performances like for boys (see also Williams 2001:88-89).

widely known in West Java starting in the 1950s. Much of Mang Koko's music used Sundanese musical idiom, but he also created new musical sounds, for instance by introducing new playing techniques on the zither. Initially Koko Koswara started in the Jenaka Sunda style (music with humorous texts) with his own group, but later developed what was called a "new style" (*wanda anyar*) (Deni Hermawan 1996:1, 4, 6).

Mang Koko also wrote songs with texts by RAF (R. Ading Affandie or "Pak Ading") on Islamic themes. Ading learned from his teacher Ustadz Sobri at the Islamic school (*pesantren*) that "art does not merely fulfil aesthetic goals, but has to be based on a feeling of devotion to Allah." In the 1950s Ading wrote a play "Yaomal qiamat" (Judgment Day) (Jurriëns 2004: 88, 79). Nano Suratno (Nano S.), a well-known composer of popular music and pupil of the late Koko Koswara, remarked in March 2005 that, from the three commonly used tone systems, his teacher preferred the *saléndro* tone system for his songs with Islamic themes. The song "Al Iman", for instance, on the cassette tape *Shalawat Nabi al-Imam; Kawih pupujian Sunda* (1995) uses the *saléndro* tone system.

*Al Iman*Faith

Taya bahan salempang
mangmang hariwang
Tuduh jalan nyata
keur pedoman leumpangas
Keur nu tumut
kadawuh nu dipikudu
[...]

It is not something to be anxious about
to be hesitant about or afraid of
The guiding principle is clear
a compass for going
For those that follow
the order that has to be obeyed

The Bimbo group is one of the oldest popular music groups in Indonesia, based in Bandung, founded in 1967 and still active. Nowadays the Bimbo group is mainly known for its music with Islamic themes, like the modern versions of *qasidah* (*kasidah*). In the song "Qasidah anak bertanya pada bapaknya" [Qasidah about the child that asked his father], created ca. 1985, they use a musical flavour from the Middle East (CD *Qasidah Bimbo* 2004). According to Deni Hermawan this music should be classified as *musik Islam*: "Islamic music" that is imported from the Middle East and adjusted to the local musical scene.

Already in the 1970s music with an Islamic message (*dakwah* music, like the popular *dangdut*), "has turned out to be big commercial business" (Frederick 1982:129). The fasting month (Ramadhan) is each year the time for *religiotaînement*: religion, pop culture and capitalism converge. An example is the VCD *Pop Ramadhan* (2004[1999]), Pop for the fasting month, with recordings of many well-known artists, like Sam Bimbo. See for more information on Islamic pop music in Indonesia and Malaysia, in particular *nasyid*, for instance, the articles by Barendregt and van Zanten (2002), Sarkisian (2005) and Barendregt (2006).

In his dissertation Millie (2006:2, 81, 92, and 194) makes interesting remarks about the present-day delivery of the texts about the exemplary deeds of Sheikh Abdulqadir al-Jaelani (*manakiban*) and the reading and reciting of the book of the Sheikh. He remarks that the *syukuran* or *selamatan* (ritual meal) are important as "a context that generates specific understandings of narrative texts." The sufi order known as the *Tarik Qadiriyyah wa Naqsyabandiyah*, which has its headquarters at Suryalaya, Tasikmalaya, takes a neutral position as regards the deliverance of the text: it does not encourage or discourage the use of artistry (*seni*). One well-known performer in the North of Bandung, Pak Endang, "even when using a source text written in prose, sings the text in the

pupuh melody known as *asmalandana*. [...] His singing helps to make the environment *meriah dan ramai* (joyous and busy), and prevents tedium.” As the delivered texts are sacred, the performances derive a quality of sacredness, but it “is at the same time read in ways that are playful, creative and humorous.”

Humour is also used by the present popular singer Doel Sumbang. He is known for his songs about morality and learned “the art of teaching people lessons in morality” from his father who was a well-known Islamic preacher (*mubalig*) and from storytelling on the radio. He also finds that “a message is transmitted most effectively in the form of humour or entertainment rather than in a serious, explicit fashion.” Doel Sumbang wants to “sell lyrics”, and is less interested in exploiting the possibilities of the music, he told Jurriëns (2004:129-130).¹⁶ Doel Sumbang compared his popular music with music for Islamic teaching:

“Maybe other people make songs for *dakwah* [religious propaganda], for [Islamic] speeches, for proselytizing. I don’t, but I like to teach people, because maybe there are people who don’t know the law yet. Therefore I like to teach those things just one by one, by means of songs [...] The people are actually more in need of easy, simple things. [...] I wouldn’t like it if I made music or songs that filled people’s heads with worries. I would consider it a failure, a big failure.” (Jurriëns 2004:130)

Songs can be very powerful if performed in the right musical form and the right social setting. Williams (2001:90) mentions that in the secular Tembang Sunda Cianjuran music performances, women may deliberately aim the message of a song at someone in the public. If the message (mostly about love) reaches the one aimed at, he is said to be “shot dead” (*ditembak mati*) by the song. In my film about Minangkabau *Saluang jo dendang* music similar words are used in a similar situation (van Zanten 2002: film 32:30-33:06, Documentation book p.11). The female singer has been singing to a bachelor: “You found a ‘blanket’ [woman], but the sun was already rising”, meaning that it was already too late to make love to her. The audience laughs and comments: “Do you get it, Mr. Bachelor? Mr. Bachelor is skinned and dead!”, that is, killed (*mati*) by the female singer.

In 1962 the power of the prestigious and secular Tembang Sunda Cianjuran music was used for calling guerrilla fighters of the Darul Islam back from the mountains. The Darul Islam movement in West Java, led by Kartosuwirjo, had been fighting the central Indonesian army since 1948 (see, for instance, Boland 1971: 54-62). In the last period of the Operation Pager Betis by the Indonesian army (see van Dijk 1981:124-6), this song was broadcast during every hour for one week¹⁷ by the radio station in Bandung. The song “Jemplang Karang” was used with a text that invited the guerrilla fighters to “come back”:

“Why can’t you come back? Back to the purpose of former days? We will cleanse our hearts, cleanse our bodies and spirits. Don’t stay on the wrong

¹⁶ Nevertheless, his popular music often includes characteristics of Sundanese music, like instrumental interludes with the typical Sundanese bamboo flute in some of the songs (Barendregt and van Zanten 2002:94).

¹⁷ Enip Sukanda (1996:17) reports that it was broadcast during one month, every day at the 5 times for the Islamic prayer, that is, at 4:20, 12:00, 15:00, 18:00 and 19:00 hours.

track, Led by the wrong desires. Don't go on making mistakes.” (van Zanten 1989:75).

Enip Sukanda (1996:17) presents another verse of this song, that he wrote down from what he remembered after many years:

Anaking diantos mulih	My child, I wait for you to come home
Mulang ka balé wiwitan	To return to your birthplace
Ieu ibu nuju ngantos	Here is your mother waiting
Ngantosan hidep rék mulang	Waiting for you to come home
Mulang ka balé wiwitan	To return to your birthplace
Nya muncang labuh ka puhu	[Like] the <i>kemiri</i> nut that falls at the foot of the tree
Kebo mulih pakandangan	And the buffalo that returns to the stable.

The singer of this song was 18-year old Euis Kartini, stepdaughter of Uking Sukri, my main informant about Tembang Sunda Cianjuran music. Euis Kartini had been chosen, and not the more experienced singers Ibu Saodah and Ibu A. Cicah, because of the qualities of her voice that sounded a little hoarse. She was accompanied by Uking Sukri on the large zither (*kacapi indung*) and Ono Sukarna on the bamboo flute (*suling*).

The guerrilla fighters indeed finished their long-standing revolt and came down from the mountains. Several months later Uking Sukri was visited by some former Darul Islam fighters and he was very much afraid that they would harm him. However, they only came to thank him, Euis Kartini and Ono Sukarna for playing the music that was so powerful that it had called them back to Sundanese society. According to Enip Sukanda the two Darul Islam commanders said that they did not surrender because they were afraid for the bullets and guns of the Indonesian army, but because they could not resist the call by the delicate voice of Euis Kartini. They lost and surrendered because they were called by the melody of a Cianjuran song. This event caused Uking Sukri to conclude that Cianjuran music was sharper than the bullet of a gun or a large knife (Enip Sukanda 1996:18).

This episode in Sundanese history shows that music, and in general the performing arts, are an essential part of Sundanese life, as I have already stated. Even for these rather fundamentalist-Islamic fighters the “secular” Cianjuran music still had the power to arouse their emotions and apparently let them reconsider their situation. Also relevant is a remark by Boland (1971:56, fn 119) about the leader of the Darul Islam movement in West Java: Kartosuwirjo “was not a *kyai* or *ulama* interested in Islamic law, but was drawn towards mysticism and magical ideas on invulnerability, etc.”

Rulers have always used the performing arts as a means to show their power. There are also recent examples where artists have backed politicians, like the well-known *dangdut* singer Rhoma Irama. Below I shall present an example from West Java in which the music group ath-Thawaf was involved in launching a socio-political programme of the Cianjur government. I shall discuss how this music group performs their “ethnic music with Islamic characteristics.”

5. Cianjur government and its Gerbang Marhamah programme

Since the law granting more autonomy to the different regions was passed in 1999, the government of the Cianjur region, a city and surrounding villages that lie south of Jakarta and west of Bandung, has been promoting ideas about government and Islam on the Internet. They developed a programme called Gerbang Marhamah. Gerbang Marhamah is an acronym for “Gerakan Pembangunan Masyarakat Berakhlakul Kari-

mah”, that is, Movement for the development of a society with a noble character, a moralistic revival movement (*Cianjur government 2005*, cassette tape *Gerbang Marhamah 2002*).

The Gerbang Marhamah programme was announced officially on the first Muharam 1442 Hijriyah, or 26 March 2001. It is an initiative by the local government and people of Cianjur, especially Muslims, in order to increase the level of moral behaviour and to face globalisation and some of its negative impacts. They strive for

- (1) people with good morality, as a foundation for prosperous families;
- (2) prosperous families as a foundation for prosperous communities;
- (3) prosperous communities where people love and respect each other.

The Cianjur government remarks in the section “background” (*latar belakang*):

“Islam is not only a belief system, but also a system for living. Islam is not only concerned with ritual aspects of the religion, but also with social, humanitarian and governmental matters. This is the reason why Islam not only teaches how humans have to prepare themselves for the world hereafter, but also arranges life in this world. Islam does not only settle how the relation between creatures and the world hereafter should be, but also how human beings should interact with each other and the natural environment.”¹⁸

The Gerbang Marhamah programme, introduced by the former governor (*bupati*, H. Wasidi Swastomo), is still running under the present one (H. Tjetjep Muchtar Soleh), elected for the period 2006-2011. It is significant that in the list of 35 governors since 1677 on this website (section *Hari Jadi Cianjur*), the names of the last seven governors (since 1970) are all preceded by H. (*Haji*, the title for men and women who have made a pilgrimage to Mecca); the 28 earlier ones are, with one exception, preceded by R. (*Radén*, a Sundanese and Javanese title for nobles).

For most Indonesians, religion and the arts have always been viewed as belonging together, in the Hindu past and in the Islamic era, starting in the 13th - 16th century in the different parts of Indonesia. For the elite in Cianjur it was important that they could recite the Koran (*ngaos*), sing the Cianjuran songs, accompanied by zithers and a bamboo flute (*mamaos*), and had mastered the martial arts for self defence (*maén po*, a form of *pencak silat*). This ideal of mastering these three fields *ngaos-mamaos-maén po* is still mentioned in the “philosophy of Cianjur” on the Internet site of the local government (*Cianjur government 2007*).

On this website the content of the Cianjuran songs is described as follows “Generally, the poems for the songs express for the greater part praise for the greatness of God and all the things He made.”¹⁹ I have described Cianjuran music differently, as secular music, with song texts mostly about love. However, the “real meaning”, or inner form,

¹⁸ “Islam bukan hanya sebuah sistem kepercayaan, tetapi juga sistem kehidupan. Islam bukan hanya berurusan dengan persoalan ritual keagamaan tetapi juga urusan sosial, kemanusiaan dan ketatanegaraan. Itu sebabnya, mengapa Islam tidak hanya mengajarkan bagaimana manusia harus mempersiapkan kehidupan di akhirat kelak, tetapi juga mengatur kehidupan di dunia ini. Islam tidak hanya mengatur bagaimana hubungan antara makhluk dengan khaliknya, tetapi juga bagaimana manusia harus berhubungan dengan sesamanya dan alam sekelilingnya.”

¹⁹ “Pada umumnya syair mamaos ini lebih banyak mengungkapkan puji-pujian akan kebesaran Tuhan dengan segala hasil ciptaanNya.” Note that the Indonesian text uses the general word for God, Tuhan, and not Allah; “Tuhan” is also used in the Pancasila principles of the Indonesian state.

of Cianjuran music is trying to understand the essence of life. It is sometimes seen as a mystical path, or a means of communication with the metaphysical world (van Zanten 1989: 1, 73). The formulation chosen on the Cianjur government website emphasises the close connection between Islam and music; music is described in rather positive terms.

Also the martial art of self-defence (*maén po*) is interpreted as a means to understand human life: “Evasive movements are not merely the game of self defence in the martial arts, but also interpreted as the attitude of keeping oneself away from sin (disobedience to Allah), whereas the blows or punches are interpreted as the strength in facing all kinds of challenges in life.”²⁰ See also Barendregt for the interpretation of the different movements in the Minangkabau martial arts in terms of Sufi ideas and the customary law (*adat*): “The Minangkabau consider the silat movements only meaningful if they are in accordance with the will of Allah.” (Barendregt 1995:113).

6. The music group ath-Thawaf

The start of the Gerbang Marhamah programme of the Cianjur government was marked by a performance of the Bandung-based ath-Thawaf music group. This group is connected to the Music, dance and theatre school (STSI) and its artistic leader is Yus Wiradiredja (see also van Zanten, *to be published*). In 2002 the group ath-Thawaf published two volumes on cassette tape (*Gerbang Marhamah* and *Jihad Tahmid*), followed by a third cassette tape in 2004 (*Pancering Hirup*).

The music of ath-Thawaf is a fusion of several musical traditions, but certain musical features make it specifically Sundanese. First, there are Sundanese musical instruments involved, like drum (*kendang*), xylophone (*gambang*), bamboo flute (*suling*) and zither (*kacapi*) and also newly made instruments based on older Sundanese ones, like the “*puklung*” percussion instrument. In the song Reformatika Diri (*Jihad Tahmid* 2002) the *gambang* and *puklung* are used and play Sundanese patterns (van Zanten 2003:7-8). All songs use the Sundanese *madenda* or *sorog* tone system²¹, and the instrumental solos of the *suling* in the song Al-Hadits (*Gerbang Marhamah* 2002) could be part of Cianjuran songs. However, many rhythms and the choral multi-part singing, such as in Reformatika Diri, do not sound Sundanese at all. In most of the songs there are refrains.

The cassette tape *Gerbang Marhamah* (2002) of ath-Thawaf has a written introduction by the governor (*bupati*) of Cianjur, H. Wasidi Swastomo. The Cianjur regency hosted the concert of ath-Thawaf when launching the Gerbang Marhamah programme and supported the production of this cassette tape. The text of the first song on this cassette tape is as follows:

Gerbang Marhama

[Gerakan Pembangunan Masyarakat
Berakhlakul Karimah]

[The movement for the establishment of a people
[society] with a noble /moral character]

Gerbang Marhamah (4x)
Cianjur sugih mukti tur Islami (2x)

Gerbang Marhamah
Cianjur lives in comfort and the Islamic way

²⁰ “*Liliwatan, tidak semata-mata permainan beladiri dalam pencak silat, tetapi juga ditafsirkan sebagai sikap untuk menghindari diri dari perbuatan yang maksiat. Sedangkan peupeuhan atau pukulan ditafsirkan sebagai kekuatan didalam menghadapi berbagai tantangan dalam hidup.*” (Cianjur government 2007).

²¹ In contrast to the Koko Koswara, who preferred the *saléndro* tone system for his songs with Islamic themes; see above.

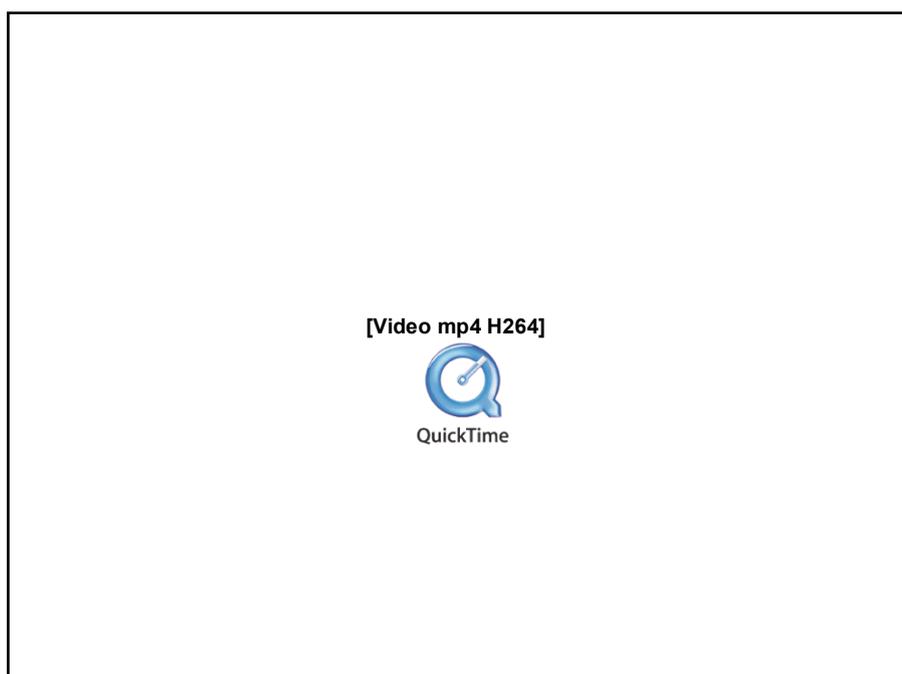
Gerbang Marhamah (2x) Tarékah hirup hurip dunya ahérat Gerbang Marhamah udagan urang Jatining umat Islam ahlaqul karimah	Gerbang Marhamah A means for vital power in eternity Gerbang Marhamah is our purpose The essence for an Islamic community with a noble/ moral character
Gerbang Marhamah (2x) Buleudkeun tékad suci amparan ikhlas Gerbang Marhamah urang tanjeurkeun Sakumna Islam pikeun ngudag mardhotillah	Gerbang Marhamah Take a firm decision to be pure, show honesty Gerbang Marhamah we establish The entire Islamic religion for pursuing matters that are approved by Allah
[Refrain] Cianjur sugih mukti tur Islami Pancegkeun ku urang kudu ngabukti Cianjur sugih mukti nu hakiki Gerbang Marhamah rupi tarékahna	Cianjur lives in comfort and the Islamic way We have to make it fit, we need to prove it Cianjur lives in real comfort Gerbang Marhamah is the means for this

The cassette tape *Pancering Hirup* 2004 contains two song cycles. The first cycle is the “Rukun Iman” (Principles of belief) that consists of 6 songs about belief in (1) Allah, (2) the angels, (3) the book of Allah, (4) the messenger (Mohammad), (5) the resurrection and (6) the decrees and will of Allah. The second song cycle is about the 5 principles of Islam (Rukun Islam): the confession of faith (Syahadat), daily prayers (Sholat), compulsory gifts to the poor (Zakat), fasting (Puasa), and the pilgrimage (Munggah haji). These songs were all composed by Yus Wiradiredja.

I would describe the music of Zakat in the second song cycle as rather “swinging”, especially the Refrain. When I saw the group performing this song in 2005, it was obvious that they liked the music. The text is as follows:

<i>Zakat</i> Sakabéh harta hasil usaha Lain pikeun urang sagemblengna Inget kana pibekeleun hirup Tigin kana kawajiban zakat Lamun urang hésé méré infak Loba harta moal rék mangpaat Lamun tara ngaluarkeun zakat Tunggu siksa di ahérat	<i>Compulsory gifts</i> All material things, gathered by our efforts Are not entirely for us Remember the task ²² for our life Includes also the responsibility of the gift When we have difficulties to donate something, [Remember:] Much property will not be of use When we will not donate the compulsory gift: Wait for the tortures in the life hereafter.
[Refrain] Hé sakabéh, dulur-dulur nu ariman Kabéh harta sakadar titipan Hé sakabéh, datang mangsa kudu mulang Nu maréngan amal perbuatan Infak, zakat, maslahat keur umat Infak, zakat, bekel di ahérat Infak, zakat, meresihan harta Iklas méré, meresihan haté	Hey, you all, brothers and sisters who are safe All material things are only entrusted to us Hey, you all, the time will come that you will die The ones who are angry Donations, gifts are advantageous for believers Donations, gifts are food for the life to come Donations, gifts clean material things Giving with sincerity will clean the heart

²² Literally: food given for the journey



Video example.
Part of song Zakat by the group ath-Thawaf,
performed at a concert in Pelabuhan Ratu, 10 March 2005
Click in the window to play the video inside. Requires adobe reader 6 and +

Otherwise click here :



The song Syahadat (the confession of faith) starts with an instrumental introduction with mainly plucked and bowed instruments. Then the chorus sings the lines of the confession of faith (in Arabic) without accompaniment, and now and then in multipart singing. An instrumental section, solo singing with accompaniment (verse 1) and again an instrumental interlude follow this. Then the chorus sings verse 2 with accompaniment, followed by the confession sung solo in Sundanese; a Sundanese zither, playing like the small Cianjuran zither (*kacapi rincik*) and other instruments accompany this part. Then there is again an instrumental part, followed by a repetition of verse 1 (chorus) and the confession of faith in Sundanese (solo). The unaccompanied confession of faith, sung in Arabic by the chorus, ends the song.

Shahadat

[Chorus; unaccompanied singing in Arabic:]

Asyhadu allaaailaaha illallooh

Wa'asyhadu anna Muhammadar

Rosuululooh (2x)

I confess there is no other god than Allah

I believe in Muhammad

His prophet

[Solo; sung in Sundanese:]

1. Syahadat rukun Islam nu kahiji

Syahadat jatining hirup urang

Maca syahadat dibarung niat

Maca syahadat dibarung ku ibadah

The confession of faith is the first Islamic principle

The confession is the essence of human life [...]

Read (recite) the confession with intentions

Read the confession

[Chorus:]

2. Syahadat cahaya nur Illahi	The confession is the light of Allah
Syahadat pancering hirup urang	The confession is the essence of our life
Dua kalimah wening tur suci	The two sentences, pure and holy,
Geura kacangking wujudkeun na amalan	Are the start of realising good deeds

[Solo:]

Abdi nyaksi taya Gusti anging Alloh	I confess there is no other God than Allah
Satemenna Nabi Muhammad	Really, the prophet Muhammad
utusan Alloh (2x)	Is the messenger of Allah

In the ath-Thawaf repertoire this composed Syahadat is particularly interesting, because one may wonder whether such song with the text of the Islamic confession of faith would be composed outside Indonesia.

We may also ask whether the Indonesian Islamic Council (MUI) would agree to this way of performing the confession of faith by ath-Thawaf, because of their 1983 ruling about the use of holy verses of the Koran in singing.²³ In this *fatwa* the MUI states that in principle it is possible to use texts from the Koran in artistic singing. In its reasoning that led to issuing this *fatwa* the MUI quoted the following text from the written traditions told by Tabrani and Baihaqi:

“Read the Koran in the style of the language of the Arabs and not in the style of the language of the Jews, Christians, or other irreligious people. Surely after me people will come, who will sing the Koran as a normal song, [like] songs for adoring statues and loud [‘shouting’] songs. What they read does not pass through their throats, that is, it does not reach the heart. Their heart is struck by slander and also struck by the slander in the hearts of the people who are proud of themselves [their situation?].”²⁴

So, according to the MUI there are conditions for the use of Koran texts in singing, and the decision in this *fatwa* is:

- “1. In singing the holy verses of the Koran one has to follow the rules of *tajwid* [that is, the correct recitation of the Koran.]
2. It is allowed to sing translated texts of the Koran, because the translations of the Koran are not subjected to the laws of the Koran.”²⁵

According to this *fatwa*, the confession of faith sung in Sundanese is no problem. However, the confession of faith, sung in Arabic and not complying with the rules of *tajwid*, should be classified as one of the “songs for adoring statues and loud songs” that “do not reach the heart.” I think not many Sundanese would get that impression when hearing this ath-Thawaf performance.

²³ *Fatwa* “Nyanyian dengan menggunakan ayat-ayat suci Al-Quran”, 3 December 1983 (MUI 2007)

²⁴ “Bacalah Al-Qur’an dengan gaya bahasa orang-orang Arab. Dan janganlah dengan gaya bahasa orang Yahudi dan orang Nasrani dan orang-orang yang fasik. Sesungguhnya akan datang sesudahku orang-orang yang melagukan Al-Qur’an semacam lagu nyanyian. Lagu penyembahan patung, dan lagu berteriak-teriak. Apa yang mereka baca tidak melalui tenggorokan mereka, yakni tidak sampai ke hati. Hati mereka terkena fitnah dan juga terkena fitnah hati orang-orang yang membanggakan keadaan mereka.”

²⁵ “1. Melagukan ayat-ayat suci Al-Qur’an harus mengikuti ketentuan ilmu tajwid; 2. Boleh menyayikan/melagukan terjemahan Al-Qur’an, karena terjemahan Al-Qur’an tidak termasuk hukum Al-Qur’an.”

Conclusion

In the last decade, since the fall of Suharto, the voices of Islam seem to have become stronger and more diverse. Large organisations like the Majelis Ulama Indonesia and the Nahdatul Ulama still play an important role in public discussions and they are criticised for their religious intolerance by institutions like the Jaringan Islam Liberal and the Wahid Institute. The decentralisation of the governmental system leads to a variety of regional and provincial governments; some want to implement Islamic law more strictly than others do. Like before, we can observe “a process of redefining the relationship between Islam and government” (van Dijk 1986:3), both on a national and on a regional level.

I have discussed the socio-political policies of the Cianjur regional government, as laid down in their Gerbang Marhamah programme. The music group ath-Thawaf was involved in launching this programme in 2001, and I have discussed some of its music. *Ath-Thawaf* is the fulfilling of religious duties by seven times walking around the Ka'aba building in Mecca. The leader, Yus Wiradiredja, interpreted the name of his group as the search for truth. On the cover of the cassette tape *Jihad Tahmid* (2002) he also writes:

“... the treasure of our ethnic music is very rich with expressions and highly valued musical emotions, it may become a source of creativity that includes the Islamic spirit, and we hope that in this way the values of Islam will deeper penetrate in the heart of each Muslim.”²⁶

The Majelis Ulama Indonesia, MUI, has ruled in a *fatwa* of 1983 about the singing of Koran verses: if sung in Arabic, it should be done according to the *tajwid*. The music group ath-Thawaf does not always follow this religious advice. We may ask how many music groups in Indonesia take this *fatwa* seriously. It seems that most of them think that the discussion about the arts should not be steered by ethics (*fikih*), but rather by mystics (*tasawuf*) or aesthetics (Abdul Hadi 2001). Moreover, many performing artists and intellectuals are concerned about the concept-law on pornography that is strongly supported by the MUI. These artists and intellectuals see this concept-law not as the right way to combat the production and dissemination of pornographic materials and as a threat to artistic creativity.

²⁶ “... *kebiasaan musik etnik kita sangat kaya dengan nuansa dan rasa musikal yang tinggi untuk dijadikan sumber kreativitas serta diberi muatan ruh Islami maka diharapkan nilai-nilai Islamlah dapat meresap lebih mendalam ke hati sanubari setiap Muslim.*”

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Audio-visual materials

- *Gerbang Marhamah* (2002), Cassette tape "Musik etnik Islami" by group with Yus Wiradiredja, artistic leader, composer and text writer of all songs. Bandung: *ath-Thawaf*.
- *Jihad-Tahmid* (2002), Cassette tape "Musik etnik Islami" by group with Yus Wiradiredja, artistic leader, composer and text writer of all songs. Bandung: *ath-Thawaf*.
- *Pancering Hirup* (2004), Cassette tape "Musik etnik Islami" by *ath-Thawaf* group with Yus Wiradiredja, artistic leader, composer and text writer of all songs in Sundanese (except one song text by Ibing Kusmayatna). Bandung: Santika Arum.
- *Pop Ramadhan* (2004[1999]), VCD with many well-known singers, like Kris Dayanti, Novia Kolopaking, Bimbo and Cici Faramida. Jakarta: Warner Music Indonesia CMV 088-4.
 - *Qasidah Bimbo* (2004), CD by Bimbo group. Arga Record CI – 57 .
- *Shalawat Nabi al-Imam; Kawih pupujian Sunda* (1995), Cassette tape with songs composed by Koko Koswara (1915-1985) and most song texts by Ading Affandi (R.A.F.). Group Ganda Mekar, led by Tatang Benyamin Koswara. Bandung.
 - *Takbir dan Sholawat* (2000) CD by the Sambasunda group. Bandung: Gema Nada Pertiwi, CMNH-100.