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**Articulating a Nation-in-the-Making
The Cosmopolitan Aesthetics of Malay Film Music from the 1950s to 1960s**

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**Articulating a Nation-in-the-Making: The
Cosmopolitan Aesthetics of Malay Film Music from
the 1950s to 1960s**

Adil Johan

Submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of
Philosophy at King's College London, University of London
September 2014

Abstract

This thesis provides an in-depth study of the ‘Golden Age of Malay Film’ (1950s to 1960s) by analysing the musical practices and discourses of commercially-produced vernacular Malay films. In exploring the potency of such films and music, it uncovers the relevance of screened music in articulating the complexities and paradoxes of a cosmopolitan Malay identity within the context of mid twentieth-century capitalism, late British colonialism and Malaysian and Singaporean independence. Essentially, I argue that the film music produced during this period articulates a cosmopolitan aesthetic of postcolonial nation-making based on a conception of Malay ethno-nationalism that was initially fluid, but eventually became homogenised as national culture. Drawing theoretically on how cosmopolitan practices are constituted within discursive and structural contexts, this thesis analyses how Malay film music covertly expressed radical ideas despite being produced within a commercial film industry. While non-Malay collaborators owned and produced such films that were subject to British censorship, Malay composers such as P. Ramlee and Zubir Said helmed the musical authorship of such films; thereby, enabling an expressive space for their Malay-nationalist aspirations. Methodologically, the study unravels the complexities and paradoxes of emergent nation-making through an intertextual analysis of Malay film music; drawing on film narratives, musical and historiographical analysis, literature surveys, and ethnographic fieldwork. I argue that Malay film music from the independence-era could not be confined by rigid ethno-national boundaries when its very aesthetic foundations were pluralistic and contemporaneous with the history of constant change, exchange, interactivity and diversity in the Malay world. This thesis reveals that despite the forced homogeneity of Malay nationalism, Malay film music from the independence-era challenged a limited conception of ethno-national identity. The aspiring and inspiring cosmopolitan ‘frameworks’ of P. Ramlee’s and Zubir Said’s music reverberates in new interpretations of identity, independence, and musical expression in the Malay world.

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Abbreviations

ASAS 50 – *Angkatan Sasterawan Limapuluh* (Writer’s Movement of 1950)

BBM - Blackberry Messenger Application

BN - Barisan Nasional (National Front)

CD - Compact Disc

DIY - Do-It-Yourself

EMI - Electric Musical Industries

HMV – His Masters Voice

ISEAS - Institute of Southeast Asian Studies (Singapore)

KMM - *Kesatuan Melayu Muda* (Young Malays Organisation)

KRIS - *Kesatuan Rakyat Indonesia Semenanjung* (Indonesian Peoples of the Peninsula Organisation)

MCA - Malaysian Chinese Association

MCP- Malayan Communist Party

MFP - Malay Film Productions

MIC - Malaysian Indian Congress

MPAJA - Malayan Peoples’ Anti Japanese Army

NCP - National Culture Policy (Malaysia)

NEP - New Economic Policy (Malaysia)

PAP - People’s Action Party

PERKAMUS - *Persatuan Penyanyi dan Karyawan Muzik Melayu Singapura* (Singaporean Association of Singers and Artists of Malay Music)

PKMM - *Partai Kebangsaan Melayu Muda* (Young Malays National Party)

UMNO - United Malays National Organisation

XFM - X Fresh FM (Malaysian Radio Station)

Notes

Film and Song Citations

I have endeavoured to adhere closely to the Author-Date Chicago Style for citations in this thesis. However, due to the interdisciplinary nature of this study and the limitations of specific citation formats for the media analysed, I have chosen to adapt some of my own conventions; in particular, my in-text citations for films and songs. For films, I have included in parentheses, the films' English translation (for initial citations), followed by the year, and director: e.g. *Ibu Mertuaku* (*My Mother-in-law*, 1962, dir. P. Ramlee). Films that do not include an English title translation are films that feature a protagonist's name: e.g. *Dang Anom* (1962, dir. Hussein Haniff) and *Hang Tuah* (1958, dir. Phani Majumdar).

Song titles are indicated by speech-marks or double quotations, with English translations in brackets and if not indicated elsewhere, followed by the name of the composer: eg. "*Tunggu Sekejap* (Wait For Awhile, comp. P. Ramlee)" and "*Sayang Di Sayang* (Sweetheart Is Loved, comp. Zubir Said)". If the lyrics for a song are not credited to the composer, I include the lyricists' name in lyrics listed in Appendix A, or in the footnotes.

In addition, for the films analysed in detail in this thesis I have sought versions that are easily accessible on YouTube, with English subtitles, where available, for the benefit of the reader. A selection of the films listed in the filmography include a reference to the YouTube videos that were screened for my analyses. While many of these films are broadcast on Malaysian national television and still available in VCD and DVD formats in Malaysia and Singapore, their longevity and continued remembrance is now largely attributed to fans who have passionately devoted entire YouTube channels to 'preserving' such films. In addition, there is a wealth of YouTube videos that feature specific songs from such Malay films. This is a phenomenon that is worthy of its own related but separate study, which I hope to pursue beyond this thesis.

Malay Names

Since Malay names employ a patrilineal naming convention in which the father's name is used 'in place' of a surname, I have decided not to abbreviate Malay names in

the bibliography, in-text citations and thesis text. For example, 'Zubir Said', 'Rohana Zubir' and 'Ahmad Sarji' are not abbreviated to their 'last' names. The few exceptions to this are Malay film personalities such as P. Ramlee and Saadiah, whose abbreviated 'stage' or 'screen' names are widely recognised. However, in reference to Ramlee's publications and interviews his name is cited as 'P. Ramlee'. Many Malay female recording artists and actresses are also referred to by their widely known 'screen' or 'stage' names; eg. Siput Sarawak, Saadiah, Zaiton, Normadiah. The abbreviation of Malay artists' names was a common practice in the 1950s and 1960s film and music industry, and P. Ramlee was known for 'christening' many of these abbreviated names including his third and last wife's, Salmah Ismail, who is widely known as Saloma. Another exception for this is the citation of 'last' names for Malay or Muslim writers who publish their works in English – e.g. Maznah Mohamad (Mohamad), Syed Khairuddin Aljunied (Aljunied), Amir Muhammad (Muhammad)- for the benefit of tracing their works in other English publications.

Language and Translation

The Malay language has spelling conventions that have changed drastically from its earliest introduction to romanised text until present-day. Moreover, Malaysian-Malay spelling and vocabulary also vary prominently from Indonesian (*Bahasa Indonesia*). When citing Malay-language sources from the 1950s and 1960s, I reproduce in verbatim the spellings of the source texts. These include the 1950s to 1960s use of the '2' symbol for 'doubled' or plural words such as '*kesalahan2*' (faults), which in contemporary (post 1980s) Malay spelling is spelt out and hyphenated as '*kesalahan-kesalahan*'. In my transcriptions of 1950s to 1960s Malay film dialogue, I employ the latter, contemporary Malay spelling conventions. Another example of 'old' versus 'new' Malay spelling is the replacement of 'o' with 'u' and the omission the letter 'h': e.g. '*mabok* (drunk)' is spelt 'mabuk' and '*chita2*' (aspirations) is now spelt '*cita-cita*'.

In addition, the reader will notice that many of the interview excerpts in Malay actually contain some English words. This is due to the inherently cosmopolitan nature of Malaysian- and Singaporean-Malay culture, in which English words are commonly interspersed in conversation. As such, I have only italicised the words in Malay. While any translation is ultimately a form of interpretation, I have nonetheless endeavoured to adhere to the intended meaning of the interlocutors and texts to the best of my ability.

The same is applied to my translation of Malay film titles as some words in Malay express nuanced meanings that cannot be conveyed with a literal translation.

Appendix

The Appendix contains lyrics for the Malay songs analysed and their English translations, and the original Malay texts of longer citations that are translated to English in the body of the thesis. It also lists all the face-to-face interviews conducted. Though some of the interviews are not cited, they were instrumental to the ideas formulated throughout this thesis. Finally, there is a selection of musical transcriptions for some of the songs analysed (where indicated) in this thesis.

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Research for this thesis was conducted in libraries and archival resource centres in London, Singapore and Kuala Lumpur. I am especially thankful to Annabel Gallop from the British Library, London, who introduced me to its vast collection of Malay film magazines from the 1940s to 1960s. I am grateful to Juffri Supa'at from the National Library of Singapore for his enthusiastic support and intriguing conversations on Malay music and Singaporean nationalism. I am also thankful for the kind assistance of Pn. Farizam Bt. Mustapha at the P. Ramlee Memorial Museum (*Pustaka Peringatan P. Ramlee*), who offered many resources and permitted me to take photographs at the museum. The staff of the Esplanade Library in Singapore who allowed me to take photographs of the Malay Popular Music Exhibition and the staff of the Singapore National Archives, which contains recordings of the Singapore Oral History Project, were invaluable in their kind assistance. I am also thankful to the staff of the ISEAS Library in Singapore, as well as the Malaysian National Archives (*Arkib Negara Malaysia*) and the Tunku Abdul Rahman Archive in Kuala Lumpur.

My supervisor, Katherine Butler Schofield has been a constant source of positive encouragement and indispensable scholarly advice. Moreover, I am indebted to her for giving me the opportunity to pursue my doctoral degree at King's; something I never imagined possible prior to this. My second supervisor, Andy Fry has always offered the most lucid advice for the most complicated situations, both personal and scholarly. The kind, encouraging and incisive advice of Prof. Martin Stokes as well as his seminal scholarship has left a significant impression on my own academic endeavours. Jim Sykes was a big-brother-like academic presence and guided me accordingly in King's during my first few years of study. David Irving has been an inspiration in his pioneering research on music in Southeast Asia and the Malay world. I am very grateful for the de facto mentorship of Frederick Moehn and the many early mornings and late evenings of first-year course planning, grading, e-mailing, and 'straight-up' musicking. I am also thankful for the radical perspectives offered by Zeynep Bulut and her class on experimentalism in popular music. Heather Wiebe was indispensable in her insightful

comments and advice on my work. Richard Lund took the time to read my work and provided some very encouraging and candid comments on the state of Malaysian music research. Julia Byl has been inspiring in her research on music in the Malay world and her energising presence at King's. I am also thankful to both Ben Murtagh and Mulaika Hijjas from the School of Oriental and African Studies, who offered me the opportunity to screen a Malay film and present my research in their Jawi summer course in 2014.

On the Malaysian and Singaporean side, I am indebted to Prof. Tan Sooi Beng who was the first ethnomusicologist that I have ever met and in fact introduced me to the possibility of being an ethnomusicologist. She encouraged me to pursue music performance and later, music research. The field of Malaysian (and Singaporean) music research is small and I hope to build on her enduring contributions to this growing area of study. During the early stages of my research, she alerted me to the work of Timothy P. Barnard, who became my mentor during my partnership with the National University of Singapore. His work on Malay film history has been at the forefront of scholarship in this area of study and I hope to expand on the ideas proposed by his research with my own musical perspectives. I am deeply grateful to the encouragement and advice of Larry Francis Hilarian who alerted me of the possibility of pursuing a doctoral degree in ethnomusicology at King's. I am also very thankful to the energetic and encouraging guidance of Bart Barendregt who offered me the opportunity to publish a chapter in his recently published edited volume (2014). In addition, Margaret Sarkissian has been very encouraging and supportive, sharing much enthusiasm regarding my study. John Napier at the University of New South Wales, Sydney, sparked my interest to pursue an academic career. His 'ear-opening' Masters-level courses in ethnomusicology inspired my journey into music research and for that I am truly grateful.

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Singapore. Prof. Geoffrey Benjamin shared his vast collection of Malay films and music. Mohamad Jamal Mohamad, the programmes manager of The Malay Heritage Centre, Singapore, obliged a lucid and highly insightful interview with me in his busy schedule.

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personality throughout the course of my study but has been ever supportive in reminding me to stay ‘grounded’. This thesis would not have been possible without the encouragement and advice of my parents, who provided my sister and I a very cosmopolitan upbringing through their international academic careers. Their dedication as parents and scholars is truly inspirational.

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

Until the present day, the musical compositions of P. Ramlee – a director, actor, singer and composer of Malay-language films from the 1950s and 1960s – have remained omnipresent markers of Malaysian and, to some extent, Singaporean national-cultural identity. His numerous films and musical output from this era are regularly screened and heard on Malaysian and Singaporean national television and radio stations and are easily accessible online via websites such as YouTube.¹ Since the 1980s, his film songs have seen an immeasurable number of interpretations in various styles, from orchestral arrangements to rock renditions to hip-hop remixes. Since 2007, a Broadway-style musical of his life featuring his compositions has been staged in sold-out theatre halls across Malaysia and Singapore.²

Historically, Ramlee's³ films and music projected the aspirations of postcolonial nationhood alongside the social anxieties of rapid urbanisation and modernisation. However, there were also other film composers such as Zubir Said⁴ and Kassim Masdor whose music for films contributed similarly to these cultural constructions of nationhood in both Singapore and Malaysia. Despite the enduring impact of these composers and their music on national culture in the Malay Peninsula, there has been a dearth of research on these individuals and the music of 1950s and 1960s Malay film. This thesis seeks to provide a much needed in-depth study on this neglected area of historical, cultural and musicological scholarship by analysing what has been called the 'Golden Age of Malay Film' through the musical practices and discourses contained in the commercially-produced vernacular Malay films made in Singapore during this period. While I explore the potency

¹ Indeed most of the films viewed for this thesis were accessed on YouTube. The online community of P. Ramlee and Malay film fandom is worthy of its own, separate study - something that I hope to pursue further upon completion of this thesis.

² While I do not discuss this musical in detail in this thesis, a brief analysis is available in McGraw's (2009) paper (53-55)

³ For a brief biography of P. Ramlee, please refer to Chapter Two of this thesis (64-65).

⁴ A brief biography of Zubir Said may be found in Chapter Four (112-113). A more comprehensive biography may be found in Rohana Zubir (2012).

of such films and music as expressions of a national culture, I also highlight the commercial context of Malay film and music production. Since the 1930s, the vernacular film and music industries of the Malay Peninsula consisted of private enterprises seeking to profit from a market of Malay-speaking consumers. I aim thus to uncover the relevance of screened music in articulating the complexities and paradoxes of a cosmopolitan Malay identity in transition, within the context of mid-20th Century capitalism, late British colonialism and Malaysian and Singaporean independence.

This research also aims to advance analytical techniques for understanding the interactive links between postcolonial nation-making, music, film and culture, while developing ideas about cosmopolitan nation-making and contributing methodologically to the field of ethnomusicology for studying such relationships. The thesis also intends to provide new perspectives for the field of Malay studies, in which music has long been neglected as a topic. Through a focus on music I seek to provide fresh insights into the ways the concept of Malayness is deployed today by providing a cosmopolitan and musical reading of Malay culture that challenges the homogenising views dominating public discourse and government policy in contemporary Malaysia and Singapore. I intend to unravel how ideas and icons associated with Malay film music from the 1950s to 1960s have, in some cases, become rigid; yet in other cases, contestatory articulations of ethno-national Malay culture in Malaysia and Singapore are still evident. Why has Malay film music made such a lasting impact on Malay society in Malaysia and Singapore, and how has such music become such an enduring and omnipresent marker of a modern Malay ethnic identity in the Malay Peninsula? More importantly, how have such potent ethno-national associations been derived from a musical repertoire that is overtly cosmopolitan in style and diverse in cultural influences?

In this thesis, I argue that the film music produced from the 1950s to 1960s articulates a cosmopolitan aesthetic of postcolonial nation-making based on a conception of Malay ethno-nationalism that was initially fluid, but eventually became homogenised as national culture. In the following chapter, I discuss in depth the notion of cosmopolitan aesthetic agency in the context of Malay film music. While the music of Malay films derived from a highly multi-ethnic and diverse local musical culture, the structural limitations of a profit-driven film industry defined and delineated boundaries of ethnicity in terms of a vernacular

Malay market. In this period English-language films from the United States and Britain, Hindi films from India and Mandarin films from China were all widely consumed; however, the Malay-speaking population of Southeast Asia was considered an untapped demographic with lucrative potential. Due to the strict linguistic boundaries that defined film industries, a homogenous Malay film industry developed to reflect the perceived taste and culture of a Malay-speaking consumer market.

However, the 1950s to 1960s was also a time of great social change in the Malay Peninsula. It is no coincidence that the so-called ‘Golden Age of Malay Film’ corresponded with the ‘Independence Era’. The possibility for an autonomous Asian nationhood that was suggested by the Japanese during their occupation of the region provided the spark for Malay nationalism after the Second World War. That spark of self-determination was seen in the cosmopolitan activism of the young Malay journalists and writers who largely populated the creative staff of the emerging Malay film industry as directors, script-writers, composers and lyricists. Their aim was to promote a modern conception of Malay nationalism through the extensive use of the Malay language. Film and music were widely accessible to the general public as they were entertaining and did not require literacy, yet were effective in articulating progressive ideas of postcolonial national autonomy to the masses. Thus, a central argument of this thesis is that 1950s to 1960s Malay cinema and its musical articulations – aesthetically and discursively – were integral to the project of Malay independence and nation-making.

The construction of homogenous national music cultures from pluralistic cultural practices has been studied extensively of other countries such as Zimbabwe (Turino 2000), Trinidad & Tobago (Guilbault 2007) and India (Weidman 2006; Subramaniam 2006; Jakhle 2005)⁵. This study is thus situated with an understanding of modernist reformism in musical culture as a global phenomenon not exclusive to the Malay world. However, there are issues of ethnicity, social agency and nation-making highlighted in this thesis that are particular to the case of film music in the Malay Peninsula. One aspect unique to the Malay Peninsula was the ethnicised social and economic structure of the postwar film industry that afforded considerable creative autonomy to Malays in the areas of music. The screenwriters and directors of Malay films were predominantly non-Malays and rigorous censorship laws

⁵ These studies are discussed in greater detail in Chapter Seven.

were enforced in particular by the late-colonial British administration.⁶ But the musical ‘authorship’ of such films was predominantly in the hands of Malay composers such as P. Ramlee, Zubir Said, Yusof B., Osman Ahmad, Ahmad Jaafar, Wandly Yazid and Kassim Masdor. I argue that the social-structural relationships of race, class and power in postwar Malaya are revealed through an intertextual reading of Malay films and music against the history of postcolonial nation-making in the region.

This thesis will examine the ways in which Malay film songs were an important part of a cosmopolitan Malay nationalist narrative by using a conceptual framework of modernity, cosmopolitanism and aesthetic agency to explain how internal/indigenous practices are adapted to external/foreign ideas by creative individuals to express modern notions of national culture. Upon considering how cosmopolitan practices are constituted within discursive and structural contexts, I proceed to analyse how Malay film music articulates creative agency by covertly expressing radical ideas despite being produced within a commercial film industry that subjected local film-writers, music composers and performers to budgetary constraints and state censorship.

Further, this thesis will highlight the importance of film music in articulating the culture and politics of nation-making in the Malay Peninsula. The study of the Malay film industry in light of postcolonial national formations is particularly challenging with regards to Malaysia and Singapore. During British colonial rule until the Declaration of Independence (*Merdeka*) in 1957, what is now referred to as Peninsular ‘Malaysia’ was known as ‘Malaya’. The Federation of Malaysia, officially formed in 1963 consisted of Peninsular Malaysia, Singapore and the East Malaysian states of Sabah and Sarawak. Prior to 1957, the city of Singapore served as the capital and colonial administrative centre of British Malaya. In 1965, Singapore separated from the Federation of Malaysia to become an independent island-state. The films analysed in this thesis were made during the transitional period between British colonial rule and Malaysian and Singaporean independence. All of the Malay Peninsula films from the 1950s to mid-1960s were made in Singapore, and after the mid-1960s most of these films were made in Kuala Lumpur, the capital city of

⁶ Despite the granting of Malayan independence in 1957, Malay films released past independence were made in Singapore, which was still a British Straits Settlement colony. Thus, films produced in Singapore were subject to British ‘screening’ before being shown in cinema halls across the Malay Peninsula and Indonesia. For more on Malay film censorship and independence see Barnard (2009) and Muthalib (2009; 2011).

Malaysia. Thus, the issue of the national identity of Malay films has become quite paradoxical, as contemporary Malaysians now consider the Singapore-made films as part of their national 'heritage'; more so than the majority non-Malay-speaking Singaporeans. However, the issue becomes even more complex when dealing with the Malay-speaking Singaporean minority who also stake a claim on such films as part of their national culture. As such, in order to highlight this paradox of film and national culture in both Malaysia and Singapore, I have chosen to focus exclusively on the music of Malay films made in 1950s to mid-1960s Singapore. These issues will be addressed towards the end of this thesis, specifically in Chapter Six and Chapter Seven, in my examination of the Malay film music icons P. Ramlee and Zubir Said, who are remembered politically in contrasting ways in Malaysia and Singapore.

To account for such complexities across national boundaries, this study will therefore focus on notions of ethnocratic 'Malay nationalism' that were central to the ideas of Malay nationalist narratives expressed in these Malay films and songs (Wade 2009; also see Nagata 2011; Shamsul A.B. 2004). Official nationalism in Malaysia is dependent on the cultural hegemony of Malay culture – the ruling political party of Malaysia since independence in 1957, UMNO (United Malays National Organisation), which comprises an exclusively-Malay-Muslim membership, and leads a ruling coalition, the BN (*Barisan Nasional* [National Front]), made up of other ethnic-based parties: the MCA (Malaysian Chinese Association) the MIC (Malaysian Indian Congress) and non-ethnic parties, GERAKAN (The Malaysian People's Movement Party), PPP (People's Progressive Party) in Peninsular Malaysia and eight East Malaysian parties⁷. As such, Malaysia's ruling government has always been based on this ethnic balance of power. This structural ethnocracy thus forms the basis of Malaysian nationalist discourse and policy which affects the conception of Malaysian national culture. In line with Malay ethnocracy, culturally-Malay music takes precedence over others, which has resulted in the Malay film music of

⁷ In Sabah, the BN coalition is comprised of PBB (*Parti Pesaka Bumiputera Bersatu* [United Traditional Bumiputera Party]), PBS (*Parti Bersatu Sabah* [United Sabah Party]), PBRB (*Parti Bersatu Rakyat Sabah* [United Sabah Peoples Party]), LDP (Liberal Democratic Party) and UPKO (United Pasokmomogun Kadazandusun Murut Organisation). In Sarawak the coalition is comprised of PRS (*Parti Rakyat Sarawak* [Sarawak People's Party]), SPDP (Sarawak Progressive Democratic Party) and SUPP (Sarawak United People's Party).

the 1950s to 1960s, particularly the songs composed by P. Ramlee, forming a ‘canon’ of national music alongside other ‘traditional’ Malay music.

However, as this thesis will demonstrate, the music of independence-era film was actually pluralistic and cosmopolitan. Paradoxically, Malay film composers drew on a range of local and foreign musical practices to construct a ‘Malay’ musical aesthetic. I understand Malay film music as a *cosmopolitan practice*, moving beyond notions of the ‘transcultural’ or ‘syncretic’ that are commonly used in the limited number of studies of Malay musical practices to date (Matusky & Tan 2004; Kartomi 1997; Chopyak 1986,1987; Matusky 1985). The terms ‘syncretic’ and ‘transcultural’ are reminiscent of chemical and biological epistemologies, which in the context of the kind of prolonged cultural exchange and musical development that existed in the Straits region are useful in understanding heterogeneity in deeply rooted musical practices. However, these terms fall short in accounting for the intrusion of European colonialism and industrial capitalism, which led to rapid structural, political, economic and ideological changes in Southeast Asia and the rest of the colonised world. Understanding Malay musical practices as cosmopolitan accounts better for the rapid adoption and adaptation of external musical cultures in Malay music during the colonial era (Chopyak 1987: 446), and thus provides a more appropriate theoretical and methodological approach for listening to the music of Malay films from the 1950s to 1960s. I further elaborate my ideas on musical cosmopolitanism in the context of Malay film music in Chapter Two.

Justification

Despite the wide-ranging impact of Malay film music from the independence era – particularly, the music of P. Ramlee and Zubir Said – on nation-making in the Malay Peninsula’s past and present, there is currently a dearth of critical scholarship on Malay popular music and even more so, Malay music in film. While there has been a significant amount of research on the history of 1950s to 1960s Malay film (Uhde & Uhde [2000] 2010x; Barnard 2002; 2004; 2005; 2006; 2009; 2012; Barnard & Paseng Barnard 2002; Van der Heide 2002; Aljunied 2005; Van der Putten & Barnard 2007; Muthalib 2009; 2011; 2013; also see Jamil Sulong 1990; Hamzah Hussin 1997; Muhammad 2010; Ahmad

Sarji 2011; Harding & Ahmad Sarji 2011), only a handful of studies exist on music in Malay films from that era (McGraw 2009; Peters 2012; also see Rohana Zubir 2012). This is a significant gap because, as I will demonstrate throughout this thesis, Malay film music from the 1950s to 1960s produced in Singapore has historically and continues to have today a broad and significant impact on nation-making in Malaysia and Singapore. One possible reason for such scholarly neglect is that *none* of the musical practices of the Malay Peninsula are thought to be distinct to the region, but are considered hybrid products of the region's intensely cosmopolitan pre-colonial and colonial history (see Reid 2004a; 2004b; Kahn 2006; also see Andaya 2008; 2001; Milner 2008). Thus this thesis fills a gap in the study on music in Malay films produced during a period of independence and by doing so, sheds light on the cultural politics of nationhood in the region by producing new perspectives on musical cosmopolitanism as it relates to the project of modern nation-making.

Musical scholarship on the Malay Peninsula is especially limited but slowly expanding. The ethnomusicological study of early twentieth-century Malay music in Malaysia is dominated by Tan Sooi Beng's extensive work on Malay *bangsawan* theatre and music (1989; 1993), Malaysian performing arts and the state during the 1980s to 1990s (1989; 1992), the Malay-language popular music recording industry (1996; 2013) and Malaysian popular music in the 2000s (2002; 2006). Aside from her work, pioneering studies on music in Malaysia emphasising traditional or folk music can be found in the works of Matusky (1985) and Chopyak (1986). Notably, Sarkissian's work on the music of the Portuguese-Malay minority in Melaka (2000; 2002) is an invaluable contribution to the field. However, none of these studies address the music of the 1950s and 1960s Malay film industry.

Chopyak's subsequent publication considers the function of a nationalised Malaysian music in the government-owned media organisation, Radio Television Malaysia (RTM) (1987), while Md. Nor's monograph on Malay *zapin* dance (1993), includes a chapter on dance in the Malay films of the 1950s to 1960s. More recent studies on Malaysian music mention Malay film in passing such as Matusky & Tan's comprehensive book on Malaysian music (2004). This includes a section entitled 'film music of the 1950s to early 1960s' that briefly mentions P. Ramlee and other Malay film composers (404-407). Tan's

article on Malaysian *ronggeng* (2005) contains a section on how the musical practice became nationalised through its use as an ensemble format and its adaptation of the music of Malay films into *ronggeng* style (298-300). Lockard's historical studies of popular music in Malaysia (1996; 1998) discuss the political impact of P. Ramlee's film music but do not provide a detailed musicological or filmic analysis of Ramlee's films and songs. Perhaps due to the shared musical practices of Malaysia and Singapore, there has been even less research on music in Singapore.

Scholarly research on popular music past the 1950s in Singapore is beginning to emerge but remains scarce. Pioneering the research on popular music in Singapore has been the work of Lily Kong (1995a; 1995b; 1996; 1999) with a recent contribution from Tan (2010) on the popular music of 1960s Singapore⁸. Unfortunately, while important to the scarce musical scholarship on Singapore, these studies do not engage any Malay musical practices in Singapore, choosing to focus predominantly on local English-language and some Chinese-language popular music. There is a problematic disregard in these studies for Singapore's unique position, at least musically, in the Malay world – many Malay-language popular musicians and artists from Singapore have forged successful careers in Malaysia (e.g. M. Nasir, Ramli Sarip, Saloma) yet are only known to the minority-Malay community in their home country. In choosing to focus on English and Mandarin-language bands and singers, Tan's (2010) survey of popular music in 1960s Singapore does not mention the phenomenon of Malay *kugiran* (upbeat guitar band) groups that were enormously popular, besides completely overlooking the presence of popular music that was produced in the Singaporean-based Malay film industry during that period. A notable study on *kugiran* Malay music in 1960s Singapore can be found in Burhanuddin Bin Buang's (2000) Honours Thesis, an area on which I expand in detail in Chapter Six. The sixth chapter of this thesis is primarily based on my own publication on Malay youth music in Singapore which, to my knowledge, is the only published academic study on Malay music in 1960s Singapore (Johan 2014). An informant from which I draw my data on Singaporean music during this era is the Singaporean music enthusiast, Joseph Clement Pereira, who has published three books detailing the country's bands and artists from the 1950s to the 1970s

⁸ The ethnomusicologist Jim Sykes is also currently working on a number of articles on Tamil music-making in Singapore in the early to mid twentieth century, but little of this work touches on Malay music culture specifically.

(Pereira 1999; 2011; 2014). Another notable study by Dairianathan (2005) discusses South Indian music and film in Singapore and has provided a much-needed perspective beyond the English, Mandarin and Malay musical studies of Singapore's multicultural and cosmopolitan setting. However, what this thesis focuses on is an aspect of musical scholarship which has not been addressed by any existing study on music in Singapore. This study conceptualizes how a crucial component of Malay ethno-national culture had also emanated from the cosmopolitan musical aesthetics of Malay films. This Malay ethno-nationalism that permeated Singapore in the 1950s to 1960s was, and continues to be, articulated in interesting ways by the island-state's Malay-minority community, an issue that is examined at length in Chapter Seven.

This thesis draws extensively on sources in the Malay language from both Singapore and Malaysia. Aside from numerous 1960s Malay magazines on film and music cited throughout this thesis, there are a selection of publications in Malay on P. Ramlee's music in films but they have mostly been hagiographical, such as Ahmad Sarji's (1999 [1st ed.]; 2011 [2nd ed.]) book, *P. Ramlee: Erti Yang Sakti (P. Ramlee: A Magical Meaning)*, which contains a section detailing an extensive history of Ramlee's career as a musician, singer and song-writer (262-281). However, this section of Ahmad Sarji's book does not analyse Ramlee's music in detail nor does it critically discuss Ramlee's enduring yet contestatory impact on Malaysian nationalism. Aside from this work, there is a bilingual Malay/English volume that compiles a selection of songs by seven Malay composers who wrote music for the 1950s to 1960s Singapore film industry (Mohd. Raman Daud 2002). The book also contains brief biographies of the composers, Zubir Said, Osman Ahmad, Yusoff B, Ahmad Jaafar, Wandly Yazid, P. Ramlee and Kassim Masdor. The book was published by PERKAMUS⁹ (Singaporean Association of Singers and Artists of Malay Music) with the financial support of the National Arts Council of Singapore. This book of music, while a useful document, is not a critical scholarly work. Moreover, the songs featured are presented in a 'lead-sheet' format (lead melody, lyrics and chord symbols), not detailing the composers' intricate musical orchestrations and arrangements for their film songs.¹⁰

Another similar book released by the Malaysian National Archives (Arkib Negara Malaysia

⁹ *Persatuan Penyanyi dan Karyawan Muzik Melayu Singapura*

¹⁰ I provide musical transcriptions of a selection Malay film songs analysed in this thesis in the Appendix.

[2004] 2008 compiles all of P. Ramlee's film song lyrics (mostly written by lyricists such as S. Sudarmaji and Jamil Sulong) and music, again in a lead-sheet format. In addition, a collection of working papers on P. Ramlee are compiled in a volume published by the Malaysian National Archives (Hajah Rahani Jamil 2003), which included three working papers on Ramlee's music (Ariff Ahmad 2003, 157-162; Mohamad Shukor Abdul Moner 2003, 249-256; Yoesbar Djaelani St. Tun Muhamad 2003, 287-297). In line with the Malaysian National Archive's agenda to valorise P. Ramlee as an icon of Malay artistic greatness, the working papers cited above do not engage critically with the social and cultural impact of Ramlee's music. Ariff Ahmad's (2003) paper for example, is merely descriptive of the many musical contributions of Ramlee to Malay films, concluding that there has been no Malaysian musician, composer or artist that can 'replace the (artistic) space left by Ramlee' (162)¹¹. Yoesbar Djaelani St. Tun Muhamad (2003) only discusses the aesthetically effective formal structures of Ramlee's film songs that lend themselves to successful symphonic adaptations and performances. Interestingly, Mohamad Shukor Abdul Moner's (2003) paper, while largely descriptive, provides some insight into the western musical influences found in Ramlee's music; emphasising the use of western harmonies, jazz-influenced emphasis of upbeats in his melodies and the extensive use of counter melodies in his arrangements. However, due to its brevity, the paper does not include much elaboration on such points, detailed musical analyses or transcriptions. Unlike these existing publications on film music in the Malay language, this thesis aims to provide a critical historical perspective on the social, cultural and musical impact of 1950s to 1960s Malay film music on nation-making in the Malay Peninsula.

The only scholarly publication in English that is concerned with Malay film music, albeit limited to a focus on P. Ramlee, is McGraw's 'Music and Meaning in the Independence-Era Malaysian Films of P. Ramlee' (2009). However, due to its brevity as a journal article, McGraw's study only provides a 'starting point' for research on Malay film music and while analysing some of Ramlee's films musically limits its focus to the impact of Malay film music in Malaysia and not Singapore. McGraw's study is insightful in its ethnomusicological film music analysis of a selection of Ramlee's films and does suggest a

¹¹ *'Memang tidak nampak sesiapa yang boleh mengganti tempat yang dikosongkan oleh... P. Ramlee'* (There is definitely no one to be seen who is able to replace the space left by... P. Ramlee).

‘spirit of aesthetic cosmopolitanism’ in Ramlee’s music (47). However he does not explicitly engage ideas on musical cosmopolitanism in Malay film music and its enduring but paradoxical impact on nation-making. Further, McGraw’s study paints an idealistic picture of Ramlee as an icon of Malaysian multiculturalism and tolerance, overlooking Ramlee’s reactionary opinions about late-1960s and early-1970s Malay youth music and his conservative views about the safeguarding of a Malay musical ‘tradition’. This thesis addresses this shortcoming in McGraw’s study by providing a more solid theoretical framework of musical cosmopolitanism in film music to highlight both the aesthetic agency as well as the contradictory conservative views on national culture expressed by Ramlee and Zubir Said in the contestatory and paradoxical history of Malay ethno-nationalism in both Malaysia and Singapore. I address McGraw’s work in greater detail in the following chapter and discuss Ramlee and Zubir Said’s views on preserving Malay music in Chapter Six. I then discuss, in Chapter Seven, the mobilisation of Zubir Said and P. Ramlee’s music and iconicity for contemporary Malay nationalism in Singapore and Malaysia. There has yet to be any comprehensive scholarly monograph in Malay or English on music made during the ‘Golden Age’ of 1950s and 1960s Malay film.

With regard to the impact of film music on Singaporean national culture, there has been growing interest in recent years in the film composer Zubir Said, who was also the composer of the Singaporean national anthem. One of the earliest state-sanctioned publications on Zubir Said (Chua & Daipi 1990) limits its focus to the national anthem and various nationalistic compositions such as nationalistic children’s songs for Singapore’s education system. Zubir Said’s daughter, Rohana Zubir (2012), recently published a detailed biographical book on her father, which has been an invaluable resource for this thesis. In Chapter Four, I expand on the biographical information provided by Rohana Zubir with a more critical analysis of Zubir Said’s views on Malay nationalism that were translated into the aesthetics of his film music compositions. Furthermore, a recent film festival to commemorate Zubir Said’s film music was held by the National Museum of Singapore, resulting in a booklet containing short articles on Zubir Said’s life and music (National Museum of Singapore 2012). Contained in this booklet is an article on Zubir Said’s music in film by the Singaporean ethnomusicologist, Joe Peters (2012). In Chapter Four, I extend Peters’ useful but broad musical observations in my own analysis of Zubir

Said's film music. Of all the English publications on Malay film music, there has yet to be any scholarship on cosmopolitanism in Malay music and films and its enduring impact on the intertwined nation-making history of both Malaysia and Singapore. Therefore, this thesis explicitly aims to address this lacuna in scholarship by providing an intertextual analysis of P. Ramlee's and Zubir Said's cosmopolitan film music to provide new insights regarding their ubiquitous presence in the shared cultural history of Malaysian and Singaporean nation-making.

Analysing Malay Film Music

The study of music in film is a well-established field (see Kalinak 2010). However, of all the ethnomusicological studies on screened music, McGraw's brief article is the only study to consider the film music of the Malay Peninsula. Particularly useful to this thesis has been the extensive field of research on South Asian, particularly Hindi film music (e.g. Morcom 2007; 2001; Booth 2000; 2008; Arnold 1988; 1991; 1992/1993). Malay film music aesthetics of the 1950s to 1960s were closely linked to those of Hindi film music from the same era, as many film directors were 'imported' from India in the early postwar days of the Malay film studio industry. However, regarding the influence of Indian films on the film music aesthetics of Malay film as dominant is problematic, as Malay film composers adopted musical approaches and aesthetics that I argue were unique to Malay culture and the Straits region. The film scholar Van der Heide in his monograph on Malaysian cinema (2004) falls into the trap of excessively attributing the aesthetic and narrative qualities of Malaysian films to the external 'border crossing' influences of Indian, American and Japanese films. While this may be true, to an extent, of the visual-cinematic aesthetic of 1950s to 1960s Malay film, I argue that Malay film music was uniquely local – which meant that it was also inherently cosmopolitan. Indian film music was definitely a major influence, avidly consumed by Malay audiences and musicians of the time, including P. Ramlee. However, Malay film composers were also interested in creating music that could satiate the cosmopolitan tastes of their local audiences while also contributing to the exciting process of Malay nation-making during the 1950s to 1960s.

Studies on Hindi film music, however, due to the dearth of film music research on the Malay world and to the intertwined filmic history of South Asia and the Malay Peninsula, offer the most salient methodological approaches and comparative ‘springboards’ for this thesis. Booth’s (2000) article is especially important in highlighting the social and musical importance of Hindi film songs that were previously seen as inconsequential to film narratives or a manifestation of crass capitalist musical production (see Manuel 1988; 1993). Booth also introduces the concept of ‘music scenes’ in examining the narrative function of film song sequences (127) and analyses how Hindi film songs are ‘embedded within a complex of conventional and cultural code systems’ (128). Taking the latter into consideration, I analyse in Chapter Four Zubir Said’s use of a specific musical-aesthetic code to evoke a Malay musical ‘tradition’ in his film scores. Additionally, the bulk of musical examples analysed in this thesis are music scenes that interact in meaningful ways with the films’ narratives. Another seminal work on South Asian film music is Morcom’s (2007) comprehensive study of Hindi film songs that emphasises the need to consider film music, alongside its social context, in its narrative context; the context of the ‘reel world’ is equally important to the context of the ‘real world’ (11). She explains that

[b]ecause film songs are consumed apart from Hindi films and the visual medium to a certain extent, have a very high profile in Indian society and culture, and are clearly interacting with the ‘real world’ context in fascinating ways, it has possibly led to the ‘reel world’ (as opposed to the real world) being overlooked as a major context of film music in its own right. (Ibid)

In my view, Morcom draws attention to the kinds of musical agency that can only be discerned in its filmic context. This is an approach that I apply to this thesis, in which my analyses of film music are always read alongside and against the narrative of the films in which they are expressed. This mode of analysis, emphasising the ‘reel world’ as much as the ‘real world’ of film music, leads me to find that Malay film music constitutes ethno-nationalism as much as it challenges it within its narrative and post-narrative articulations. For example, in Chapter Five, I note how the film, *Ibu Mertuaku* (*My Mother-in-law*, 1962, dir. P. Ramlee), which is commonly read as a reflection of Malay anxiety towards modern-western immorality, on the contrary embraces an inherently cosmopolitan Malay modernity through its musical themes and content. This observation is only made possible through an analysis of music in its filmic context. In fact, due to the limited number informants available for this study – all of the Malay film composers and musicians from the 1950s to

1960s Malay film industry based in Singapore are no longer alive¹² – this thesis relies significantly on filmic contexts to analyse film music (aside from secondary sources and primary sources such as film magazines and newspaper articles). Such musical analyses based on films are conducted throughout Chapters Three to Six. Further, Morcom (2007) examines how Hollywood musical conventions merge and interact with Hindi film music noting the use of large symphony orchestras and western film-scoring aesthetics (139-145), western musical instruments such as the piano and saxophone (145) and musically eclectic combinations of western popular music genres (145, citing Arnold [1988]). Morcom points out that despite the general assumption that the West poses a threat to Indian tradition, culture and morality, western film music practices were in fact very much integrated with Hindi film music to progress the emotional and melodramatic content of the films' narratives (178-179). Western music in Malay film, I argue, is even more so integrated with the musical aesthetics of Malay film music. The integration of western or pluralistic influences had already occurred in Malay music long prior to the advent of Malay films. As such, I consider Malay film music as inherently cosmopolitan due to the history of musical practices preceding and surrounding Malay films in the 1950s to 1960s. I discuss the historical context of musical cosmopolitanism in Malay film in Chapter Two.

As useful as these prominent studies on Hindi film song are to my musical analysis, they do not specifically address film music in the context of nation-making. This is perhaps due to the copious amount of existing research on film and South Asian nationalism and the complexity of nationalism in relation to the Indian film industry. However, in the context of the Singapore-based 1950s to 1960s Malay film industry, it is impossible to ignore the pervasive impact of nation-making on film music and film music on nation-making during that era of nascent independence in the Malay Peninsula. Moreover, unlike the studies on Indian film music that are based on a broad historical period of study, the musical approach of 1950s to 1960s studio-produced Malay films largely waned past the 1970s. After the 1970s it was increasingly rare in Malaysian-made films to feature film songs or music

¹² I was fortunate to interview Kassim Masdor, the last surviving Singaporean Malay film composer, in 2013. Sadly, he passed away on January 2014 during the writing of thesis. Another Malay film composer I managed to interview was Ahmad Nawab Khan (2013), but he wrote music for Malay films made in Malaysia since the mid-1960s and was not involved in the Singaporean film industry. For an extensive biography of Singaporean Malay musicians, most of whom played for the Malay studio film industry in Singapore see Azlan Mohamed Said (2013).

scenes such as is found in independence-era Malay films and still today in Indian films¹³. Interestingly, while Malay musical films can now be considered ‘extinct’, I discuss in Chapter Seven how film songs from independence-era films, particularly the ones composed and performed by P. Ramlee are still widely consumed by present-day Singaporeans and Malaysians and are subject to tribute performances and albums as well as new musical interpretations.

Aside from the relevant research on film music in South Asia, studies of film music elsewhere in Southeast Asia, such as that of neighbouring Indonesia, are also scarce. Sumarsam’s book chapter on music in Indonesian historical films (2008), to my knowledge, is the only scholarly publication on the topic and is found in Slobin’s comprehensive edited volume, *Global Soundtracks: Worlds of Film Music* (2008). Sumarsam’s chapter has been a useful point of comparison for this thesis, as he highlights how traditional Javanese music – especially the gamelan – is scored in historical-political films that narrate Indonesia’s postcolonial independence (232). In line with Naficy’s (2003, 205) views, Sumarsam (2008) further stresses the importance of reading film music ‘intertextually (that is, synchronically and diachronically) and as a crosscultural phenomenon, as fictional, and as documentary and ethnographic’ (235). As such, my approach to analysing music in Malay films is intertextual in that the musical articulations in such films are read in the historical and contemporary cultural context of Malay nation-making.

Stokes’ (2008) chapter in the same volume discusses the film music of Egyptian singer and film star, Abd Al Halim Hafiz, noting the enduring impact of the star’s film music on the Egyptian national consciousness. The great film-music personality of the Malay World,

¹³ Notably, the film *Kami* (1982, dir. Patrick Yeoh), features the male Malaysian-Malay singer-superstar, Sudirman, in music scenes that are well-suited to his aspiring-singer-protagonist. There are also some recent films – perhaps in nostalgic reference to 1950s-1960s Malay films – such as Amir Muhammad’s documentary *The Last Communist* (2006) which features song and dance sequences in between its historical narrative of Malaysia’s communist insurgency. Yasmin Ahmad’s *Talentine* (2009), features many original songs written for the film by Malaysian songwriter, Pete Teo. The songs’ performances fit neatly into the film’s narrative that revolves around a secondary school talent competition. This was also the international award-winning director’s last film before her untimely passing in 2009. The controversial Malaysian-Chinese rapper, Wee Meng Chee @ Namewee’s, also recently directed, starred and performed in two films that feature musical numbers, *Nasi Lemak 2.0* (*Coconut-Rice 2.0*, 2011) and *Hantu Gangster* (*Gangster Ghost*, 2012).

P. Ramlee, discussed at length throughout this thesis shares many striking resonances, in terms of his national iconicity, with the case of Abd Al Halim, whose

music is, in a sense, monumental: deeply internalized and naturalized as part of the legitimate cultural order and as materially tangible as a historic mosque or a portrait of a president. In another sense, it is the pedagogical resource: something to be studied, dissected, picked over, discussed, and appreciated by people seeking to gain serious musical knowledge, a knowledge that will produce new things as well as simply reproduce the past. (327)

Similarly, Ramlee's musical presence is just as 'monumental' as well as 'deeply internalized and naturalized as part of the legitimate cultural order' in Malaysia; an issue that I discuss regarding iconicity and cultural remembrance in Chapter Seven. I note how two film music icons, Ramlee and Zubir Said, are appropriated by the Malaysian and Singaporean states, respectively, to perpetuate hegemonic national culture. However, I consider how these film music icons may also be mobilised for counter-hegemonic purposes. Ramlee's music is appropriated by musically marginalised groups in Malaysia to legitimate themselves as musically Malaysian, while Zubir Said's music is championed by the Singaporean-Malay minority to emphasise the historical significance of Malay culture in Singapore's supposedly race-neutral nation.

Applied throughout this thesis is Slobin's methodology (2008a) that considers film music as an ethnography of the culture it represents (3-4). Slobin examines the ethnographic representations of non-western music through the orchestral American film music system he calls the 'Steiner superculture'; a system of film music scoring traceable to the composer, Max Steiner, that became 'an extremely effective technical and aesthetic practice that spread to the rest of the world as, simply, the way music works' in film (3). Slobin goes on to problematise this music-producer-powered relationship of arbitrarily constituting non-western musical cultures by suggesting that such music is an 'assumed venacular' music (25-29). However, this is not merely a one-way power dynamic. Despite the authoritarian position of American film producers and composers in defining through the globally adopted conventions of the Steiner superculture what would constitute the musically familiar and foreign, the self and the other in film music, there are also spaces for resistance and subversion that seep through these musical articulations in film (29). I find this conception of a musical superculture useful in unravelling the constituted homogeneities as well as subversive articulations and paradoxes of Malay film music made

during the independence-era. In Chapter Three, I note how the Malay films of the mid-1950s musically articulate on the one hand, a passive perpetuation of colonial power relations and on the other hand, an active resistance to colonialism. As such, Slobin's ethnomusicological approach to film music beyond American films has been useful in understanding how Hollywood film music aesthetics pervade Malay film music as much as it provides a structural format that may be subverted musically with political meaning. While Malay film music may be heard as reproductive of the Steiner superculture, it was also, in my view, unique to the region and rootedly-cosmopolitan (see Tan 2013; Anderson 2012). Thus, while relevant to the pervasive reach of European colonialism and western capitalism on a global scale, Slobin's approach does explicitly account for the agency of non-western film music makers.

In my view, the music of 1950s to 1960s Malay film, instead of an 'assumed' vernacular, actually expressed a *constitutive* vernacular aesthetic. Malay film composers were actively creating their own vernacular film music aesthetic that was inherently cosmopolitan. Preceding and largely influencing the music of the postwar Malay film industry, as suggested by Tan (2013), was the rootedly-cosmopolitan and widely popular music of 1930s Malay-language recording artists in the Malay Peninsula, who

did not travel outside the Malay world but were exposed to and absorbed universal ideas about change which circulated in the region. They used Malay, the local lingua franca, which had no fixed form, and mixed it with other languages to spread their messages. They interacted with Indian, Chinese, Arab and other diasporic people at the port cities where they performed and mixed Anglo-American music with their own to speak to and attract audiences that were not limited to any one community or nation. (460)

Tan views the 'rooted cosmopolitanism' of such musicians and their music as counter-cultural to more essentialised conceptions of Malay nationalism that were circulating during the independence-era (Ibid). This rooted cosmopolitan musical aesthetic and social outlook pervades Malay film music past the 1940s, despite the more homogenous Malay-nationalist rhetoric that was associated with the independence-era (Milner 1995, cited in Tan 2013: 460). In line with this, I provide a cosmopolitan history of Malay music and film music in the following chapter. Taking into account the rooted cosmopolitanism of Malay music and film, considering a superculture in analysing Malay film music, while useful, does not provide the complete picture of how nationalism was constituted through

vernacular identities that had already embraced a culturally pluralistic conception of the foreign and the local.

Methodology

One of the major challenges of an interdisciplinary study such as this has been its methodological basis. This thesis is as much an ethnomusicological study of music in film as it is a historical and political ethnography of 1950s and 1960s Malay nationalism. As such, I draw upon a multitude of research methods in my collection and use of data. The primary sources include the textual materials of films, the songs and music contained in such films, newspaper articles and film magazines. The face-to-face interviews, listed in the appendix, were conducted with Malay film music composers, Malaysian historians, authors, museum officials, music journalists and event organizers. I have also used oral history materials consisting of pre-recorded interviews of actors and music producers collected under the Singapore Oral History Project of the Singapore National Archives. This mixed-method research has been extremely useful, allowing me to conduct this study within an appropriate intertextual framework.

This thesis seeks to understand musical cosmopolitanism and nationalism by analysing the musical articulations and discourses about music contained in Malay films. Far from being an auxiliary element, music plays a crucial role in constituting a film's narrative (Kalinak 1992: 30-31). Conversely, music in film often has the ability to subvert a film's narrative and reveal antipathies that are not overtly present. Music interacts with a film's story, dialogue and visual context not only to enhance or subvert meanings 'already present', but even more functions as 'an active parameter in the creation and emergence of narrative and meaning' (Morcom 2007: 16). The musical constitution of meaning in film is a complex process. As such, I employ the ethnomusicological notion of 'screened music' to observe how processes of national or 'self-representation' can be 'de- and re-contextualised' in a myriad of ways while highlighting 'issues of agency, ... process, active or contrived representation or re-representation, ... mediation and media-isation' (Mera & Morcom 2009: 5; also see Morcom 2007; Slobin 2008a; Slobin 2008b). In summary, this

this thesis seeks to understand Malay film music by paying attention to the mutually constitutive and interactive texts of a film's narrative and its music, reading them against the social and cultural context in which they were historically produced and are currently remembered. I find that such an intertextual analysis of music in Malay film from the 1950s to 1960s unravels the seemingly homogenising yet contestatory and paradoxical tropes of Malay culture and nationalism that are equally relevant to nation-making in the past as they are to the present in the Malay Peninsula.

Summary of Chapters

There are altogether eight chapters in this thesis. Following this introduction is Chapter Two, which will establish the version of cosmopolitanism I am employing for this study and how a reading of aesthetic agency in musical practices is integral to my analysis of music and postcolonial nation-making as articulated or suggested in Malay films produced in the 1950s to the 1960s. Following that, I provide evidence of the cosmopolitan history of music in the Malay Peninsula by presenting the pluralistic musical precedents to Malay film music in the 1950s: *bangsawan* theatre, *orkes Melayu*, *ronggeng* and *joget moden*. These artistic practices expressed an already cosmopolitan musical aesthetic in the Malay Peninsula, but unlike earlier forms of music were part of a commoditised colonial entertainment industry. These cosmopolitan practices provided the Malay films of the 1950s to 1960s with a palette of musical materials to draw from, simultaneously popular in appeal yet uniquely local. Chapter Two importantly traces a chronology of how music was used in Malay films starting from the 1930s onwards. What is evident was how musical conventions from *bangsawan* were reproduced in Malay film from the 1930s until the 1960s. However, despite the pervasiveness of *bangsawan*-derived music in Malay entertainment culture, the creative use of newer forms of music was also emerging in Malay films from the mid-1950s; such music interacted closely with the political and narrative themes of films. At the centre of this musical creativity in Malay films from this era was the iconic director-writer-actor-singer-composer, P. Ramlee. In this chapter, I

introduce his musical contributions to Malay cinema and observe his enduring if not paradoxical impact on conceptions of Malayness and Malay nationalism.

Chapters Three to Seven of this thesis will unravel the issues put forth above through in-depth case studies of music in selected films released from the mid 1950s to late 1960s. This thesis does not attempt to be an exhaustive study of Malay films and music; however, the selection of films analysed contain, in my assessment, musical-narrative articulations that clearly represent the era of nation-making on the Malay silver-screen. As such, each chapter is organised by specific themes concerned with cosmopolitan nation-making: musical decolonisation; postcoloniality and tradition; modernity and class; youth and cultural policing; national culture and remembrance. Each chapter introduces the sociological framework for the nation-making themes highlighted above and proceeds with a detailed intertextual analysis of music, narrative and history in relation to that theme in one to two films.

Chapter Three uncovers sentiments of decolonisation by analysing the music of two films made in the mid-1950s: *Hang Tuah* (1956, dir. Phani Majumdar) and *Sergeant Hassan* (1958, dir. Lamberto V. Avellana), with reference to the political history of nascent anti-colonial social movements leading up to Malaysian independence in 1957 and a Communist insurgency that saw a proliferation of pro-British propaganda and censorship in local cinemas. These films were chosen specifically because the former was made a year before independence and the latter a year after. *Hang Tuah* and *Sergeant Hassan* also contrast significantly in their narrative themes, genre and setting. The latter is a 'modern' World War Two movie while the former is a 'traditional' epic set in pre-colonial times. These contrasting projections of nation-making – the modern and traditional – are precedent to the following chapter's discussion on the modern construction of musical tradition in Malay film music.

Chapter Four focusses on the film composer, Zubir Said, by analyzing his increasingly 'traditionalised' music in early 1960s Malay films that had a pre-colonial theme. I argue that the film, *Dang Anom* (1962, dir. Hussein Hanniff), that features Zubir Said's music, incorporates a *traditionalised* aesthetic representation of Malay music as a way of articulating an aspiring ethno-nationalist and anti-colonial sentiment. In this chapter, only one film was chosen for analysis as it highlights the synergy between the radical Malay

director, Hussein Haniff and the Malay-nationalist music icon, Zubir Said. In my view, *Dang Anom* is a pertinent film because it features Zubir Said's traditionalist and Malay-nationalist music aesthetic interacting with Hussein Haniff's anti-feudalist interpretation of pre-colonial Malay society.

Chapter Five continues to analyse films of the early 1960s but considers how modernity, modern musical technologies and cosmopolitan ideals are featured in social films set within the then contemporary and urban contexts. The films analysed in this chapter, *Antara Dua Darjat* (*Between Two Classes*, 1960) and *Ibu Mertuaku* (*My Mother-in-law*, 1962), represent P. Ramlee's most prominent 'social' films from the pinnacle of his directing and musical career in 1960s Singapore. Additionally, the songs featured in these films are arguably Ramlee's most well-known, in particular, "Getaran Jiwa (Reverberating Soul)" from *Antara Dua Darjat* and "Di Mana Kan Ku Cari Ganti (Where Could I Find a Replacement)" from *Ibu Mertuaku*. I argue that the musical content as well as the discourses about music and musicians in these films mediated the social fissures between modernity and tradition, urban and rural, working-class and elites, autocracy and self-determination.

The sixth chapter of the thesis examines the slow but musically 'spirited' unravelling of the Malay film studio industry from the mid 1960s to the early 1970s. This was a period that saw the increased inclusion of rock & roll music and youth culture in Malay films, marking a substantial aesthetic shift in Malay film music away from the cosmopolitan and 'traditional' sounds of the previous period. I analyse how a nationalist musical discourse was articulated in Zubir Said's and P. Ramlee's commentaries on developing and preserving national musical culture; how their ideas, despite their earlier cosmopolitan leanings had essentially become ethno-nationalist and reactionary to cultural change. I analyse two films that prominently feature the youth culture of this period, *Muda Mudi* (*The Youths*, 1965, dir. M. Amin) and *A Go Go '67* (1967, dir. Omar Rojik). I chose to examine *Muda Mudi* as it featured the prominent Malay actress and singer of 1940s and 1950s fame, Siput Sarawak, who portrays an ageing film star in the film. The film's self-referentiality parallels the historical context of a Malay film industry that was uncertain of but also cautiously appropriating the new youth culture that was emerging in the mid-1960s. *A Go Go '67* was selected for analysis because it features actual *pop yeh yeh* bands,

singers and dancers, and it was one of the last films to be made at Shaw Brothers' MFP studios in Singapore, truly marking the twilight of Malay films in the Malay Peninsula. Despite the studio's closing, the music director of the film, Kassim Masdor, went on to shape the late-1960s to late-1970s Malay popular music industry as a prominent composer, producer and Artist and Repertoire representative for EMI's Malay music division.

A state-defined national culture that appropriates 1950s to 1960s Malay film music aesthetics and its icons, P. Ramlee And Zubir Said, as emblematic of a refined and fixed national music culture grounds my discussion of remembrance in Chapter Seven. This final chapter provides an ethnography of how Malay film music and its enduring icons from the 1950s to 1960s are remembered, historicised and canonised in present-day Malaysia and Singapore. Analysing the music of a nation-making past in present-day Malaysia, I depict how P. Ramlee's film music is interpreted by contemporary Malaysian musicians; paradoxically articulating the subversion of a homogenous national music culture while perpetuating a commodified nostalgia towards the past.

Finally, the concluding chapter of this thesis provides a personal reflection of my musical journey and how that has tied in with the purpose, substance and contribution of this study to the enhancement of music research through an intertextual reading of music, film and cosmopolitanism within a social and historical context.

CHAPTER TWO

Musical Cosmopolitanism and Malay Film Music in Context (1900s-1960s)

The Cosmopolitan Challenge

Cosmopolitanism is a fluid concept and it is common to find it used somewhat flexibly in historical and musical scholarship.¹ Some argue that there is a methodological challenge in specifying cosmopolitanism in rigid terms as it may 'be a project whose conceptual content and pragmatic character are not only as yet unspecified but also must always escape positive and definitive specification, precisely because specifying cosmopolitanism positively and definitively is an unc cosmopolitan thing to do' (Pollock, Bhaba, Breckenridge & Chakrabarty 2000, 577). I find that this circumlocution borders on the anarchistic and raises the question: why use cosmopolitanism at all? However, aside from indicating the challenges of a cosmopolitan world and a diversity of perspectives, the above mentioned statement allows for the democratisation of methodological and analytical possibilities of using cosmopolitanism in a multitude of ways. More pertinently, Beck & Sznaider (2006) deploy cosmopolitanism as a sociological methodology that draws attention to 'societal relations as distinct from the nation-state' (20); but more so 'to understand how states are being formed in the cosmopolitan constellation, how new non-state actors arise and... new type(s) of cosmopolitan states might develop' (21). This is particularly useful in understanding the formation of nation-states in the postcolonial Malay World and Southeast Asia which was already, prior to the intrusion of European colonialism comprised of vibrant 'cosmopoleis'; the various kingdoms of Asia since the 6th Century engaged in trans-regional trade and cultural exchange (Reid 2004a, 3-5). Reinforcing this pre-colonial history of cosmopolitanism, Cheah (2006) in tracing the concept of cosmopolitanism from eighteenth-century Kantian philosophy to Marxist ideology and finally to Habermas' more recent appropriation of Kant notes the common error of

¹ Austerlitz (2005) in *Jazz Consciousness: Music, Race and Humanity* views cosmopolitanism in Dominican jazz music as a universal, unifying culture that transcends differences, while Monson (2007) sees the cosmopolitanism of hard-bop jazz in the 1960s as an expression of *aesthetic agency*. On one hand, idealistic scholarship views cosmopolitanism as a Kantian universalism, while other more nuanced studies, in particular Turino's (2000) study of music in Zimbabwe view cosmopolitanism as representing a negotiation of the external with the internal, the foreign adapted to the native, the global in interaction with the local.

regarding ‘cosmopolitanism as the transcendence of the particularistic and parochial limits of the nation-form’ and suggests that cosmopolitanism may in fact precede the popular nation-state in history and nationalism in the history of ideas’ (489). As such, my understanding of cosmopolitanism in the Malay World is applicable to both the pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial history of musical practices in the region. With the exception of Kahn’s (2006; 2003) and Tan’s (2013) attempts to draw attention to cosmopolitanism in the history of postcolonial nationalism in the Malay Peninsula, there have been no studies on cosmopolitanism and Malay cultural practices. Thus, the thesis aims to address the absence of such studies by contributing a much needed perspective on musical cosmopolitanism in Malay film culture during an era of intense nation-making.

My deployment of cosmopolitanism is a pragmatically theoretical one, whereby a cosmopolitan cultural practice is one that can be discerned as articulating two or more contrasting identities simultaneously. These identities are not necessarily divergent, but interactive and in the case of artistic practices are often the result of active *aesthetic agency*. I view musical cosmopolitanism as a process in which individuals or cultural collectives create aesthetically successful music that is dialogical of contrasting local and supralocal ideas or approaches. In Turino’s words, cosmopolitan practices must be seen as ‘simultaneously local and translocal’ (2000, 7). However, before delving into the notion of agency I would like to discuss how social conceptions of cosmopolitan practices may be understood sociologically in relation to modernity.

Modernity and the Sociology of Aesthetics

A crucial factor in the conceptualisation of practices as cosmopolitan is an acknowledgement of the existence of a discursive relationship between the past and the present, the internal to the external, the indigenous to the foreign. In ethnomusicological research a fundamental discursive dichotomy that has emerged is that of the ‘modern’ in opposition to the ‘traditional’.² Throughout my thesis I will observe cultural practices, ideas and processes that reflect hierarchical discourses that view the ‘modern’ as a

² An ethnomusicological study that informs my understanding of this issue is Waterman’s (1990) article on how musical ‘traditions’ are considered as ‘modern traditions’. I discuss the notion of tradition, modernity and postcolonialism in greater detail in Chapter Four. For a problematisation of musical tradition in the Malaysian context, see Sarkissian (2000).

progression from the 'traditional'. In the historical context of Malaysia and Singapore in the 1950s and 1960s, it is common to find cultural productions articulating ideologies of modernity that 'militated against the so-called traditional – that is, the various indigenous alternatives to modernity and capitalism – precisely by redundantly projecting them as a primitive past' (Turino, *Ibid*).

I argue that in Malay film and film music conceptions of modernity have been articulated in aesthetic ways such that 'modern' aesthetic practices replace, or are re-articulated as, 'traditional' aesthetic practices. In fact, aesthetics are very much at the centre of understanding the formation of new or renewed national and cultural identities in the wake of cosmopolitan postcoloniality and modernity. Regev (2007) views cosmopolitanism on a sociological level, whereby the production and consumption of film and music is understood within the aesthetic framework of the nation-state. He suggests that 'aesthetic cosmopolitanism' is initially the result of a local, nationally bounded, ethnically defined self that consumes 'cultural products or art works that unequivocally "belong" to a nation or ethnicity other than their own' (125). In the period of 'early to high modernity' this is further complicated by the construction of a 'national culture' that is characterised by an essentialist and purist conception of the 'ethno-national' self, which in the process represses and conceals 'exterior influences and sources of' said culture 'in order to glorify its authenticity' as 'fully indigenous' (Regev, *Ibid*). Following that, in a period of 'late modernity', cultural actors seek unique expressions to transcend such rigid ethno-national confines through 'fluid' understandings of local identity, willfully implementing 'stylistic innovations in art and culture from different parts of the world (Regev, *Ibid*). Departing from ideas about cultural agency, Regev conceives aesthetic cosmopolitanism as a normative social condition:

... aesthetic cosmopolitanism in late modernity should be located not necessarily at the individual level, but at the structural collective level, as a cultural condition that is inextricable from current ethno-national uniqueness... Aesthetic cosmopolitanism is the condition in which the representation and performance of ethno-national cultural uniqueness are largely based on art forms that are created by contemporary technologies of expression, and whose expressive forms include stylistic elements knowingly drawn from sources exterior to indigenous traditions. As such, aesthetic cosmopolitanism is not the exception in contemporary cultural practices, but rather the normal and routine (126).

While this argument greatly discounts the possibility of individual agency in the stage of 'late modernity', it suggests how cosmopolitanism as an aesthetic exists

structurally in the form of cultural technologies, global industries, nation-states and musical fields of taste. This is an important observation, as it helps to contextualise and explain how cultural practices that are seen as foreign may be adopted and adapted by individuals as local artistic expressions. The indigenous past is adapted to the modern present, and local elements converge with foreign influences. Beyond this neat structural dichotomy of the internal and external however, I contend that there is still the possibility of uniqueness, creativity and novelty in an artist's active embrace of a cosmopolitan attitude. Regev's argument of aesthetic cosmopolitanism as 'normal and routine' does not account for the individual actors that went against the grain to create uniquely novel cultural productions in a cosmopolitan vein. While such productions may have eventually been normalised into the fabric of ethno-nationalist discourses and practices, it is problematic to ignore the agency that exists in the act of creation at the time and place of production. In 1950s Singapore, P. Ramlee sang film songs with a 'universal' cosmopolitan aesthetic but did not sing the same way that Abd al-Halim Hafiz did in the musical films of 1950s Egypt; Ramlee's voice remained, uniquely, unequivocally, his.

Of course, it is not possible to ignore the structural limitations of colonialism and capitalism upon cosmopolitanism. These were factors that greatly influenced the cosmopolitan musical articulations of Malay films in the mid-1950s; an era of official independence (*merdeka*) in the Malay Peninsula that was marred by a communist insurgency and the resultant State of Emergency declared by the late-colonial British administration. Chapter Three of this thesis examines the music of two Malay films during this tumultuous period of decolonisation, whereby an acceptable, capitalist-colonial-friendly vision of Malay nationalism had to be constructed musically through a reinvented past and a projected future on the silver screen. The music of the historical epic, *Hang Tuah* (1956, dir. Phani Majumdar), was set in the pre-colonial Malay kingdom of Melaka, but the musical composers of the film did not attempt an 'authentic' representation of Malay music; they had to make music that was suggestive of pre-colonial Malayness but ultimately appealed to the cosmopolitan musical tastes of the mid-1950s. Thus, it could be argued that the commercial and cosmopolitan impetus of the Malay film studios directly or indirectly imposed structural limitations on their musical output. The reliance of western film-music conventions are particularly evident in a film set in Japanese-occupied Malaya, *Sergeant Hassan* (1958, dir. Lamberto V. Avellana), which develops its narrative using a repeated theme-score leitmotif. The

overtly western-sounding orchestration of the score is reminiscent of the Max Steiner 'superculture' of film music 'spawned in the 1930s'; an approach to film music that contains specific, formal codes of musical meanings to correspond to narrative situations (Slobin 2008, 3).

However, both films examined in Chapter Three contain a subtext of self-determination, and the musical articulations of such films amplify this undercurrent of subversion, resistance and postcolonial national aspiration beyond the structural boundaries of a musical superculture, a profit-oriented film industry and stringent colonial censorship. While *Sergeant Hassan's* score was overtly western, the song that forms the basis of its score, "*Tunggu Sekejap (Wait For Awhile)*"³, articulated both the ambivalence of a nation in waiting and its citizens' aspirations for true independence beyond colonial rule. *Hang Tuah*, while set in a feudal pre-colonial past, contained the song "*Berkorban Apa Saja (To Sacrifice Anything At All)*"⁴, which poetically questioned the concept of unquestioning loyalty to a monarchy; by extension, it challenged colonialism in a period during which Malay society was increasingly mobilised for national independence from British rule.

As such, I propose that cosmopolitan musical practice in its complex negotiation of two or more divergent cultures – whether it be western music against local practices or colonial rule against postcolonial autonomy – may be deployed as an instance of artistic agency. While useful in understanding the historical processes of cultural change in nation-states, a sociology of aesthetics as proposed by Regev falls short of placing the agency of individuals at the centre of understanding cosmopolitan aesthetics in musical practice.

Aesthetic Agency and Musical Cosmopolitanism

In this thesis, I thereby define cosmopolitan practice as a process born out of the awareness of active human agents of a rooted cultural identity in ongoing contact with foreign elements, ideas or practices. The agent finds creative ways to negotiate these cultural diversities within a holistic artistic expression or aesthetic articulation. The notion of 'musical cosmopolitanism' explains how people situated in specific cultural spaces connect to cultural ideas and practices from exogenous spaces and periods to

³ Composed for the film by P. Ramlee, with lyrics by S. Sudarmaji.

⁴ Composed for the film by P. Ramlee, with lyrics by Jamil Sulong.

form unique musical expressions that are distinctly local interpretations of globally distributed musical styles. In particular I have found Turino's study of music and cosmopolitanism useful in understanding creative agency in cultural production. In his definition of cosmopolitan formations:

... given ideas and features must be widely diffused among *particular* social groups in dispersed locales. Cosmopolitanism is a specific *type* of cultural formation and constitution of habitus that is translocal in purview. Because cosmopolitanism involves practices, material technologies, and conceptual frameworks, however, it has to be realized in specific locations and in the lives of actual people. (2000, 7; emphases by the author)

Such a statement places local uniqueness at the centre of cosmopolitan cultural practices. Cosmopolitan cultural practices simultaneously draw from 'translocal' elements while emphasising a sense of rootedness in the 'constitution of habitus'. In music and other cultural practices, new local forms of expression are realised in the active interaction of the external and internal. Martin Stokes extends this notion of 'musical cosmopolitanism' as

a term, and a set of questions and problems... (that) invites us to think about how people in specific places at specific times have embraced the music of others, and how, in doing so, they have enabled musical styles and musical ideas, musician and musical instruments to circulate (globally) in particular ways... *Most importantly, it restores human agencies and creativities to the scene of analysis, and allows us to think about music as a process of making 'worlds', rather than a passive reaction to global 'systems'*. (2007, 6; emphases mine)

Thus, there is an active process of agency that is crucial to understanding musical practices in the context of political-economic structures and cultural discourses of 'globalism' or 'universality' in music. Musical cosmopolitanism allows for the observance and analysis of 'creativities' or uniqueness in cultural practitioners that are active agents in the process of making musical 'worlds' or aesthetic paradigms that are not entirely subjugated to structural hegemonies. However, Stokes' intention is not to provide an altruistic vision of cosmopolitanism in music. More so, musical cosmopolitanism should be approached as 'a set of questions and problems'. As such, my theoretical application of cosmopolitanism is critical and reflexive; I read the agency of local actors against processes of contestation and contradiction that are concomitant with postcolonial nation-making. While P. Ramlee's music could be considered idealistically cosmopolitan for the 1950s and 1960s, he would later become a conservative critic of the youth music that he felt usurped his popularity (see Chapter

Six). After his death in 1973, Ramlee's cosmopolitan music would be appropriated and remembered as a canonical reference of Malay 'greatness' in the arts, leaving little room for other, especially non-Malay, music to be accepted as Malaysian national culture. Ramlee's posthumous musical hegemony would result in musicians having to legitimise their 'Malaysian-ness' by performing songs from the Ramlee-national-music canon. Present-day manifestations of paying tribute to Ramlee to legitimise Malaysian-ness are discussed in Chapter Seven.

While there are contradictions brought about by an idealistic reading of cosmopolitanism⁵ in music that ignores sociological-structural hegemonies it is equally problematic to discount the musical agency of individuals. Such agents were instrumental in crafting a unique musical aesthetic of self-determination. Monson (2007) understands aesthetic agency as a musically cosmopolitan process that emerges from the discursive and structural limitations of a given society (74). She views jazz aesthetics in the 1960s as a cosmopolitan musical practice resulting from an 'active musical self fashioning' process whereby African American musicians articulate music that is different from the hegemonic structures and discourse of white America (Ibid). Aesthetics, therefore, provide a flexible conceptual space that accommodates fluid identities and plural cultures. The fluidity of aesthetic agency can also be read across time. Despite present-day Malaysian artists having to legitimise themselves by performing the Malay film music canon, they also interpret such music on their own aesthetic terms; as is evident in the production of the 'indie' compilation, *Indiepretasi* (*Indie-pretation*, 2010), paying tribute to Ramlee's music, which is examined in Chapter Seven.

In applying this notion of aesthetic agency to understand Malay film music, I observe how Malay film song composers P. Ramlee and Zubir Said articulated a cosmopolitan aesthetic agency. Malay film songs expressed an indigenous 'Malayness' using 'western' media and musical structures such as notated scores, non-indigenous instrumentation and harmony. Moreover, Indian film music styles and formats were extensively adopted and practiced.⁶ Hence, observable in Malay film songs are

⁵ Differing from my approach to cosmopolitanism, though notable for its contribution to the concept is Appiah's (2006) philosophical monograph on the potential of cosmopolitanism as an ethical ideology.

⁶ Malay film histories frequently indicate the dominant presence and influence of Indian films and music in 1950s Malaya. See Md Nor's (1993) chapter on 'The Malay Movie Industry' (51-60) and Van der Heide's (2002) chapter on 'Film in Malaysia' (105-160) for accounts of Indian

divergent cultural ideas converging on an interactive aesthetic space, facilitated by creative individuals who perceived and utilised exogenous or 'global-universal' elements as unique 'local-indigenous' expressions. It is erroneous to describe Zubir Said's and Ramlee's music as 'authentically' Malay as much as it is dangerously reductive to see it as 'in-authentically' western. What is apparent in the music of cultural actors such as Zubir Said and Ramlee is the deep internalisation of 'foreign ideas and practices' (Turino 2000: 8). The diverse international musics used by Malay film song composers were not imitated but *internalised*; indicative of 'internally generated cultural creativity, practices, and identities' (9).

In Chapter Four, I analyse the aesthetic agency of Zubir Said who was instrumental in crafting a Malay musical 'tradition' for the silver screen. Despite budgetary constraints that resulted in a small-sized ensemble, Zubir Said succeeded in composing background music that followed western orchestral conventions while also incorporating distinctly Malay melodies and rhythms. Despite not having a formal western education in music, he sought to formalise a tradition of Malay music, as he believed such a system was necessary for an emergent Malay nation. Another case of cosmopolitan musical practices articulated with aesthetic agency can be seen in the work of Malay film composers P. Ramlee, Yusof B. and Kassim Masdor, who were extremely comfortable composing in jazz and Latin American genres and demonstrated a mastery of western instruments⁷. In Chapter Five, I analyse how western instruments and musical styles featured prominently in Malay social films. Yusof B.'s saxophone playing featured prominently in the film *Ibu Mertuaku* (*My Mother-in-law*, 1962, dir. P. Ramlee), yet the overtly jazzy saxophone also came to symbolise the self-actualised identity of the film's Malay protagonist, Kassim Selamat (P. Ramlee); resulting in a uniquely local musical articulation of Malay social issues concerning class and modernity in an emergent nation. Thus, constantly undermining the possibility of unique agency are the inescapable boundaries of the nation-state.

Cosmopolitan Modernity and the Agency of Nation-making

film culture in Malaysia and the use of Indian directors in Malay films. Though by no means a critical or academic book on Malay films, Harding & Sarji (2011) in their biography of P. Ramlee devote an entire chapter to the lasting impact of Indian directors who directed Malay films of the 1950s (43-82)

⁷ A fascinating and comprehensive biography of Malay musicians in Singapore from the 1900s to 1965 can be found in Azlan Mohamed Said (2013)

In addressing these boundaries to aesthetic agency, we need to consider how the cosmopolitan ideologies and aesthetic inclinations of cultural actors such as the ones mentioned above played a central role in the endeavour of nation-making. Postcolonial nation-states have always formed national identities out of cosmopolitan formations, cultural practices and ideologies (see Kahn 2006; Cheah 2006). The people that contribute to the process of nation-making are often ‘cosmopolitans themselves’ and alongside ‘the mass media’ and ‘nationalist cultural programs... provide the most concrete conduits between indigenous arts, cosmopolitan aesthetics, and transnational markets – much as colonial programs did formerly’ (Turino, 13). Hence, the project of nation-making itself is of a cosmopolitan inclination, in which the values and characteristics of the local or indigenous are adapted to fit the rigid ‘universal’ framework of nation-states. Turino suggests that this poses a ‘twin paradox’: First, specific ‘emblems and discourses’ derived from ‘traditional’ local customs and symbols must be accommodated into the ‘modern’ configuration and ideology of nation; second, while uniqueness in indigenous culture is favoured, a diversity of local cultures within national boundaries potentially undermines the mono-cultural notion of statehood (15-16). In order to overcome such disjunctures, nation states balance such ‘needs and threats... through the process of *modernist reformism*’, in which ‘distinctive local arts and lifeways are reformed, or “developed”, in light of cosmopolitan ethics, aesthetics, and worldview’ due to ‘the cultural positions of the reformers’ (16). Turino elaborates that

reformism typically objectifies, recontextualizes, and alters indigenous forms for emblematic purposes in light of cosmopolitan dispositions and social contexts and programs... Through this process, diverse local forms are incorporated or homogenized within the same cosmopolitan frame while maintaining surface (emblematic) differences in relation to the cosmopolitan. In short, reformism both uses and diffuses local difference and uses and contributes to modernist cosmopolitanism, thereby balancing the needs and threats within the twin paradoxes. (Ibid)

I find the notion of using, diffusing and recontextualising indigenous practices particularly relevant in listening to Malay film music. The notion of ‘reformism’ and its somewhat aggressive connotation is salient to Malaysian and Singaporean cultural

policy from the late 1960s onwards (Tan 1989; 1992; 1993; Sarkissian 2000; 2002)⁸. This cultural reformism in national music was also prevalent throughout Asia during this period evident in notable studies on the formalisation or classicisation of music in South East Asia (Moro 2004) and South Asia (Weidman 2006; Subramaniam 2006; Bakhle 2005). In Chapter Seven, I consider cultural reformism in the context of the moral policing of youth music culture by the Singaporean and Malaysian states that occurred in the late 1960s to early 1970s. The rock & roll or *kugiran* (upbeat guitar band) music of Malay youth found its way into Malay films from the late 1960s and, while initially at odds with the musical sensibilities of the older generation of film producers and composers, eventually formed a conciliatory and even symbiotic relationship with the Malay film industry.

I argue a less drastic approach to nation-making was taking place in the 1950s to 1960s, prior to the *kugiran* period mentioned above, whereby as cosmopolitans Malay film music composers had already internalised non-indigenous conventions of music-making. It was the rise of postwar Malay national and ethnic consciousness that inspired such composers to incorporate local musical cultures to reference an indigeneity or localness in their music. Instances of modernist reformism through the development of a 'traditional' Malay musical aesthetic is particularly evident in the film music of Zubir Said, analysed in Chapter Four. I elaborate on this notion of modernist reformism by linking the musical discourses of tradition and postcoloniality to the radical Malay politics of the early 1960s. I suggest that the *traditionalised* music of Zubir Said in the film, *Dang Anom* (1962, dir. Hussein Haniff) articulates a cosmopolitan critique of Malay feudalism and British colonialism. Such notions of indigeneity were part of a larger narrative of Malay ethnicity and nationhood that was being championed by young activists in the Malay Peninsula and Indonesia since the late 1930s (Andaya & Andaya 2001, 246-247).⁹

Kahn (2006) provides an insightful account of the 'nationalist narratives' that were being articulated by a Malay cultural intelligentsia in 1950s Singapore (114-117). By

⁸ I discuss the ideas of Zubir Said and P. Ramlee concerning nationalism and music that directly influenced the Malaysian National Cultural Policy (NCP) in Chapter Six and I examine the 'problem' of national culture in Malaysia and Singapore in Chapter Seven.

⁹ In particular Malay activists like Burhanuddin Helmy and Ibrahim Yaacob who founded the left-wing, labour-based, Kesatuan Melayu Muda [Union of Young Malays] who were active in writing Malay-nationalist literature that was critical of the colonial administration (Andaya & Andaya 2001, 247). For a study of the postcolonial politics of the Malay World, with a focus on the ideas of Burhanuddin Helmy, see Aljunied (2011).

the 1950s, the notion of a Malay ‘*bangsa* (Race-nation)’, ‘*kebangsaan* (Nationality)’ and a consequent ‘exclusionary nationalist narrative’ had matured and was being popularised by emerging Malay radical nationalists (113-114). Kahn observes that a common Malay nationalist trope in Malay films is based on the notion of *bangsa* as rooted culturally in the Malay *kampung* (village) with its attendant communitarian values forming a potent benchmark for Malayness. This notion of Malayness initially propagated by Malay cultural leaders at the beginning of the twentieth century was also a product of the discursive structural boundaries and conception of race encouraged by British colonial policies and education in Malaya.¹⁰

Cultural anthropologists on the Malay Peninsula suggest that a ‘hegemony of indigenusness’ (Nagata 2011, 23) and a discourse of ‘authority-defined’ Malayness (Shamsul A.B. 2004, 147-148) permeated the politics and culture of the independent Malaysian nation-state into the twenty-first century. While the notion of a ‘hegemony of indigenusness’ and ‘authority-defined’ Malayness is applicable to post-1970s Malaysia, these notions do not address Malayness across borders, particularly Malay identity in Singapore. In Chapter Seven, I attempt to address the issue of Malay-minority identity in Singapore by examining how present-day Malay-Singaporeans mobilise the iconicity of Zubir Said – who aside from being a Singaporean-Malay film composer was also the composer of Singapore’s national anthem – to claim a cultural stake in a country that places Malay culture on the margins of its national cultural identity (see Rahim 2009)¹¹. As evident in the contemporary contestations of Malayness across the Malay World, the history of Malay nationalism is pluralistic, paradoxical and intensely cosmopolitan (see Barnard 2004; Milner 2008; Mohamad & Aljunied 2011). Analysing Malay film and music from the 1950s to 1960s lucidly reveals such nuanced articulations of ethno-national nation-making.

Aside from drawing on historical and political examples, in his study of Malay cosmopolitanism Kahn (2006) engages a repertoire of Malay films made in the 1950s to 1960s, focusing on films directed by P. Ramlee. He uncovers in Ramlee’s Malay films a recurrent narrative of idyllic *kampung* life in contention with urban modernity. The

¹⁰ Anderson ([1983] 2006) notes how the use of censuses in the Federated Malay States under the British were used to discursively concretise notions of race and consequently ethnically-prescribed national identity in Malaysia (164-70).

¹¹ To complicate matters of identity politics further, Zubir Said was actually an Indonesian citizen when he composed the Singaporean national anthem in the mid-1950s. He only became a naturalised Singaporean citizen in the 1970s (Rohana Zubir 2012)

values and customs (*adat*) associated with the *kampung* Malay such as communalism, generosity and humility are always favoured over the associations of modern city life such as individualism, greed and arrogance. Furthermore, Kahn suggests that Ramlee's films underscore ideas of Malay nationalism resonant with the nationalist movements for independence in the 1950s to 1960s (126-131). Malay nationalism in Ramlee's films was linked to a 'vision of a Kampung (Village) Nation' that 'constituted a form of mediation between the nationalist narratives of Malay intellectuals and the experience of a broader Malay public' (130). This mediation of modernity with Malay tradition is particularly pronounced in the Malay 'social' films of the early 1960s.¹² I build on Kahn's insights in Chapter Five to uncover how this mediation of Malay modernity occurs musically by analysing Ramlee's *Antara Dua Darjat* (*Between Two Classes*, 1960) and *Ibu Mertuaku* (*My Mother-in-law*, 1962).

Contrary to the hegemonic discourse of Malay ethnic 'purity' or *kampung* idealism, in observing the case 'of Malay musical and dance culture', Kahn observes that 'hybridity exists at the heart of Malay culture and the Malay community' (170). The notion of hybridity is confused or denied in films like *Penarek Beca* (1955). In a scene from the film, the hybrid Malay *joget* and *inang*¹³ music performed in a cabaret night club are performed as emblematic of Malay 'tradition', displeasing the film's urban, cosmopolitan villain who specifically demands to hear non-Malay *samba* music (163).¹⁴ This scene paradoxically articulates a conception of cosmopolitan Malayness that embraces the 'intercultural relations' of hybrid internal cultures, while simultaneously seeking a bounded identity or exclusive space for interaction, in effect, 'a limited kind of cosmopolitanism' (164-165). What may be observed in this example is that music in interaction with film has become a site for challenging a modern national identity. The *joget* and *inang* are recontextualised as local and indigenous, but this localising process is contestatory, as overtly displayed in the film's narrative. In the film, the modern-

¹² Malay social films differed from Malay *bangsawan* or historical films in that they were set in contemporary urban settings. More importantly, such films overtly articulated social issues concerning modernity, urbanisation and morality; issues that reflected the social concerns of a Malay society facing rapid modernisation and urbanisation. Directly influencing Malay social films were their precursors found in India, analysed in Vasudevan (1995; 1996).

¹³ For further discussions on the syncretism of Malay indigenous music see Matusky & Tan (2004) and Chopyak (1986).

¹⁴ This is even more ironic, because a majority of Malay film music from that era has musical roots in *bangsawan* theatre that draws from a plethora of Latin musical styles including *samba*, *rhumba* and *cha-cha* (Tan 1993). I discuss these cosmopolitan styles of music in greater detail in the following sections of this paper.

urban villain dislikes Malay traditional music and the very framing of his character informs the audience that local music *should* be appreciated over other kinds. However, it is the already cosmopolitan medium of Malay film and film music that express these homogenising ideas in a ‘national narrative’ or what I prefer to call an aesthetic of nation-making. Such paradoxical discourses of nationhood were part of a complex network of diverse nationalist ideas in the cosmopolitan port-city of Singapore in the 1950s.

Along with a ‘highly politicised Malay artistic and literary scene’ (Barnard & Van der Putten 2008, 114, citing Ismail Hussein 1959), Singapore was also the birthplace of ASAS 50 (*Angkatan Sasterawan 50*)¹⁵ - a Malay activist literary collective that comprised ‘schoolteachers, journalists and writers dedicated to the cause of “art for society”’ (115). Initially, this organisation was primarily concerned with emphasising ‘the role that Malay language and literature could play in developing modernity’ among Malays ‘in Singapore’ (Barnard & Van der Putten 2008, 140). Following that, their public activities in promoting Malay literature through book fairs, print media and journalism led to the furthering of their activism by promoting modernism in ‘schools, the newly developing genre of film, labour activism and ultimately nationalism’ (Ibid). The Malay film industry while profit-driven, provided an ‘avenue for reaching a mass audience’ with the modernist-nationalist notions of ‘young Malay activists’ underscoring ‘the stories on the screen’ (144). Barnard & Van der Putten believe that it was the cosmopolitan intellectual environment of Singapore in the 1950s that led to significant creative and political advances in Malay arts and literature throughout the region. A cosmopolitan conception of Malayness was being formed and the imperative for the creation of a modern ‘Malaysian’ state was being articulated with utmost agency, ‘in the Malay language’ (148).

The centrality of the Malay language in the history of Singaporean nation-making can also be seen in music. Zubir Said wrote a selection of patriotically-themed songs for a concert in celebration of Malaysia’s independence in 1957 (148-150). Zubir Said’s song, “*Majulah Singapura*” that became a state anthem in 1959 (149) would become the national anthem of Singapore upon the state’s separation from the Federation of Malaysia in 1965 (Andaya & Andaya, 288). In Chapter Four I examine how Zubir Said’s nationalist ideas were articulated in his film music. I contend that Zubir Said was

¹⁵ Translated as ‘The Writers Movement of 1950’.

especially concerned with constructing a Malay musical tradition for the silver screen that combined elements of Malay folk music with modern-western conventions of film scoring and orchestration. Such music in interaction with historical Malay films articulated a modernist-nationalist message of aspiring postcolonial self-determination that mirrored Singapore's cosmopolitan Malay activists' radical ideas of independence and nation-making.

It was the creative agency of Malay activists, writers, film-makers and composers during this period that would have lasting effects on conceptions of nationhood and artistic identity among future generations of Singaporeans and Malaysians. In line with a conception of cosmopolitanism, agency was not achieved through thoroughly 'indigenous' practices but through modern ideas and mediums that recontextualised indigeneity in the form of nationalism. The music of Malay film songs may have used western orchestration or *samba* rhythms, but the newly composed songs were written in the Malay language and sung with a Malay cosmopolitan aesthetic.¹⁶ Such cosmopolitan aesthetics were expressed in a plurality of ways using a diversity of musical styles and instruments both local and foreign: eg. modern western orchestration (violins, cellos, french horns) was combined with Malay percussion (*rebana* and *gendang* hand-drums), saxophones were used to 'sing' Malay-sounding melodies, vibraphones were used to evoke Javanese gamelans, Malay lyrics were sung with Latin American samba, rumba and mambo rhythmic accompaniment. Further evident in all the musical examples analysed in this thesis is the intertextual articulation of nation-making that reflected the aspirations, contestations and paradoxes of the independence era in the Malay Peninsula.

The next section of this chapter outlines a historical background of cosmopolitan musical practices in the Malay Peninsula predating the postwar film industry of Singapore and Malaya. First, I review studies on the metropolitan musical practices of the *bangsawan* theatre, *ronggeng* ensemble and *orkes Melayu* (Malay Orchestra). These Malay musical practices are particularly indicative of the plurality and ethnic diversity

¹⁶ This Malay aesthetic in singing style present in Malay film song performance has been identified by Tan (1993, 98) in her study of *bangsawan* (Malay musical theatre) music. I discuss her study in more detail later in the following section of this chapter.

of the colonial port cities of Singapore and Penang¹⁷; Penang was where P. Ramlee grew up and developed his musical skills before going to Singapore, the centre of Malay film production and entertainment culture in the 1950s and 1960s. I read these musical practices as cosmopolitan in light of the rapid cultural exchange and musical diversity of such styles as they interacted in urban, capitalist and colonial spaces. These musical practices were the direct precursors of the musical styles and ensemble formats utilised in Malay films from the 1950s to 1960s. I will finally provide a survey of the history of Malay film music in Singapore and Malaysia with a focus on the iconic film director-actor-singer-composer of that era, P. Ramlee.

Malay Film Music: Cosmopolitan Interactivity and the Aesthetics of Nation-making

Precursors to Malay Film Music: Pluralism, Diversity and Cosmopolitan Interactivity in the Early to Mid-Twentieth Century

The early 1900s was an intensely cosmopolitan period for musical culture in Southeast Asia and the Malay Peninsula.¹⁸ A recent study by Keppy (2013) reveals that cosmopolitan forms of popular music that combined the music of America's jazz age with local musical practices were particularly prevalent in the Philippines and Indonesia during the 1920s to 1930s. The jazz-infused music of Filipino *vodavil* from that period mirrored American vaudeville theatre and articulated the social concerns of Filipino society while promoting an ethno-national aspiration for Filipino independence (449-455). The Indonesian *stambul* singer, Miss Riboet, appropriated jazz styles alongside local music genres like *keroncong* and sang for a largely illiterate audience about current affairs while critiquing the injustices of the Dutch colonial government in her

¹⁷ These cities and Malacca, were under direct British rule in the 20th Century and known as the Straits Settlements. The Straits Settlements' were economic and administrative centers for the British in colonial Malaya.

¹⁸ Irving's (2014) recent article fills the gap in Malay musical research by providing an insightful historical account of how Malay music prior to the 1900s was documented by 19th-century British colonial scholars and heard by them as easily adaptable to European musical sensibilities. Irving concludes that the already hybrid music of the Malay World that usually incorporated 'tonal harmony or implied tonal harmony, can be traced within the historical record as a distinct tradition, shaped by three successive colonial incursions (Portuguese, Dutch and British), constituting a genre category with a unique identity (216).

songs (455-462)¹⁹. Such socially-conscious cosmopolitan musical practices thrived in the bustling cities of Southeast Asia. In parallel to the examples above, urban centres in the Malay Peninsula such as Penang, Kuala Lumpur and Singapore were cosmopolitan spaces for long-standing local musical practices that interacted with rapidly disseminated 'modern' western styles. A major factor of such cosmopolitan interactivity was the ever-expanding recording industry that found lucrative markets in the diverse metropolitan communities of those politically stable economies (Tan 1996/1997, 2; also see Tan 2013). Thus, these metropolitan and economic spaces stimulated the rapid interaction of musical styles and practices. Consumers and producers expressed an interest for cultural products that were both indigenously familiar and exotically foreign.²⁰ This interactivity between the rooted self and western other converged as a new and unique cultural field of taste that was articulated as a cosmopolitan aesthetic in local musical practices. At the time, this was expressed as a pragmatic need to be 'up-to-date' with the west and its attendant modernity (Tan 1993, 99):

New instruments (especially Western ones) were added to the *bangsawan* ensemble for various reasons. The musical stage, like many other Malayan cultural forms at the turn of the century, developed at least partly in imitation of European styles and genres, as these symbolized 'modernization' and prestige. Malaysians developed their own styles through regular comparison and competition of foreign works. The introduction of Western instruments was one way of adapting to the world of Western music. (74)

Tan proceeds to reveal a multitude of diverse instrumental and stylistic influences in the development of the *Orkes Melayu* (Malay Orchestra) that was used to accompany the *bangsawan* theatre. These included Hawaiian guitars, Indian harmonium and tabla drums, saxophones, ragtime and jazz, brass ensembles, Latin American percussion and dance rhythms, and the unorthodox use of the Malay frame drum called *rebana* (76-78). The combined use of the *rebana* frame drum with European *violin* is an example of even earlier cosmopolitan interactions in Malay instrumentation as Kartomi (1988) has suggested its origins in Middle Eastern Moorish culture imported in the sixteenth century by Portuguese colonists to the Malay Archipelago (cited in Tan 1993, 77, supra note 6). Interestingly, by the twentieth century the *rebana* was used as a distinctively

¹⁹ For more on the Komedi Stambul musical theatre that has parallels to Malay *bangsawan* see Cohen (2006).

²⁰ An interesting case of this is the creation of the Malay consumer market in the late 1920s. Jan van der Putten (2010) traces the emergence of popular culture in Malaya and the marketing of luxury goods to a Malay 'market' that involved an increase of advertisements in Malay print media. Such commercials that marketed cars, motorcycles and even beer promoted a modern-western lifestyle by introducing Malays 'to the art of consumerism' (44).

‘Malay instrument’, its use in *bangsawan* coinciding ‘with the introduction of Malay historical stories into the *bangsawan* repertoire’ (Tan 1993, 77). The *rebana* was also used specifically to represent Malayness in songs of the *asli* genre,²¹ one of many Malay song and story styles performed in *bangsawan* (77-78). By the 1930s, Malay musical culture was signified in a ‘modern’ way through the ‘fusion of Malay and Western elements’, in which Malayness was presented in ‘the singing style, the vocal ornamentation, the singer’s emphasis on the last beat of the phrase, the linear texture, the cyclic drum rhythmic patterns, and the use of Malay *syair* texts’²², while the west was represented in ‘harmony or implied harmony in or between the instrumental and vocal parts (a factor which strongly influenced melodic invention), close relationship between the text and the music, and western melodic instrumentation’ (98).²³

As a precursor to Malay film music, McGraw (2009) suggests that *bangsawan* theatre attracted its audiences by providing ‘the latest global sounds’ that consequently ‘coalesced into a multicultural musical language of leitmotifs called *irama* that could be used to evoke an Arabian, Javanese, Malaysian, Western, or Hindustani (etc.) character or scene’ (37). These culturally evocative yet internalised stylistic approaches would provide the template for a cosmopolitan aesthetic in Malay film music. An extreme example of the expression of such cosmopolitan aesthetics in Malay film can be heard and seen in the film *Tiga Abdul* (1964, dir. P. Ramlee) discussed in Chapter Six. The film is set in a fictional, Turkish-Arabic, cosmopolitan city, in which men wear fez hats and play rock & roll *kugiran* (Malay, upbeat guitar band) music.

The early to mid-1900s also saw the formation of a trans-regional Malay culture in the Malay Archipelago, and music was central to this articulation of Malayness. Weintraub (2010) notes the travelling Malay music ensembles that toured across ‘Malaya, Singapore, Batavia, Surabaya, Deli, and Riau’ expressing diversity in shared musical spaces:

Hybrid forms (of music) paralleled the evolution of new societies in the cities. People of distinct ethnic, racialized, and cultural identities speaking different languages faced new socioeconomic realities as they confronted people of new identities- occupational, class, and cultural- and formed new alliances. Within this multiethnic, multilingual, and

²¹ The *asli* genre meaning ‘original’, ‘indigenous’ or ‘pure’ is both a specific Malay rhythm and a repertoire of song types. See Matusky & Tan (2004, 330) for an example of the *asli* rhythmic pattern and (321, 329-330) for examples of *asli* repertoire.

²² For a detailed (though non-musical) study of Malay *syair* texts, specifically from the Riau-Penyengat region, see Hijjas (2011).

²³ For detailed musical examples and stylistic analysis see Tan (1989; 1993, 84-98).

multicultural context, hybrid forms gave people a common “language” that helped them forge a common culture. (37)

I argue that ‘hybrid’ is an incomplete term that misreads this commonality of musical culture in the Malay Archipelago. Unlike the slower process of transculturation, hybridity does account for a rapid ‘fusion’ of cultural styles in a fast-changing socio-economic context, but it does not account for the internalisation of differences between multiple musical elements. Hybridity while useful, does not observe how the foreign can be adopted and adapted as a uniquely local aesthetic in the same frame of understanding that cosmopolitan agency provides. Weintraub’s observance of hybridity assumes ‘distinct ethnic, racialized, and cultural identities’. But to what extent were these cultures really ‘distinct’ by the early 1900s; a period of late European colonialism when national identities in the region were only beginning to emerge? Furthermore, many pre-colonial, colonial and postcolonial histories of Malay culture indicate a complex web of cultural interaction, exchange and contestation with regard to cultural identities throughout the Malay Archipelago (Milner 2008; Andaya 2001; 2008; Barnard 2004). In my view, denoting the pluralistic music of the Malay World as merely ‘hybrid’ is incomplete as it does not account for the politically conscious ‘alliances’ that were being formed between these diverse individuals. Weintraub’s observations actually suggest that social agency and the explicit politics of making Malay ‘aesthetic practices’ to stake a claim on *Melayu* authenticity in music was problematised ‘in terms of historical and cultural change, involving a high level of interaction among people of diverse and mixed ethnicities especially in urban centers’ (35). In this important observation, musical cosmopolitanism, instead of hybridity, better explains the social interactivity between subcultures and subcategories of musical styles and people interacting on a mutual plane of cultural identification to produce a unified cultural aesthetic within the context of urban modernity and nascent nationalism.

Weintraub goes on to observe the ‘hybrid’ or cosmopolitan stylistic qualities of the *harmonium*, *gambus* and *Melayu* orchestras (*orkes*) in Malaya and Indonesia prior to the 1960s (38-41). The *orkes harmonium*, which originated in the 1930s, consisted of the ‘harmonium, violin, trumpet, *gendang* (small frame drum), *rebana* (frame drum), and sometimes tambourine’ (38). The ensemble performed Hindi-language songs and rhythms, as well as repertoire that combined Hindustani and Malay music (Ibid). The *orkes gambus* was made up of ‘*gambus*, harmonium, violin, flute, string bass (plucked

contrabass),... *rebana*, and tambourine' and performed 'Arabic songs... in addition to Melayu tunes' (39). In addition, performances included Middle Eastern styles that were combined with Malay songs, 'Cuban-derived dance music' such as 'rumbas', tango accompaniments, and Arabic-inspired crooning vocals (39-40).

The *orkes Melayu* was more flexible in its instrumentation, frequently consisted of jazz instrumentalists, played a blend of Malay rhythms with Latin American rhythms such as cha-cha, but emphasised Malay elements such as the *pantun* poetic verse form (40-41). This ensemble drew its influences from the Malay *ronggeng* style and repertoire but was distinctively modern and eclectic demonstrating 'a profoundly multicultural interplay of Melayu, Arabic, Indian, Latin American and European sounds circulating in (the) popular music' of the 1930-1950s (40).

In summary, all three of these modern Malay ensembles - *orkes harmonium*, *orkes gambus* and *orkes Melayu* - were constitutive of a trans-regional process of cultural interactivity in which a unique cosmopolitan Malay aesthetic was derived from 'Malay-language texts' as well as 'Western-style orchestral arrangements, Middle Eastern vocal techniques, Indian melodies, and Latin dance rhythms' (53). This cosmopolitan Malay music aesthetic was also present in the popular *ronggeng* ensembles; a direct musical influence on the Malay films of the 1950s to 1960s.

Ronggeng music is a particularly unique case of a Malay (and Malaysian)²⁴ music practice that openly embraces a diversity of stylistic elements. It is a distinctively local artistic expression that internalises foreign elements, hence making it a vibrant example of musical cosmopolitanism in the Malay Peninsula. *Ronggeng* is a popular social dance that comprises a variety of musical styles and repertoire (Tan 2005, 288). In urban centres like Penang, it is performed and enjoyed by diverse cultural communities in an informal recreational setting typically accompanied by ensembles that consist of *rebana*, accordion, violin, gong, maracas and tambourine (287, 294). In addition, a variety of local Malay repertoire is performed from local genres such as *asli*, *inang*, *joget*, *zapin*, *masri* as well as foreign styles such as the 'Indonesian *kroncong*, Thai *ronggeng* or *ramvong*,... Latin American dances such as the *cha-cha-cha*, *rumba*, *mambo* and waltz (291, 294).

²⁴ In Tan's (2005) paper, she describes a *ronggeng* performance at a *Peranakan* Chinese wedding. The *Baba-Nyonya* or 'Straits Chinese' community in Peninsular Malaysia are a unique local Chinese-Malay 'hybrid' community that have lived in the region for over five centuries. See Khor (2011) for a detailed study of the paradoxical status the Straits Chinese community in the Malay Peninsula.

Tan argues that *ronggeng* styles came to be musically symbolic of Malaysian national culture precisely through the burgeoning Malay film industry of the 1950s to 1960s (298-300). The booming postwar film industry in Malaya incorporated existing *ronggeng* ensembles and musicians from the *bangsawan* theatre to produce 'new' film music. While retaining the 'heterogeneity' of *ronggeng* music, the film producers sought 'to attract audiences of various races and yet produce a modern type of popular music that had a recognizable Malay sound' (298). Ironically, due to the rigidity of commercial film formats, the spontaneous and improvisatory qualities of *ronggeng* were repressed and formalised, while a modernist western aesthetic led to the use of more western instruments and orchestration (299-230). This once diverse and convivial style of music became increasingly homogenised in its style, and the once participatory associations of its practice were transformed into a passive reception and consumption of singing movie stars and recordings (230). An example of this homogenisation and formalisation in *ronggeng* music can be heard in Zubir Said's film music for *Dang Anom*, discussed in the third chapter of this thesis. The rigid conventions of recording music for film required the composer to arrange instrumental parts that 'responded' to vocal parts. This was for a *dondang sayang*-styled song reminiscent of *ronggeng* music that usually involves less formally structured and extemporised playing by instrumentalists who 'answer' the vocal lines.²⁵ However, while this commodified standardisation was taking place on the silver screen, live *ronggeng* culture was renewing itself in the form of '*joget moden* (modern joget)', through which a lively, modern and cosmopolitan dance culture emerged (300).

Interestingly, the music of *joget moden* was part of a vibrant dancing and entertainment culture that permeated the entertainment parks of Singapore, Kuala Lumpur and Penang. Van der Putten (2014) provides a fascinating account of how *ronggeng* and *joget modern* were embroiled in controversy in the Malay Peninsula. The *joget moden* craze which 'sparked into being in 1949' combined 'rumba and samba rhythms' with Malay melodies and instrumentation and was introduced by widely-popular Malay violinist, Hamzah Dolmat and *keroncong* 'king' Ahmad CB (Van der

²⁵ Tan (2005) references the use of a *ronggeng* ensemble in the recording of the song, *Dondang Sayang*, by singers, Tijah and Dean for the 78 RPM record on Chap Kuching, 1930 (296). The *dondang sayang* (literally translated as 'love song') aside from being a type of Malay musical repertoire can also be considered a genre of Malay singing that could have originated in the Penyegat-Riau region or the Melaka kingdom of the 15th Century (Matusky & Tan 2004, 333-334)

Putten, 124, citing Webb Jones [1953, 78-79]). The immense popularity of the music among Malay youth and its involvement of Malay female ‘taxi’ dancers²⁶ naturally raised the concerns and anxiety of conservative Malay Muslims. Such anxieties about and admonishments of *joget moden* were articulated in the fictional literary narratives of Malay novels (Ahmad Luthfi 1949), while other writers tried to convey a more conciliatory understanding of the dance culture by highlighting the economic opportunities for its female dancers and the artistic agency of its musicians (Harun Aminurrashid 1968). Harun Aminurrashid’s novel, *Minah Joget Modern (Minah A Modern Joget Girl)* contains a speech by a musician-violinist character named Mat Biola²⁷ (modelled after Hamzah Dolmat) that advocates for the new style of music:

... joget modern is an art form of mixed Western and Eastern parentage. I do not wish to ruin our own (Malay) art and culture by introducing the new form, but intend to fashion the aspirations of the youngsters who want to change and are not bored with our virtuous art and culture... Our youngsters wish to be happy and strive for solid changes equal to the youngsters in this atomic age, therefore it is not right to look down upon and disparage the creations of Malay artists. (94, cited and translated by Van der Putten 2014, 131)

It is telling in Van der Putten’s historiography of *joget modern* and Harun Aminurrashid’s novel that Malay music culture by the postwar years was already very hybrid and, what is more, was developing a self-consciously cosmopolitan outlook in its incorporation of external musical practices to articulate a sense of local agency. As such, there was a proliferation of contestatory discourses about music and Malay culture circulating in the Malay Peninsula; such discourses about music and society would resonate in the Malay films of the 1950s and 1960s to articulate an even clearer aspiration for Malay nation-making. Van der Putten also suggests that such discourses that lauded the changes brought about by new cosmopolitan Malay musical practices were inspired by the nationalist revolution in Indonesia of 1945 to 1949 (132). Indonesian artists active in the Malay Peninsula encouraged their counterparts to ‘embrace a sonic and kinetic modernity’ (Ibid). This is particularly evident in Chapter Four’s discussion of the music and cosmopolitan biography of the Indonesian, Zubir

²⁶ Malay female ‘taxi’ dancers were employed by dance clubs and danced a limited amount of time for a fixed fee paid by male patrons who would purchase tickets from the dance clubs, commonly located in entertainment parks (Van der Putten 2014, citing [*The Straits Times*, October 2, 1949, 8]).

²⁷ ‘Biola’ is the Malay term for ‘violin’.

Said, who established himself as a film composer in Singapore and was a vocal advocate for Malayan independence.

The case of *ronggeng* demonstrates how once cosmopolitan practices became homogenised into a representation of the ethno-national imaginary on film. The Malay film was a modern culture industry that sought a fixed ethnic expression of Malayness in music. Thus, along the lines of Regev (2007), this period in Malaya of ‘early to high modernity’ as seen in the emergence of the Malay film industry represents the beginnings of a process of constructing a ‘national culture’ characterised by an essentialist and purist conception of an “‘ethno-national” self that represses and conceals’ exterior influences and sources of the culture ‘in order to glorify its authenticity’ as ‘fully indigenous’ (125). Where Regev falls short here is in considering the repression of internal (cosmopolitan) practices as well, in the formulation of a homogenous ethno-nationalism. Chapter Seven deals with the issue of the selective and politicised remembrance of film music icons in the present day to assert ethno-national legitimacy. The Malaysian state and advocates of Malay supremacy, for example, promote P. Ramlee as a Malay-national music icon, while conveniently ignoring his pluralistic musical influences. The history of Malay musical practices in film music presented in this thesis actually reveals a cosmopolitan diversity that was deeply embedded if not fully internalised since the early 1900s. However, the vernacular boundaries of a commercial Malay film industry were also instrumental in forging a homogenised vision of Malay music. While the Malay film industry innovated a uniquely local but pluralistic and cosmopolitan musical aesthetic, it also sowed the seeds for a homogenising conception of Malayness.

An Aesthetic of Nation-making: Music in Malay Film from the 1930s to 1950s

The rich and diverse musical practices of *bangsawan* theatre, *orkes Melayu* and *ronggeng* provided a uniquely local and cosmopolitan musical aesthetic that would form the palette for music in Malay films. One of the first local, Malay language film productions in the Malay Peninsula, *Leila Majnun* (1934) comprised a Malay cast of *bangsawan* performers (Uhde & Uhde [2000] 2010, 17). Aside from featuring Middle-Eastern dances the star was a popular Malay H.M.V. recording artist, Fatima Binti Jasman (Uhde & Uhde, *Ibid*; Barnard 2010, 47, citing advertisement for *Leila Majnun*, *The Straits Times*, March 27, 1934). Prior to this local production, the Hindi musical

film of the same story, *Leila Majnun* (1931), had enjoyed a successful reception among Singaporeans indicating ‘the first signs of the profound inspirational role Indian cinema would play for filmmaking in Singapore and Malaya’ (Uhde & Uhde, 17).

While the influx of Indian films and Indian directors to the Malay Peninsula had a significant cultural impact on Malay films and film music, a vernacular approach was also developing in the region. Barnard’s (2010) study of the pre-war magazine *Film Melayu* published in 1941 observes how films provided a platform for expressing local ideas about ‘modernity and nationalism’ (60). These films used local *bangsawan* theatre music and starred popular *bangsawan* performers who were already recording artists. The inclusion of local musical cultures in these films helped to cultivate a vernacular cosmopolitan style that was unique to the region. The film *Hancor Hati* (*Heartbroken*, 1941) featured a *bangsawan* performance that was central to the plot, and the film *Terang Bulan Di-Malaya* (*Bright Moon Over Malaya*, 1941) featured two characters who were singers of the regional *keroncong*²⁸ genre (Barnard 2010, 59-60, citing Anonymous 1941a, 7; Anonymous 1941b, 11-4). Barnard argues that these musical films were important in expressing ‘an anxiety with a cosmopolitan culture that distanced Malays from prior relationships, and spoke to these audiences in ways that films from the West could not’ (60). Thus, articulated in these pre-war era films was a local narrative of modernity in which musicians were prominent characters and music, alongside the medium of film, expressed the initial ideas of Malay nation-making.

During the Japanese occupation from 1942 to 1945, a proliferation of Japanese propaganda films replaced the locally-produced and foreign films that were regularly screened in Malaya prior to the war (Uhde & Uhde, 24; White 2008). Interestingly, a significant proportion of films shown were ‘Shanghai-set musical(s)... filmed by the Japanese in occupied China’ and were on nationalist themes promoting conciliation between China and Japan (Uhde & Uhde, *Ibid*). These films often included popular film songs that have today become ‘karaoke’ classics in Japan, particularly the songs *Quitting (opium) Song* and *Candy-peddling Song* performed by Yamaguchi Yoshiko from the film *Wang shi liu fang* (*Opium War*, 1943), which ‘catapulted her to the select group of top-singers in Chinese-speaking Asia’ (*Ibid*). It is uncertain whether these songs made a significant impact on Malay film songs in the 1950s to 1960s. However,

²⁸ The *keroncong* genre originated in Java, was a popular ‘hybrid’ music popular to the Malay Peninsula and Indonesian islands. A study by Kornhauser (1978) traces its plural origins to Javanese gamelan aesthetics and Moorish-Portuguese harmony and instrumentation.

P. Ramlee received part of his formal musical education, including violin lessons and reading western music notation, under a Japanese music teacher during the occupation (ABI 1986; Mohd. Raman Daud 2002, 119, 120). It has also been noted by film scholars that Japanese film genres and cinematography greatly influenced postwar Malay film-makers (White 2008; Van der Heide 2002).

Certainly the rise of Malay nationalism fostered during the Japanese occupation had a strong impact on Malay film-making during this period (Andaya & Andaya 2001, 259). Malay activists in their literature used pre-colonial symbols of Malay nationhood such as Melaka and Hang Tuah to develop 'greater (regional) unity through the preservation of *bahasa*, or Malay language, customs and tradition' (Ibid). These emblems, tropes and conceptions of nationhood would permeate the narratives and music of Malay films after the war. The popularity of these historical-nationalist stories would culminate in one of the most popular Malay films made by Shaw Brothers' film production company, *Hang Tuah* (1956, dir. Phani Majumdar), made a year prior to Malayan independence.

White (2008) observes rather broadly that 'the more obvious feature' of Malay films made after the war was 'the ubiquitous musical number', a traceable influence from Indian and Hollywood films. He perceives a marked difference from Hollywood musical approaches in Malay film songs, in the latter's deviation from the narrative: songs were often used to alleviate tense points in the film's story arc (Ibid). This is particularly true of Malay horror films such as *Anak Pontianak (Vampire's Child, 1958, dir. Ramon Estella)* which contains one song, "Satay Man", that is completely unconnected to the main plot (Ibid). White suggests that the inclusion of music unrelated to the narrative was probably due to audience expectations formed by *bangsawan* theatre practices where musical interludes or 'extra turns' were used to 'release tension', 'lengthen the performance and give the stage crew time to change the set' (White 2008).

On the contrary: as the many analyses in this chapter will reveal, film songs in Malay cinema were, in fact – with very few exceptions such as the horror films White mentions – very closely tied if not integral to the narrative. Curiously, White contradicts his initial claim by noting the narrative use of music in films like *Bujang Lapok (Ne'er do Well Bachelors, 1957, dir. P. Ramlee)*, in which songs expanded the film's narrative to expose 'characters' emotions, desires, intentions, etc.', while films such as *Ibu Mertuaku* (analysed at length in Chapter Five) used 'realistically motivated' songs

because the main protagonist was a musician (White 2008). Some other notable films starring P. Ramlee which feature him as a musician are *Ibu* (1953, dir. S. Ramanathan) in which he plays a budding trumpeter; in *Anakku Sazali* (1956, Phani Majumdar) he is a violinist and composer of popular Malay songs; and in *Antara Dua Darjat* (*Between Two Classes*, 1960, dir. P. Ramlee) he plays a pianist. In my analysis of *Antara Dua Darjat* in the fourth chapter, I consider how musicians are portrayed as being able to musically mediate the tensions between upper class and lower class Malay society. In the film *Ibu Mertuaku*, Ramlee portrays Kassim Selamat, a fictitious if not 'mythical' saxophonist, singer and bandleader. Thus, aside from the ever-pervasive inclusion of songs, Malay films also featured musical stories that featured musicians. This allowed for the creative interplay of diegetic and non-diegetic musical moments²⁹ in these films.

In the most recently published English study of P. Ramlee's music in film, McGraw (2009) discusses 'diegesis' in film music (citing Gorbman [1987] and Slobin [2008]) and notes unique approaches to diegetic and non-diegetic music³⁰ in Ramlee's *Ibu Mertuaku* and *Pendekar Bujang Lapok* (*Ne'er Do Well Bachelor Warriors*, 1959) (McGraw, 43). The author proposes that the level of realism in Ramlee's films is expressed in complex ways, beyond utilising music to 'amplify' the narrative, such as the use of 'slippage' between diegetic and non-diegetic musical moments (McGraw, *Ibid*, citing Slobin [2008, 23]). For example, there is a scene in *Ibu Mertuaku* where Ramlee's character picks up a saxophone and plays unaccompanied the song, "*Jeritan Batin* (Wailing Soul)". Halfway through this 'diegetic' performance, an orchestral accompaniment is heard, 'slipping' the performance into a 'non-diegetic' musical moment. I extend McGraw's analysis of this song by analysing the mediation of a modernity and the actualisation of self through the embodiment of western instruments and cosmopolitan music (the saxophone and jazz) in Chapter Five.

McGraw even suggests that such complex modes of diegesis were not present in American films of the period, as American films were more concerned with 'verisimilitude' when music was involved (43-44). He goes on to argue that unique instances of 'counterintuitive musical ironisms' and 'ingenuity' observed in P. Ramlee's film were indicative of an 'early Malay film audience (that) was prepared for a different

²⁹ I use the term 'musical moments' throughout this paper in line with Slobin's (2012) methodology in examining film music.

³⁰ In film, *diegetic* music is music that can be located "with a source visible on screen" in the film and can be heard by the film's characters, while *nondiegetic* music is usually not located on screen, "heard by the audience but inaudible to the film's characters" (Kalinak 2007).

kind of verisimilitude than that of the typical American audience' (43). Unfortunately, McGraw's rather general observations of American audiences are not thoroughly substantiated but I believe he is trying to emphasise how prevalent such 'flexible' musical diegesis was to Malay cinema in comparison with American cinema. Such examples of unique musical moments in film point to a creative aesthetic agency in Malay film music from that era. As I will demonstrate in the following chapters' analyses, music was unmistakably the main locus of aesthetic agency in Malay films from the 1950s to 1960s.

The Paradoxical Omnipresence of P. Ramlee

Unavoidable in any discussion of nation-making and music in the Malay Peninsula is the aesthetic agency of P. Ramlee, an undeniably cosmopolitan figure whose music and films articulated and continue to reflect the aspirations, contestations and paradoxes of emergent and current Malay nationhood. As should already be obvious, P. Ramlee was and remains a central icon of the Malay world of film and music. Aside from being the first Malay to write and direct a commercially successful film, *Penarek Becha (Trishaw Puller, 1955)*, he was a prolific singer, songwriter and actor.³¹ He acted in 62 films, of which he directed 33, all of which involved him composing and performing his own songs (Ahmad Sarji [1999] 2011, 63). Moreover, he recorded a cumulative total of 359 songs for films and records (133-145).

Ramlee was born in Penang on 13th March 1929 as Tueku Zakariah bin Teuku Nyak Puteh but had his name changed to 'the more fashionable and enigmatic sounding P. Ramlee at the dawn of his foray into music and show business' (Uhde & Uhde, 30). The source of his success in the entertainment industry was his musical talent. At the age of 19, already composing his own songs and actively playing the violin in *keroncong* bands, he joined an annual singing competition hosted by Radio Malaya in Penang for the third time and won (Ahmad Sarji, 264). It was there that he was spotted by Shaw Studios' director, B.S. Rajhans, who was scouting young Malay talent for his films (Ibid). Following that, P. Ramlee moved to Singapore to begin his singing and acting career. By 1951, Ramlee was recording his film songs for H.M.V. Records in Singapore alongside popular Malay singers (265-266). Up to his untimely death in 1973, Ramlee

³¹ Haji Mahadi was the first Malay to direct a Malay film - *Permata di Perlombongan (Jewels in the Valley, 1952)* but it was a commercial failure (see Muthalib 2013, 56).

had composed a repertoire of songs that would be definitive of modern yet what was considered 'authentic' Malay music.

This standardised narrative is embraced by most authors who write about P. Ramlee. Ahmad Sarji notes that 'the rhythms (*rentak*, rhythmic stylings) of P. Ramlee's singing and compositions are at one with the heart and soul of Malay peoples',³² specifically in his use of Malay genres such as 'inang, zapin, masri, asli, joget and boria' (275). He also states that 'P. Ramlee was ingenious in arranging and adapting foreign musics with Malay songs'³³ mentioning as examples the waltz, middle-eastern rhythms, samba, beguine, bolero, rhumba, slow beguine, slow rhumba, twist and mambo (Ibid). While Ramlee was adept at interpreting a diverse plethora of musical styles for a Malay audience, he eventually encountered obstacles to his creative omnipotence. In 1964, Ramlee left Singapore for the soon to be separate nation state of Malaysia,³⁴ continuing his film career at the newly set-up, under-funded, and inexperienced Merdeka Film Productions studio in Kuala Lumpur (Uhde & Uhde, 33-34; Lockard 1996, 5). Towards the late 1960s he found his popularity waning due to the changing musical tastes of Malaysian youth. To keep up with the 'Beatlemania' craze and the rise of '*kugiran*'³⁵ bands, Ramlee had to use the new 'twist' style for the song "*Bunyi Gitar* (Sound of the Guitar)" in the film *Tiga Abdul* (*The Three Abduls*, 1964, dir. P. Ramlee) and "*Ai Ai Twist*" in the film *Masam-Masam Manis* (*Sweet and Sour*, 1965, dir. P. Ramlee) (Ahmad Sarji, 277). However, despite being 'closely attuned to the socio-cultural changes of the time' (Lockard 1996, 5), he was quite reactionary in his attitudes towards the new popular music that was prevalent in the mid-sixties:

Pop songs and music that is not of quality will give birth to a wild generation in the future. Youths that sing self-indulgently, play music self-indulgently, (and) dress self-indulgently, will be exposed to qualities that are disagreeable and out of that will be born a generation that is without discipline. (Ahmad Sarji, 276-277, citing an interview of P. Ramlee in *Utusan Zaman* [date not included])

Ramlee in 1971 also gave an ambivalent speech at a Congress on National Culture in Kuala Lumpur, where he denounced similar 'pop' music cultures, pointed out a

³² '*Rentak lagu-lagu gubahan dan nyanyian P. Ramlee adalah sejiwa dengan orang-orang Melayu*'

³³ '*P. Ramlee amat bijak dalam mengadun dan menyesuaikan muzik-muzik asing dengan lagu-lagu Melayu...*'

³⁴ Singapore would be separated from the Federation of Malaysia on the 19th of August 1965 (Andaya & Andaya: 288)

³⁵ An abbreviation of '*kumpulan gitar rancak*', meaning 'upbeat guitar group'.

decline of traditional music in Malaysia and proposed solutions for this ‘problem’. He lamented the encroachment of Hindustani music from India (of which he was, ironically, an ardent fan), pop music from the west and the influx of youth culture such as long-haired males, mini-skirted women and marijuana smoking (P. Ramlee 1971, 205). He then stated that the government must take aggressive measures to encourage and sponsor the education, performance and presentation of ‘Malaysian traditional’ and ‘*asli*’ music in the media, schools, and even ‘night-clubs, hotels and restaurants’ (206-207). In Chapter Six, I discuss how Ramlee’s views mirrored the moral policing of youths in late-1960s and early-1970s Singapore and Malaysia. Ramlee’s reactionary comments contributed to a homogenising conception of Malaysian national culture that endures until the present day; an issue I examine at length in Chapter Seven.

Such reactionary statements suggest that P. Ramlee was experiencing a ‘decline’ in commercial success as well. Ramlee’s music and films, once considered cosmopolitan and ‘new’, were being overshadowed and, in effect, antiquated by an influx of commoditised trends disseminated by more rapid technologies of global capitalism. However, also due to these changes, his music was acquiring an ‘indisputable’ Malay indigeneity that was compatible with Malay cultural-nationalist rhetoric. Yusnor Ef, a staunch advocate and disciple of Ramlee here considers his impact on Malay music:

Malay songs are an integral part of a Malay person’s identity, in which external influences can be accepted while Malayness must be central, just like the music or songs of P. Ramlee; the foundations are Malay, but Western, latin (sic) and Indian elements are absorbed subconsciously (internalised). Elements from jazz, bossa nova, mambo and cha-cha are found in his songs, but his soul (enduringly) remains a Malay soul. (2011, XIX)

Regardless of how ‘Malay’ or cosmopolitan P. Ramlee’s songs actually were, his music has provided the basis for an ethno-national discourse of homogeneity or indigeneity, in which ‘Malayness’ in music is perceived to be rooted in the ‘soul’ and ‘heart’ and therefore, identifiers of ‘Malayness’ become difficult to discern musically. ‘Malay music’ thus becomes more of an ideological and political term than it is a descriptive marker in musical form, structure or style. In effect, discourses about Malayness in music mainly act to articulate debates over cultural nationalism.

McGraw (2009) provides some useful observations concerning the impact of P. Ramlee’s film music on conceptions of modernity and indigenous identity in Malaysia:

If, in his early films, Ramlee suggests that modern, Westernized living is corrupt and potentially dangerous to Malay society and culture, then his use of music presents a significantly more complex image, one that suggests that certain aspects of Western culture and modernity fit well with Malaysian aesthetics and values, and indeed can be hybridized and adopted as Malaysian. Furthermore, any attempt to neatly categorize and evaluate instances of Malay (or, in this case Ramlee's) music as either Western/modern or Malay/traditional is to grossly oversimplify the case. Musics in Ramlee's films that might otherwise be identified as “western” (especially jazz, Hawaiian, and Latin music) have a long lineage in Malaysia, having been performed and transformed in the colony within contexts such as *bangsawan* since before Ramlee's birth. Furthermore, later generations of Malaysian viewers have come to understand Ramlee's rumbas and jazz and rock (& roll) tunes as distinctly Malaysian, sometimes unaware of their global roots.' (46-47)

The author further states that the realm of musical 'taste' in Ramlee's music goes beyond the polarised dichotomy of degenerate modernity in contestation with pure indigeneity but instead reflects 'a spirit of aesthetic cosmopolitanism' (Ibid). While this idealistic aesthetic may have been expressed in earlier film songs by P. Ramlee, McGraw still leaves much to be discussed with regard to national-culturalism and the changing discourses of nation-making evident in a continuum of nationhood. I argue that such 'aesthetic cosmopolitanism' can be heard in Malay film music, but when contextualised historically, more paradoxical tropes of nation-making can be unravelled.

While Malay film music from the 1950s to 1960s may have 'global roots' it is impossible to deny the nationalist resonance that it has with a contemporary Malaysian public. What about contemporary Singaporeans' reception to such music? Yusnor Ef, cited earlier, is a Singaporean citizen but remains a strong advocate for an essentialised Malay culture in music. An aspect of McGraw's study that requires expansion is the impact of P. Ramlee's music beyond the confines of the modern nation state of Malaysia. I address this issue at length in Chapter Six, with a focus on Malayness and film music in present-day Malaysia and Singapore, comparing the political remembering of P. Ramlee in the former and Zubir Said in the latter. On one hand, I find that Zubir Said's iconicity, due to his status as the composer of Singapore's national anthem, is mobilised by present-day Malay-Singaporeans to claim cultural relevance in a nation that marginalises Malay culture. P. Ramlee's iconicity, on the other hand, has been claimed by the Malaysian state as an unquestionable marker of Malay cultural hegemony in the arts. The fact that most of Ramlee's successful films and enduring compositions were actually produced in mid-1950s to early-1960s Singapore is conveniently forgotten.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I established a framework for analysing Malay film music as a cosmopolitan practice that articulates an aesthetic agency of nation-making. I also provided a historical background of the musical antecedents of Malay film music that were themselves already pluralistic and cosmopolitan. I argue that musical practices in the Malay Peninsula since the 1900s are better understood, rather than ‘hybrid’, as cosmopolitan practices that reflect a cyclical and ongoing aesthetic interaction of the internal-local-traditional with the external-foreign-modern. Such cosmopolitan music was facilitated by the rise of a colonial-capitalist economy, popular culture, and modern technologies and spaces that encouraged the commercial consumption of music by the local population. Such a diversity of local-cosmopolitan musical practices beyond the middle of the 20th Century would be homogenised as ‘Malay music’ within the vernacular frames of a commercial Malay film industry. Despite an inclination towards vernacular homogeneity, a history of the music in Malay films reveals a pervasive cosmopolitan aesthetic that allowed for articulations of emergent-nationalist agency by film producers, composers and musicians – particularly, P. Ramlee – that was unique to independence-era Malay films. P. Ramlee’s towering presence in this context also makes it necessary to examine his enduring musical-filmic legacy as *the* iconic and omnipresent composer-musician-actor-director of the era of Malay films studied in this thesis. Ramlee’s omnipresence in Malaysia is ultimately paradoxical, as his music simultaneously supports and challenges a homogenous conception of national culture. As prolific Malay film composers, Ramlee and Zubir Said, as will be discussed in Chapter Seven, are constantly being appropriated and mobilised by state institutions and ethno-nationalists to legitimate a monocultural vision of nationhood in the Malay Peninsula. The research here offers a response and critique to such limited and problematic perspectives by unravelling a cosmopolitan and pluralistic musical and socio-political history of Malay film. This study, however, does not intend to discount the hopeful and vibrant spirit of postcolonial independence promoted by these actors. Essentially, this thesis aims to highlight the unique spirit of self-determination articulated by Malay independence-era films but without ignoring the complexities, contestations and paradoxes of projecting Malayness through a screened-music aesthetic of cosmopolitanism.

CHAPTER THREE

Decolonising Motifs: Reinventing the Past and Projecting the Future in Malay Film Music (mid-1950s)

By the mid-1950s, P. Ramlee was a cinematic icon and archetype of the Malay hero. The star's presence on the Malay silver screen was ever pervasive; cast in leading roles for comedies, historical epics and modern melodramas alike. His musical input was even more influential than his acting; his compositions were at the forefront of developing a recognisable Malay vernacular aesthetic of film music that was intensely cosmopolitan. As cosmopolitan as they were, Ramlee's compositions for film have become canonical markers of Malaysian and, more explicitly, Malay national identity in music. Since his death in 1973, numerous reproductions and adaptations of his film songs are heard on the radio, television, (new) films, stage productions and the internet. In understanding the omnipresence of Ramlee's music in Malaysia, it is useful to trace the rise of Malay film and his music against the backdrop of an emergent nationhood in the Malay world. The postwar Malay film industry was instrumental in providing to its emerging citizen-audience a musical representation of a nation-in-the-making.

In this chapter, I examine how Malay film music articulated, within the frames of a cosmopolitan commercial-vernacular industry, the sentiments of emergent postcolonial nation-making during the transition between postwar colonial rule and Malayan independence. Music in mid-1950s Malay-language films is analysed in the context of decolonisation in the Malay Peninsula. These films were produced within a commodified enterprise that sought revenue from a vernacular audience. As such, Malay films from this period were not overtly political due to colonial censorship but still contained covert postcolonial nationalist ideas of resistance and self-determination. At the very least, such films articulated in their narratives the tension, anxieties, aspirations and disjunctures of postcolonial nationhood. I analyse how such ideas of emergent cosmopolitan nationalism were expressed musically in such film narratives through the use of narratively-linked musical motifs and culturally referential songs. In the following pages, I will analyse the music contained in two films produced by the Shaw Brothers' Malay Film Productions (MFP) that reflect the growing consciousness of nationhood among the Malay community in the Malay Peninsula. Significantly, these films also articulate two phases of nation-making in the Malay Peninsula: one was made a year prior to the declaration of Malayan independence (1957) and the other a year after. *Hang Tuah* (1956, dir. Phani Majumdar) reflects Malay nationalism expressed through a popular historical narrative, while *Sergeant*

Hassan (1958, dir. Lamberto V. Avellana) is a militaristic story set during the Japanese occupation of Malaya during the second World War that actually articulates the anti-communist sentiment of the ruling Malaysian government during the period in which it was produced. Notably, both films starred and featured music composed by P. Ramlee.

Set during a pre-colonial and pre-modern period, *Hang Tuah* articulates a Malay nationalist narrative in a historical manner but it is not without ideological contradictions. The screenplay was written by a British scholar-administrator, Mubin Sheppard, who was an enthusiastic documenter of Malay history and cultural practices. The story depicts the popular Malay hero, Hang Tuah (played by Ramlee), of the pre-colonial Sultanate of Melaka (c.1400-1511). The narrative of the film however, paints the hero in a modern light, in which his actions and virtues of unquestioning loyalty to the king are put through critical questioning. When read musically, the film displays simultaneous instances of cultural displacements, omissions and resistance. In my analysis, I suggest traditional Malay musical cultures are misrepresented in the historical setting of the film; reflecting instead the commercial and cosmopolitan approaches to musical production that were part of a western 'superculture' of film music practices (Slobin 2008). However, the film's music also incorporates a vernacular approach that suggests the ethno-nationalist agenda of the film's Malay composer. Nevertheless, a modern construction of national identity is relayed in the film in its depiction of internal others who are relegated outside the boundaries of the constructed, 'authentic' Malay nation. This is complicated by instances of musical othering that on one hand, marginalise certain groups and individuals in the narrative and on the other hand, provide an alternative to autocratic feudalistic patriarchy and by extension articulate a musical resistance to colonial rule. I unravel these ideas through my analysis of numerous songs and dances featured in the film and emphasise my reading of colonial resistance through an analysis of a recurring motif representative of the hero's love interest, Melur (Saadiyah).

In my musical analysis of the second film, *Sergeant Hassan*, I observe that a leitmotif of decolonisation is derived from the melody of the film's featured song, "*Tunggu Sekejap* (Wait For Awhile)", composed by Ramlee, with lyrics provided by S. Sudarmaji. I argue that the musical and lyrical content of the song in relation to the film's narrative reflect the ambivalence of an emergent ethno-national identity in the wake of Malaysian independence. The film, in its depiction of the Malay and British resistance movement against the Japanese occupation in the Malay Peninsula during the second World War, also mirrors the State of Emergency that involved extensive guerrilla warfare by the Malaysian communist army against Malaysian and Commonwealth troops. *Sergeant Hassan* exhibits a very colonial-friendly stance in its depictions of Malay soldiers who display militaristic

bravery and national pride in defending their homeland. The film's narrative is a prelude to Malay national autonomy albeit within the 'framework' of a British-colonial notion of nationhood. I argue that this framework is clearly 'heard' in the film's western-styled monothematic score in its use of the "*Tunggu Sekejap*" song that is developed as a leitmotif throughout the narrative to symbolise an independent nation in waiting.

Decolonisation and the Transition to Nationhood

The 1950s in the Malay Peninsula was a period of intense social unrest and political change. The years immediately following the end of the second World War saw a growth in local political mobilisation for post-colonial autonomy. These local movements for independence frame the films made in Malaya in the mid-1950s: Malay films had to appeal to a vernacular audience who were becoming increasingly political, if not already cognisant of their potential position as citizens in an emerging nation-state. Malay films that were commercially produced by private companies had to walk a fine line between highlighting current political issues and providing entertainment. While non-Malay collaborators owned and mostly produced these Malay films subject to the strict British censorship board, the musical productions of such films were helmed by Malay composer-directors such as P. Ramlee and composers such as Zubir Said and Kassim Masdor (see Mohd. Raman Daud 2002). This racialised division of labour in the Malay film industry significantly parallels the ethnicised structures of late-colonial, postwar Malaya. Marginal voices and ideas were surfacing to exert structural changes and challenge the hegemony of colonial and local elites. In 1950s Malaya, with independence looming, Communism and leftist politics were a major concern for the British. I provide here a brief history of the political tensions of 1950s Malaya to better situate my analysis of Malay film music made in this period of decolonisation and nation-making.

Having signed the Atlantic Charter (1941) in cooperation with America's international policy of decolonisation, the returning British colonial administration was compelled to facilitate Malayan independence (see Andaya & Andaya 2001, 265). However, in doing so, the British remained opposed to radical organisations with affinities to Communist or leftist ideologies. Such groups had an organised labour and militant base that was fostered in the resistance movement against the Japanese occupation. The Japanese occupation also gave

rise to Malay radicalism and a political consciousness that was closely tied to the ideas that fuelled Indonesia's anti-colonial and independence movement following the war. In their haste to form a Malayan nation-state, the British administration was met with unpredicted resistance from politicised Indian, Chinese and Malay communities. Drawing from Andaya & Andaya's insightful narrative of Malaysia's history, I briefly highlight four historical junctures that contextualise the political milieu of nation-making in postwar colonial Malaya: 1) the end of the Japanese occupation in the Malay Peninsula, 2) the proposal of and opposition to the Malayan Union, 3) the State of Emergency due to the communist insurrection and 4) the declaration of independence in 1957. These events demonstrate the rise of ethno-nationalism in a period of decolonisation that resonated with Malay film narratives produced in the 1950s. A sense of a Malay nation was forming and this emergence was reflected in the film narratives and music analysed in this chapter.

When the majority of British forces fled Malaya during the war, The Malayan People's Anti-Japanese Army (MPAJA), comprised mostly of local leftist groups including the Malayan Communist Party (MCP), were instrumental in the armed-resistance movement against the Japanese. Upon Japan's surrender in 1945, the MPAJA was swift to gain control of the Peninsula before the return of the British administration. During the occupation, the Malay community who were considered indigenous to the region were given, in comparison to other ethnic groups, more favourable treatment by the Japanese; many were recruited into administrative and law-enforcement positions. In contrast to this, the Chinese community suffered considerably under the Japanese due to existing enmities from the Sino-Japanese War of 1937. As such, when the Japanese conceded defeat, the predominantly Chinese MPAJA or MCP elements retaliated by capturing and executing Malay district officials and police officers. Such inter-ethnic violence from this period forms the backdrop to the communal tensions that would infuse the politics of postwar Malaya.

Upon recapturing Malaya, the British initiated plans to form a Malayan Union comprised of the Federated Malay States, Unfederated Malay States, Penang and Melaka. The newly proposed Union under the authority of the British Crown would greatly reduce the power of the Sultans of the federated and unfederated Malay states. Nevertheless, most of the Sultans were coerced into signing the agreement and equal citizenship was granted to

all ethnic communities, whether immigrant or native to the Malay Peninsula. The Malayan Union's official inauguration in 1946 directly resulted in the political galvanisation of the Malay community in 'united, vehement and unforeseen' opposition to it, leading to the formation of the United Malays National Organisation (UMNO) (Andaya & Andaya, 267). UMNO effectively provided a platform for Malays of all backgrounds – eg. radicals, nobility, religious leaders, educators – to articulate a sense of ethno-national self-determination. Malay women also played a prominent role in rallying support from their community. Their mass mobilisation to oppose the Malayan Union resulted in its replacement with a Federation of Malaya in 1948; a product of negotiations between Malay rulers, UMNO leaders and British officials. Still under British colonial authority, the new Federation of Malaya had more rigid terms of citizenship for non-Malays and defined in strict terms what constituted members of the *Melayu* (Malay) race: those who practiced Islam, adopted Malay customs and habitually conversed in Malay. While UMNO significantly progressed Malay rights in the path to independence, the new Federation of Malaya also paved the way for a factionalised communal or ethnic-oriented politics in the Malay Peninsula. Some of that communal tension was exacerbated by the ethnic dimensions of the State of Emergency.

Two years after the end of the war, a rise in rubber-plantation worker strikes and increasing colonial suppression of leftist labour organisations prompted the predominantly Chinese MCP,¹ led by their new secretary-general Chin Peng, to initiate an armed insurrection against the colonial state. In 1948, a State of Emergency was declared resulting in an increased military and police presence throughout the country, the de-legalisation of militant groups such as the MCP¹, the implementation of regulations that allowed for the arrest and detention of suspects without trial and the mass resettlement of working-class Chinese communities into 'New Villages' – by 1952, 400 government-administered villages housed 100,000 Chinese residents (Andaya & Andaya 2001, 272; Harper 2001, 149, 182-8). Due to the predominantly ethnic Chinese membership and national Chinese ties of the MCP, the Malayan-Chinese community found themselves marginalised as

¹ It must be noted that there were Malay members active in the Communist party and in the insurrection. Other Malay leftist groups (including Malay members of the MCP) such as the Kesatuan Melayu Muda (KMM) and Kesatuan Rakyat Indonesia Semenanjung (KRIS), who felt affinities with the postwar independence movement in Indonesia, formed in late 1945, the Partai Kebangsaan Melayu Muda (PKMM) helmed by Malay activist, Dr. Burhanuddin Al-Helmy.

‘victims in a quarrel that was not of their making’ (Andaya & Andaya: 274). In addition, while the British established their control over the livelihood of the Chinese community, the Malays regarded the Chinese community with increasing suspicion over their loyalty to the country (Ibid). By 1958, violent clashes with communist insurgents was markedly decreased with the surrender of 500 guerillas. On July 1961 the State of Emergency was officially ended.

The five years leading up to Malaysian independence in 1957 established a lasting political alliance between UMNO and the Malayan Chinese Association (MCA). They were later joined by the Malayan Indian Congress (MIC) in 1955. During the Emergency, the MCA, led by Tan Cheng Lock, gained support from diverse factions of the Malayan-Chinese community while cooperating with UMNO and British authorities ‘in the fight against communism’ (275). The alliance of the two parties – both of which had racially exclusive memberships – resulted in landslide victories in the municipal town council elections of 1952 and 1954. With MIC joining in 1955, the Alliance won 51 of 52 contested seats for the first Federal Council elections. The political cooperation between members of the Alliance finally led to the ratification of the new Constitution that afforded citizenship to all non-Malay residents born in the Peninsula with additional requirements for others. UMNO’s acceptance of non-Malay citizenship was given on condition that special privileges be granted to Malays and that such rights would be safeguarded by a paramount ruler (the Yang Dipertuan Agong, elected out of a council of sovereign Malay Sultans). On 31st August 1957 Independence (*Merdeka*) was proclaimed for the Federation of Malaya. This intense and racialised political history of nation-making coincided with the consolidation of the Malay-language film industry, which peaked in productivity and popularity in the mid-1950s to early 1960s, a period of pronounced nationalist sentiment and political ambivalence. I have outlined this political historical narrative in some detail, because these events underscore the musical and filmic output of the Malay industry at the time – particularly the two films with nationalist-centred themes, *Sergeant Hassan* and *Hang Tuah*, that form the focus of this chapter.

Screening Decolonisation

The Malay film industry of the 1950s reflected the tensions and complications of a plural postcolonial Malayan nation. The period preceding Malaysian and Singaporean independence was marked by ‘negotiation, tension and deliberation over how the state would function and who would be its members’, which resulted in the newly formed nation being led by an alliance ‘of ethnically-based parties’ (Barnard 2009, 66). The term ‘*merdeka*’ (independence) was commonly used throughout the nation to denote ‘the transfer of political power’ but ideologically, it signified the need for ‘a revolutionary change in the outlook of all the members of the new nation, from the elites to the *rakyat* (citizens), or masses, and this was a process that was fought on a number of battlefields and was not simply a binary equation’ (66-67). Underneath the spirit of *merdeka*, however, was a growing tension brought about by a racially-oriented political landscape that would eventually culminate in the racial riots of 1969 (see Comber 1983). In this chapter, I draw attention to a less violent decolonising ‘battlefield’ that negotiated this new national consciousness: the emerging Malay film industry based in Singapore.

Singapore was a particularly diverse and lucrative centre of entertainment, art and literature and attracted many intellectual and creative Malays from the rest of the Peninsula:

Singapore was part of the Malay world, but it was radically different from any part of the Peninsula as it was a British colony and a strategic military base for the British. The port city was attractive to many Malays who sought employment as well as an environment that was less restrictive than those under the Emergency laws enforced in wider Malaya. (Muthalib 2009, 50)

Thus, Singapore in the 1950s was a cosmopolitan hub for the creative and intellectual advancement of Malays and for nascent ideas about Malay culture and nationhood. The creative industries such as print, film and music were fertile arenas for the articulation of Malay nationalist ideas. Young Malay men² in Singapore whose ideas permeated film scripts were part of an activist community that ‘promoted the ideal of an iconic Malay nationalist... who honoured traditions while embracing the possibilities of a rapidly changing nation’ while being ‘squarely rooted in the Malay community... rarely’ considering ‘the larger multi-ethnic nation, or at most’ reactionary to such diversity (Barnard 2009, 71). Malays were an ethnic minority in the Chinese-majority population of Singapore; ironically, it was this relative position of marginality that provided a creative space for voicing the Malay-majority politics of the entire Malay Peninsula. This creative

² I must emphasise here that all of the main creative agents in the Malay film industry were men with the exception of the popular film star Menado, who did not write for films but would eventually own her film production company, and another popular actress and singer, Siput Sarawak, who wrote the script for *Mata Syaitan (Devil's Eye)*, 1962, dir. Hussein Haniff) (see Barnard 2002, 128, 33).

space for the articulation of nascent Malay nationalism was also limited to the commercial context of a film industry absent of direct state control but nonetheless subject to strict British censorship.³

Despite the communal political orientation of some Malay activists, Singapore was a vibrant space for the convergence and interaction of people, cultures and ideas from all over Asia, Europe and the Americas. Thus, when reading the social narratives of Malay cultural practices and productions from Singapore, we must consider the plural interactions of these diverse cultural perspectives as a key element of their cosmopolitanism. Ideas of Malay nationhood and decolonisation expressed through music and narratives via the Singapore film industry were undoubtedly shaped by plural and mixed creative practices in a cosmopolitan environment (see Barnard & Van der Putten 2008; Kahn 2006). While there were latent tensions between the Peninsula's ethnic communities there were also economies of integration and cooperation that reflected the ideal of Malayan multiculturalism. The Malay film industry in the 1950s, for example, was financed by Chinese businessmen, operated by a combination of Indian, Chinese and Malay technical staff, helmed largely by Indian directors and showcased Malays as musical performers, composers and actors (see Barnard 2002, 128). This apparently pluralistic vision of inter-ethnic collaboration must be tempered by the fact that these films were made for a Malay vernacular audience. Viewed from the audience's perspective, the films presented an exclusive ethnic space for the articulation of Malay nationhood. Its vernacular frames spoke to the hopes and aspirations of its Malay-speaking consumers⁴; however, these articulation of Malay nationalism was still mediated by the presence of multi-ethnic and transnational agents.

The Malay films of the 1950s reflected the disjunctures of postcolonial nationalist ideals that were toned down or subtly expressed within the commercial confines of a profit-oriented industry and stringent British censorship (see Muthalib 2009, 53). Barnard (2009) observes that a great number of Malay film-makers in Singapore were activists 'who promoted a modern, individualistic outlook' (66); however, this also coincided with the reality that they worked for profit-oriented businesses, which constrained their creativity to market-driven goals (68). These limitations, I suggest, contributed to many of the ideological disjunctures inherent in the political narratives of such films. Such disjunctures are also observed as an 'ambivalence' in the social messages expressed by film directors

³ For more on Malaysian state-sponsored films and censorship, specifically of the British-initiated Malayan Film Unit see Muthalib (2009, 2011).

⁴ Beyond this mono-cultural appeal there were Malay films of the period that were successfully received by a multiethnic audience in Malaya; particularly popular across communities was the horror genre, notably the Malay films *Pontianak (Vampire, 1957)* and *Sumpah Pontianak (Curse of the Vampire, 1958)* (Barnard 2002, 129-30).

and writers with regards to the ‘feelings that Malays were experiencing during the 1950s’ in the wake of increasing urban migration and changing lifestyles that departed from Malay rural practices and values (Paseng Barnard & Barnard 2002, 21; Muthalib 2009: 51). This is further complicated by the observation that the Japanese occupation of Malaya had made an impact on local film-making, particularly in comedic genres, ‘narrative style and cinematography’ (White 1997). P. Ramlee famously even received his musical education as a cadet at a Japanese naval school in Penang during the war (Mohd. Raman Daud 2002, 119).⁵

These socio-historical ‘ambivalences’ and disjunctures in the Malay film industry paradoxically contributed to the conditions that allowed for instances of creative agency in the films and music analysed in this chapter. Considering the disjunctures between Malay ethno-nationalism and a commercial film industry, a cosmopolitan milieu of production and creative agency was still able to emerge from structural limitations; thus, providing a context for a nuanced interpretation of music and nation-making in Malay films.

While an ethno-nationalist ‘ideal’ was embedded in Malay film narratives, the music contained in these films, by contrast, was modern, hybrid, and in many instances aesthetically Western-European. This musical aesthetic resonated with the modern-nationalistic content of the films’ narratives. However, such music was also reflective of a period of decolonisation represented by the commercial production of vernacular films for a mass-consumed entertainment market. Thus, films like *Hang Tuah* set in pre-colonial times could contain covert anti-colonial ideas in the guise of criticising pre-colonial Malay feudalism. By contrast, a film like *Sergeant Hassan* that negatively depicts the period of the Japanese occupation in Malaya expresses British political ideology and more covertly, anti-communist propaganda.

Reinventing the Past: *Hang Tuah* (1956)

The Malay historical epic, *Hang Tuah*, provided Malay audiences with a complex script for postcolonial nationhood. Set in an idealised pre-colonial past, the film anticipated the approaching national formation of the Federation of Malaysia in the mid-1950s. The semi-mythical legend of *Hang Tuah* is a ‘classical’ or pre-colonial Malay epic that depicts an admiral (*Laksamana*) of the Melaka Sultanate in the 15th Century. Early accounts of the admiral’s exploits are found in the pre-colonial Malay chronicles the *Hikayat Hang Tuah*

⁵ This is particularly ironic, as I will be analysing later in this chapter, the film *Sarjan Hassan*, in which Ramlee portrays a World War Two soldier that fights against the Japanese army in Malaya.

(*The Romance of Hang Tuah*) and the *Sejarah Melayu (Malay Annals)*.⁶ These court-produced texts were ‘highly respected receptacles if not sacred objects’ that were instrumental in validating the authority of the Malay monarchy (Van der Putten & Barnard 2007, 257). The British in their development of vernacular education syllabi for Malays favoured using these texts because they underscore Hang Tuah’s fealty to his king and such values, of unquestioning loyalty to one’s ruler, were easily transferrable to the project of instilling Malay support of the colonial administration (Ibid; also see Proudfoot 1993, 16). As such, these texts were two of the first British publications in the Malay language, valued for their ‘clear and simple’ use of Malay unencumbered by ‘Arabic loan-words, and therefore in line with nineteenth-century Western ideals of a “pure” original language which was important for Western understandings of a Malay “nation”’ (Van der Putten & Barnard, 258). The Hang Tuah story blossomed in popularity among the Malay-speaking population during the postwar period with a proliferation of *bangsawan* plays,⁷ literature, comic-books, dramatic stage acts and film⁸ (Ibid, 246). I am particularly interested here in how music was used in the Shaw Brothers’ large-budget cinematic production of the story.⁹

Musically Reinventing Melaka

During the opening credits of the film, a percussive Malay rhythm on *rebana* drums is heard followed by an unaccompanied solo voice singing in a Malay *syair* style (**Example 3.1**). Malay film audiences of the 1950s would have recognised the unmistakable voice of P. Ramlee, the star of the film and, by then, a prominent singing and acting icon of the Malay entertainment industry. More importantly, this musical presentation immediately signals for a Malay audience a pre-colonial setting for the narrative. The Malay *syair* is a poetic form of storytelling structured in four-lined verses and is sung in a melodic pattern using Arabic *maqam* or modes that are used in Quranic recitation (Matusky & Tan 2004, 77, 265). *Syair* singing and verse structures are present in Malay music styles like *ghazal* (Matusky & Tan, 353) and incorporated aesthetically and textually to represent ‘Malay

⁶ Its original title was *Sulalatus Salatin* edited and compiled by Tun Sri Lanang in 1612 and was initially translated to English by John Leyden as *The Malay Annals* with an introduction by Stamford Raffles (2012 [1821]).

⁷ The early nineteenth century prior to World War Two also saw adaptations of the *Hang Tuah* narrative in *bangsawan* plays (see Tan 1993 and Rahmah Bujang 1975).

⁸ Two of the notable films regarding the *Hang Tuah* are Majumdar’s *Hang Tuah* (1956) produced by the Shaw Brothers’ Malay Film Productions and the more daring adaptation, *Hang Jebat* (1961)

⁹ Far exceeding the standard cost of a typical Malay film production (below \$30,000) the total cost of the production was \$300,000 - at the time one Malayan ringgit was equal to 14 British pence (Van der Putten and Barnard 2007, supra note 15).

elements' in *bangsawan* music (Matusky & Tan, 77).¹⁰ Hijjas (2011) notes the pervasiveness of the Malay *syair* in the nineteenth-century Malay world as a poetic and narrative structure 'used not only for religious but romantic allegories... reportage... and romantic narratives of all kinds'; while the connection between *syair* and music may be discerned from the 'teasing songs performed by *biduan*, or female court singers... in *Hikayat Hang Tuah*' and descriptions in the *Sejarah Melayu* of *syair* in musical contexts (4-5, supra note 12 and 13, 276-277). Thus, the use of *syair* at the beginning of the film evokes an aesthetic of 'Malayness' that audibly signifies a premodern Malay past to set the tone for the film's 'historical' narrative. This musical device is simultaneously a narrative, historical and ethnic marker. Despite the complex history of the *syair*, notably its popularity as an oral and written form during a period of Western colonial contact with the Malay world in the nineteenth century and its adaptation to modern forms of entertainment in the twentieth, its use here sonically frames the film as a distinctly pre-colonial Malay story. In addition to this musical-historical placement a Malay nationalist tenor is articulated in the glorification of the Melaka Sultanate (see Appendix A.1).

The opening song that details the 'greatness' of Melaka connects the sentiments of 1950s Malay nationalism to a pre-colonial past in which a traceably and discrete Malay – or more specifically, *Melayu* – ethnicity centered on specific histories of kingship. Such a sentiment is clearly articulated in the third verse that espouses Melaka as the 'well-known' Malay 'state of origin'. In tracing the origins of the ethnic concept of *Melayu*, Reid (2004) highlights the significance of royal lineages traced historically to ambiguous associations with the Srivijaya Empire in the seventh century up to the clearer identifications of *Melayu* culture with the sixteenth-century Melaka Empire (3-8). Indeed, it is the conception of Melaka as a 'polity of substance' that acts as the source for a cohesive Malay identity from the sixteenth century to the present in the form of literary and filmic adaptations of history as an 'inspiration for modern state builders'¹¹ (Milner 2008, 47). While Melaka was a Malay polity of note, there were also many other Sultanates associated with the Malay world that were similar 'in their mode of living, their language and literature, their state rituals and titular systems, and the particular logic of their political and cultural systems'

¹⁰ I note in the second chapter of this thesis the transference of *bangsawan* (Malay opera) musical practices to Malay films.

¹¹ Malay films drew from a genre of *bangsawan* plays that were Malay historical stories based on pre-colonial Malay texts. See Tan (1993b) for more information. Some prominent Malay films aside from *Hang Tuah* that were of this historical genre include *Semerah Padi* (1956, dir P. Ramlee), *Hang Jebat* (1961, dir. Hussein Haniff), *Raja Bersiong (Vampire King)*, 1968, dir. Jamil Sulong).

(Milner, 49).¹² Milner asserts that a unifying factor in the concept of Malayness lies in the ‘civilizational logic’ of the ‘*kerajaan* system’, in which the ‘sultan or the raja’ was the highest authority in a hierarchy of ranked subjects to which the monarch had a reciprocal relationship: the more *rakyat* (subjects) in his polity, the more power and prestige he was bestowed (66). What makes this unitary system more complex is that many discrete cultural polities existed in a networked but feudalistic space of *kerajaans* (kingdoms). While these were fluidly linked identities, the shared cultural characteristics that encompassed an affiliation with a Malay monarch would form the basis of greater ethnic homogenisation through colonial European as well as local understandings of race. Thus, the song, “Melaka” on a textual, conceptual and historical level relates a message of emerging nationalism that could galvanise a conception of a unified Malay race in a period of decolonisation.

The unaccompanied solo vocal theme is then ‘transformed’ into a *dikir barat* in the second verse with the added accompaniment of a percussive ensemble and a chorus of men and women that sing in response to Ramlee’s solo verses. The *dikir barat*, largely popular in the northern states of Peninsular Malaysia (including Penang, where Ramlee was born and raised) involves solo lines sung by a lead singer (*Tok Juara*) that is responded to by a chorus of ten to fifteen singers (*awok-awok*) accompanied by a percussive ensemble consisting of a mixed assortment of a *rebana* frame drums, a *gedumbak* drum, maracas and a *tetawak* or *canang* gong (Matusky & Tan 2004, 355-364). Here, we see the influences of two normally separate Malay music styles converging in a manner that could be construed as “inauthentic” or “cosmopolitan” depending upon one’s viewpoint. I observe this with no intention to question musical ‘authenticity’ but rather to note how different styles may be merged creatively in the commercial context of film music to intensify ‘Malay’ aesthetic signifiers. I argue that it is the commercial context of Malay film music production that facilitates this musical intermingling of styles. The purpose of the music was not to be historically accurate but to be referential of a pre-colonial Malayness while at the same time providing lively musical entertainment for its cosmopolitan audience. This convergence of styles for a film theme indicates at once the commercial context of film music as well as the ethno-nationalist message that underscores the film.

The history of the film’s production, however, taking into account the diverse range of individuals involved, reveals a more complex account of cosmopolitan interaction and commercial production goals than a simplistic reading of it as “ethno-nationalist”. Much criticism was levelled at the film by activists from the Malay community. Mahmud Ahmad,

¹² These *other* sultanates include ‘Brunei in north Borneo, Patani in present-day southern Thailand, Aru and Siak in eastern Sumatra and Melaka’s successor polity, Johor’ (Milner 2008, 47).

one of the Malay cultural advisors to the film, unhappy with his limited input and meagre remuneration, was critical of the ‘vibrant’ and thus inauthentic colours of the film’s costumes (Van der Putten & Barnard 2007, 262-263). More so, he found the ‘inordinate amount of input’ by the British author of the script, Mubin Sheppard, troubling and was further exasperated by the use of English at the meetings he attended, interpreting this ‘as a tool of colonial oppression’ (Van der Putten & Barnard, 262). Other critics expressed weariness with an Indian director helming the production, dissatisfaction with the ‘simplification’ of the complex narrative, and opposition to the portrayal of a ‘singing Hang Tuah’ insofar as it made the film ‘too Indian’ (Van der Putten & Barnard, 263, citing Harding and Ahmad 2011, 72)¹³. Despite the film’s commercial success, it did not appeal to all Malays invested in a postcolonial conception of Malay nationalism.

These critical opinions reveal the anti-colonial political discourse that concerned Malay activists at the time. Ironically, the narrative of the film actually aligns with such anti-colonial critique in its departure from classic Malay themes of loyalty to the monarch, thereby suggesting ideas of self-determination and resistance to autocratic rule. Despite the criticisms levelled at the film after its release, I would suggest the film be read as an appeal to modern Malay nationalist sentiments in its articulation of a critique of feudalistic and colonial rule. The contradictory responses and readings solicited from the film could be explained as reflective of the social ‘ambivalence’ and anxieties that the Malay community felt in the midst of political uncertainty and rapid urban-migration and modernisation (Paseng Barnard & Barnard 2002). The music contained in the film however, depicts less ambivalence than is revealed in the film's social and narrative contexts. Beneath this textual ambivalence, from the outset of the film I identify an overtly masculine and Malay ethno-nationalist agenda in the film’s music.

In *Hang Tuah’s* historical-commercial narrative of a pre-colonial Malay past I am interested in tracing musical meaning with regard to the complex conditions of authorship and production. While the musical content of *Hang Tuah* reflects the commercial-cosmopolitan constraints of the film’s production, it also reveals a vernacular authorship; a fashioning of national identity in a ‘rooted cosmopolitan’ framework (Tan 2013). In the authorship and production of the film, music was the only domain that was helmed by Malays – the songs of the film were composed and performed by P. Ramlee. In considering the authorship of the film’s narrative, further complexities arise. The scriptwriter Mubin Sheppard, a British colonial administrator who had immersed himself in Malay culture and converted to Islam, authored an adaptation and translation of the *Hikayat Hang Tuah*

¹³ Adding to the film’s questionable authenticity to Malay culture are a western story-book style opening credit sequence and the use of the end-title, ‘The End’.

(*Romance of Hang Tuah*) that formed the basis of the film's script.¹⁴ The directorship of the film was awarded to the Indian national, Phani Majumdar who had a track record of directing films with postcolonial nationalist themes in his home country (Van der Putten & Barnard, 261).¹⁵ Hence, the production context of *Hang Tuah* was representative of the cosmopolitan interactions of locals with foreigners, but more so, foreigners that were sympathetic to the cultures and political concerns of locals during a period of rapid decolonisation in the British colonies. All these complex interactions and relationships between individuals of different ethnicities, nationalities and motivations saliently reflects the cosmopolitan idealism and nascent ethno-nationalist contestations that fuelled the film's production.

In examining music in Malay films during this period of decolonisation produced in such multi-ethnic conditions, Malay agency is thus most evident in the music, and in musical moments that signal a modern sense of Malay citizenship. The musical moments in *Hang Tuah* that best represent such agential musical articulations relate the ambivalences of citizenship in mid-1950s Malaya. Two key examples are the song, "*Berkorban Apa Saja* (To Sacrifice Anything At All)"; and a recurring melody or leitmotif sung by Tuah and Melur (Saadiah), an aboriginal woman and love interest of Tuah. The traces of modernity that contrast with the film's pre-modern setting are also found in the dance sequence of the "*Joget Pahang*" song.

Dance of Deception, Song of Sacrifice

Musical performances wedded to the film's narrative occur in the second act of the film. It is interesting to note that all of the film song performances (ie. songs vocally performed by Ramlee on screen) occur during Hang Tuah's excursion in Pahang, where he is given the task of courting the daughter of Pahang's *Bendahara* (a viceroy or representative of a Sultan that oversees multiple provinces), Tun Tijah (Zaiton), for the Sultan of Melaka. This section of the film contains the song and dance sequence of "*Joget Pahang*" and two performances of the ballad, "*Berkorban Apa Saja*". The narrative context of the latter

¹⁴ Mubin Sheppard's involvement with documenting and eventually adopting Malay culture is especially interesting. Having arrived in Malaya in the late 1920s, he stayed on through the Japanese Occupation of the Second World War and past Malaysian independence to eventually become a Malaysian citizen and converting to Islam (see Sheppard 1979). His documentation of Malay culture culminated in a series of publications on Malay customs and cultural practices, including music and the arts (Sheppard 1983; 1978; 1972; 1959). A complete bibliography of his publications on the Malaysia is listed in Barlow (1995).

¹⁵ Phani Majumdar was brought from India to re-organise Shaw Brothers' MFP studio to maximise its output efficiency. He proved this in his efficient and rapid completion of the shooting for *Hang Tuah* in 28 days (Kanda 1995, 48).

portrays Hang Tuah in his first moment of self-doubt, the first instance in which he questions his actions – though not his loyalty – in service to the desires of his monarch.

This section of the film is initiated when the Sultan of Melaka declares his interest in marrying Tun Tjihah, the princess of the kingdom of Pahang. Unfortunately for the Sultan, she is already betrothed to a prince from another kingdom. Without receiving direct orders, Tuah decides to take matters into his own hands by ‘claiming’ Tun Tjihah for his Sultan. He embarks for the kingdom of Pahang and upon his arrival gains the trust of the *Bendahara* of Pahang by declaring that he has defected from the Melaka court. The *Bendahara* of Pahang who has a strained relationship with Melaka is thrilled to have the famous warrior in his court and welcomes him with open arms. Immediately, Hang Tuah is seen adapting himself to the Pahang court, immersed in the singing and dancing of the song, “*Joget Pahang*” (**Example 3.2**). It is an upbeat performance that sees Tuah dancing and singing jovially with Tun Tjihah’s brother and other men of the Pahang court. Outside of the room in which the mens’ merriment is taking place the princess and her female entourage watch with curiosity and interest. Tjihah is immediately attracted to the famous Hang Tuah.

This musical interlude embedded in the narrative represents an interesting case of an appropriation of a post-colonial song genre – a modern *joget* - for a pre-colonial setting in Malay film. The ‘modern’ *joget* used in the film is a style that developed in *ronggeng* ensembles and *bangsawan* theatre after western colonial contact in the Malay Peninsula (see Tan 2005). This was possibly a reference to the courtly *joget gamelan* that has origins in the Pahang court of the early twentieth century, but which is markedly different in musical style and dance from the form presented in the film (see Matusky & Tan, 108-9; Sheppard 1983, 1-16). The earliest documentation of *joget gamelan* situates its performance in the Riau-Lingga royal courts of the eighteenth century (Matusky & Tan, 108). Then, through a royal marriage between Riau-Lingga and Pahang, court dancers and the accompanying Javanese-gamelan ensemble and instruments were transported to the court at Pahang, where it developed further during the midnineteenth century and was known as the ‘*gamelan Pahang* or *joget Pahang*’ (Ibid). The divergence from the Javanese-style gamelan accompaniment only occurred after the *joget gamelan*’s development in the Terengganu courts – brought there through another royal marriage – in the early twentieth century (Matusky & Tan, 108-9). While the title of the film’s song, “*Joget Pahang*” appropriately reflects the function and context of such courtly music, which was used for celebrations that ranged from ‘the crowning of a new sultan’ to welcoming and honouring ‘official state visitors’, *Hang Tuah*’s music and dance sequence in no way approximates the real practice of Javanese-style *gamelan* accompaniment and female court dancers (Matusky & Tan, 109, citing D’Cruz 1982). Neither does the chronology correlate with the fifteenth-

century setting of the film; the *joget gamelan* dance is displaced by about five centuries! This musical-historical displacement and conflation of the *joget gamelan* or *joget Pahang* with modern joget betray the 1950s Malay film industry's commercial goals and the attendant limitations of historical verisimilitude.¹⁶ The Malay past was creatively being reinvented through the unintended misrepresentation of Malay music and dance on the silver screen.

The “*Joget Pahang*” song written and performed by Ramlee (with lyrics by Jamil Sulong) served an explicit commercial purpose in the film to provide entertainment to its vernacular audience, showcasing P. Ramlee as a ‘singing Hang Tuah’, while narratively linking the popular Pahang-titled song to the pre-colonial Pahang kingdom in the film (see Van der Putten & Barnard, 263; Harding and Ahmad, 72).¹⁷ I argue that the performance may be read as a *dance of deception* on two levels: firstly, in its narrative context it is portrayed as Hang Tuah's deception of the Pahang court and secondly, in the film's historical misrepresentation of a post-colonial *joget* style to depict a pre-colonial setting.

The historical-musical ‘error’ is mainly interesting for what such a musical conflation reveals about the active fashioning of a “timeless” conception of Malay nation-hood through music strategically employed. Ramlee and Jamil Sulong penned a ‘pre-colonial’ musical theme for Pahang that resonated with the popular music taste of a mid-1950s Malay audience. Thus, what is evident in this song is its appeal to a Malay audience via a commercial cosmopolitan and ethno-nationalist narrative; at once presenting a grand-narrative of a Malay national hero in a timeless Malay cultural space while appealing to the then contemporary tastes of Malay popular music consumers. Shaw Brothers' MFP employee and film song composer, Kassim Masdor, stresses that it was the ‘commercial appeal’ and singability (*mudah dinyanyikan*) of MFP film music that contributed to the company's success (1999, Reel 6; 2013). This ‘commercial appeal’ of Ramlee's music can be seen as a form of cosmopolitan ‘deception’ as well. Maier's article (1997) on the inherent heterogeneity of Hang Tuah as evidenced in a detailed reading of historical texts

¹⁶ The choreographical and musical displacement of the “*Joget Pahang*” scene could be due to a number of converging factors. The choreographer, Devdatta Jetley may not have been familiar with traditional Malay dance as is evident in the exoticised or stylised choreography throughout the film. The music of modern joget was also more suited to showcase Ramlee's composition and singing. Moreover, considering the haste at which the production was made (28 days) and limited involvement of Malay cultural advisors (as I have noted above of Mahmud Ahmad's complaints) it is no surprise that the musical and choreographical content was produced with a consideration for efficiency and popular appeal. What is curious is the absent input of the script-writer, Mubin Sheppard who was quite attuned to traditional Malay music and dance as evidenced in his book chapter on *joget Pahang* (1983, 1-16). Perhaps Sheppard had not refined his knowledge on traditional Malay dances in 1956.

¹⁷ As I mentioned above, Harding & Ahmad point out how critics of the film lamented the overt Indian film influences that permeated *Hang Tuah*, resulting in a singing and dancing hero.

reveals that the hero's cultural identity was extremely fluid, if not 'hybrid' and mixed (*kacukan*). Maier notes how 'tradition' is in itself 'deceptive', whereby 'every recitation' and 'every reading' of a traditional text results in 'a difference within a repetition' (696). Ramlee's musical, dancing and singing Hang Tuah embodies this plurality and mutability of Malay culture and his musical articulations in the film, while not concerned with historical accuracy, certainly captured the spirit of the character being represented. Despite the appropriation of Hang Tuah as a Malay-nationalist icon before and after Malaysian independence, any reading or re-reading of the figure will ultimately reveal the cosmopolitan plurality and paradoxes of Malayness.

The historical disjunctures in Tuah's personality are further revealed in the modern representation of his conflicted sense of loyalty to his ruler; something that is unquestioned in pre-filmic representations of Tuah.¹⁸ This questioning of loyalty is articulated strongly in the song, "*Berkorban Apa Saja*" – a song that presents the *double entendre* of sacrifice for love and Tuah's sacrifice of love. After the night of merriment and display of Tuah's musical prowess, he befriends Tun Tjihah's personal maid or *mak inang* (nursemaid) to devise a way to meet with the princess in person. Upon an arranged secret meeting at the maid's home, Tjihah is smitten by Tuah's charm and intelligence as they exchange romantic verses of Malay *pantun* poetry.¹⁹ In classic Malay texts, this was considered a form of flirtation or expression of intimacy that would not cross physical boundaries. At the end of their *pantun* exchanges, Tun Tjihah asks Tuah, 'What is the meaning of love? Can you explain (its meaning)?'²⁰ to which Tuah replies, 'I can, but not with ordinary words.'²¹ Tuah then proceeds to sing the first performance of "*Berkorban Apa Saja*" (**Example 3.3**, Appendix A.2).

Thus, Tuah wins Tjihah's heart by explaining 'love' as one's ability to 'sacrifice' anything for their beloved. After Tjihah leaves satisfied with Tuah's musical answer, Tuah experiences his first moment of self-doubt over his loyalty to the Sultan of Melaka. He echoes the song's title as he asks himself, 'sacrifice anything at all? Could I (really) do that?'²² Then, he catches himself in doubt and reasserts his unquestioning loyalty, 'Perhaps I may never get to love. My love is only for my king and country. But Melur. I can't forget

¹⁸ For instance, Mubin Sheppard's English version of the story (1954), of which the film is based, depicts an unquestioningly loyal figure of Tuah.

¹⁹ The Malay *pantun* is a poetic format of quatrain rhymed verses, usually extemporised in the different social contexts. In romantic encounters, couples will extemporise *pantun* to solicit or gauge each other's mutual feelings or attraction in an indirect manner; essentially, as a courteous form of flirtation. (See Karim 1990, 30; Van der Heide 2002, 182).

²⁰ 'Apakah erti kasih sayang? Bolehkah Tuah terangkan?'

²¹ 'Boleh, tetapi tidak dengan kata biasa'

²² 'Berkorban apa saja. Bolehkah aku berbuat begitu?'

you Melur.²³ His proto-nationalist declaration of loyalty is tempered by thoughts of his ‘true’ love interest as depicted in the film, the ‘*Jakun*’ or *orang asli* (aboriginal) maiden, Melur (Saadiyah). He then sings the “Melur Motif”, which I will discuss further in the following section.

This moment of self-doubt is further amplified in the second performance of the song (**Example 3.4**). When Tuah finally convinces (or deceives) Tijah to elope with him, he reveals his true intentions on their boat journey to Melaka. Upon revealing the devastating truth to Tijah he tells her to eat a magical betel quid (*sirih jampi*) to forever forget her feelings for him. Following this, Tijah, devastated and crying in her cabin sings “*Berkorban Apa Saja*”, now imbued with an alternative meaning from its initial rendition. She is now sacrificing her love for Tuah, to allow him to serve his Sultan’s wishes. As Tijah and Tuah leave behind their ‘false’ romance in Pahang, the song in its second performance diverges from its initial romantic meaning to symbolise Tijah’s sacrifice while questioning the morality of Tuah’s actions. The song foregrounds Tuah’s personal doubts over his unquestioning loyalty to his king at the cost of Tijah’s and his own happiness. Moreover, it places Tijah, as a woman of the court, in sacrificial servitude to the desires of men in power; a victim of the autocratic patriarchal state. She is unable to escape an arranged marriage and her brief romance with Tuah was merely a deception. In *Hang Tuah* women and feminine inclinations such as romantic love ultimately fall victim to an autocratic patriarchal nationalism. However, the musical portrayal of melodramatic tragedy in Tijah’s despair and Tuah’s ambivalence can also be read as a critique of that deterministic patriarchy. In line with these intertextual disjunctures I argue that the song is a motif of feudalistic and colonial critique, one that may be heard in light of a period of nascent nationhood in late-1950s Malaya; a period of resistance to feudalistic practices and colonial rule.²⁴

The Melur Motif

The most interesting use of a musical motif in *Hang Tuah* centres around the hero’s love interest, Melur. Melur is presented in very musical ways and her character and relationship to the main protagonist loudly articulate the anti-feudalistic and anti-colonial critique

²³ ‘*Barang kali aku tidak boleh bercinta. Cintaku hanya kepada rajaku dan tanah airku sahaja. Tetapi Melur. Aku tak dapat melupakan kau Melur.*’

²⁴ It must be noted that of the *bangsawan* adaptations of the *Hang Tuah* story from 1914 to 1956 that preceded to the film, the motif of love was only present in one adaptation, “*Cinta di negara Hang Tuah* (Love in the land of Hang Tuah)” as listed by Rahmah Bujang (1975, appendix D). Van der Putten and Barnard postulate that the above mentioned play may have depicted the story of Tun Tijah similarly portrayed in Majumdar’s film (259).

embedded in the film's narrative. Unfortunately, Melur also embodies the role of the ill-fated and eroticised 'celluloid maiden', similarly observed in Marubbio's (2006) study of the Native American heroine in Hollywood cinema, who 'enables, helps, loves, or aligns herself with a white European American colonizer and dies as a result of that choice' (ix).²⁵ Indeed, Melur mirrors this neocolonial American archetype of the sacrificial internal other translated to a masculine Malay nationalist discourse. In the film, Melur, is a Melakan girl who is kidnapped by an aboriginal tribe. She becomes Hang Tuah's enduring love interest throughout the film but dies when she kills a corrupt Melaka court official in her attempt to exact revenge for Tuah's presumed execution. While her character represents the feminine and affectionate side of Tuah's sensibilities – in contrast to his masculine and martial patriotism – she sacrifices herself violently in parallel to Hang Tuah's sacrifice of love for nationalistic duty. Melur's death has been viewed as secondary if not inconsequential to the death of Hang Jebat who dies at the hands of Tuah for violently revolting against the Sultan of Melaka (Van der Heide 2002, 180). However, I argue that the relevance of her death to Hang Tuah's ambivalence is far from inconsequential; Melur's character anchors the narrative and Tuah's sense of morality as the film's 'throbbing emotional heart' (Muhammad 2010, 102). Beyond all the violence, death and sacrifice however, a rejection of blind patriotism is offered in the musical text of the film and Melur's character and musical articulations in the film's narrative resonate with ideas of postcolonial conceptions of ethno-nationalism and resistance (however futile) to repressive feudalistic or colonial regimes.

She is first seen standing beside the mysterious martial-arts master, Adi Putra of Gunung Ledang (Ledang Mountain), as he watches through his magical fire Hang Tuah and his companions scaling the mountain to seek his instruction in advanced *silat* fighting techniques.²⁶ Melur is then seen again and introduced more prominently as a lead dancer in an exoticised dance of a 'Jakun' or aboriginal tribe.²⁷ It is learned later that Melur was actually a child of Melaka that was kidnapped and raised by the tribe. Tuah stumbles upon this dance in his search for food and is saved from being shot with a poisonous blowpipe by Melur who vouches for him to her tribe members; thereby initiating the ill-fated relationship between Tuah and Melur. While Tuah is an outsider to the musical practices of

²⁵ Much has been written about the ill-fated and exoticised heroine in European opera. The orientalist and sacrificial representation of female opera characters from Bizet's *Carmen* and Delibes' *Lakme* are discussed at length in these studies: Locke (1991, 1998, 2009), McClary (1992), Parakilas (1993), Scott (1998), Kertesz & Christofordis (2009).

²⁶ A useful anthropological study of *silat* martial arts practices in Malay culture may be found in Rashid (1990, 64-95).

²⁷ The dances were choreographed by a Singaporean-based classical Indian dancer, Devdatta Jetley.

the tribe, Melur, despite being born of the kingdom, is forever an outsider to Melaka and Tuah's sense of duty to his king.

The *Jakun* song and dance sequence is a sensationalised representation of aboriginal people similar to primitivist portrayals in western films of 'tribal' or exotic communities (Van der Heide, 179) (**Example 3.5**). McGraw (2009) observes the dance in this scene as 'suspiciously Hawaiian' indicating the inclination of Malay film-production companies to reproduce representations of 'the generic Pacific/Eastern savage' perpetuated in postwar Hollywood cinema (50). He also rightly notes that the term '*Jakun*' – indicating a specific aboriginal group (*orang asli*) in Peninsular Malaysia – is a reductive term used by Malays to denote all the various *orang asli* communities in the country (49). Slobin (2008a) considers the notion of an 'assumed vernacular' in American film music practices since the 1930s that assigned generic music for 'tribal' or 'savage' people depicted on screen (6, also see [McGraw 2009, 50]). Applied to denote any exotic or savage group ranging from Hawaiian islanders to African tribes to Native Americans, such generic 'assumed vernacular' music was characterised by a mixture of monotonous or complex drumming and pentatonicism, in contrast to the use of symphonic arrangements and chromatic melodies for (white) protagonists and familiar or non-threatening locations or cultures (Slobin 2008a, 7, 11-15). I suggest Slobin's notion of the 'Steiner superculture' of film music practices in portrayals of cultural alterity applies in my analysis of the *Jakun* music scene in *Hang Tuah* (3).²⁸ Despite the Malay film industry not being located in the West and using music composed by local Malays, the cosmopolitan and commercial practices of film music in the Malay film industry possessed considerable potential to reproduce through similar sonic means western-colonial notions of the national-ethnic-self as mutually constitutive of the nationless-exotic-other. Moreover, Slobin also considers how in American films, 'African and Native Americans' occupy the representational space of 'internal Others that could be generalized and... "profiled"' (13). In the Malay ethno-national film context, Melur and the 'Jakun' tribe are likewise portrayed as *internal others* in relation to the historical Malay nationalist hero archetype embodied in Hang Tuah.²⁹

²⁸ Max Steiner was one of the first Hollywood film composers who was known for incorporating the European symphony orchestra and (post classical era) romantic aesthetics for film music. His aesthetic approach to film scoring has been consistently reproduced by his successors in Hollywood and around the world to this day. Slobin (2008a) analyses the musical 'ethnography' inherent in Steiner's musical representations of non-western peoples in the films *Birds of Paradise* (1932, dir. King Vidor) and *King Kong* (1932, dir. Merian Cooper) (6-17).

²⁹ My views of musical 'othering' is also drawn from views of the same exoticising musical tropes found in western music discussed extensively in Born and Hesmondhalgh's (2000) illuminating edited volume *Western Music and Its Others: Difference, Representation and Appropriation in Music*.

Thus, in line with this musical ‘profiling’ of *orang asli*, I observe how the initial half of the dance and music in this scene represents the imaginary *Jakun* tribe as an internal other by not incorporating any noticeable Malay music styles while providing a visceral and exotic spectacle for the film’s audience. Melur is seen as a lead or featured dancer in front of a group of coordinated dancing girls. The dance is overtly exotic in its choreography with movements that include coordinated spinning, raising and waving of hands, and seductive swaying of hips (Figure 3.1). At one point in the more upbeat second half of the dance, the ‘chorus girls’ stand side-by-side in a line reminiscent of the cancan dance of nineteenth-century Parisian music halls that was then popularised in early-1900s American cabaret dance halls (Figure 3.2).

The music for the dance is characterised by vigorous hand-drumming, melismatic unison singing by a chorus of female and male voices using the syllables ‘ah’ and ‘oh’, and punctuated by unmelodic vocal exclamations of ‘Ha!’ by a responding chorus. In the second half of the song, violins and (what sounds like) an electric guitar accompany the chorus melody, sometimes in unison with the chorus and at times in response to the chorus. The music has an overall diatonic tonality with the exception of a few minor-second intervals. The most telling moment of this diatonicism is heard when the song is ended by a repeated ascending major pentatonic scale sung by the female and male chorus in unison.



Figure 3.1. The Jakun dance featuring Melur (second from right)



Figure 3.2. ‘Cabaret’-styled choreography in the ‘Jakun’ dance

While the presentation of exoticised or primitivising musical tropes is pronounced, traces of actual *orang asli* culture are visually present in this dance scene, as if to underpin the “reality” of what is being shown. Throughout the dance, there is a woman sitting on a ledge playing an instrument that appears to be a *kereb* – a bamboo, plucked, two-stringed ‘heterochordic tube zither’ usually played by women of the Temiar community in Kelantan (Matusky & Tan, 299) (Figure 3.3). Barely visible in the scene, sitting on the ground behind the dancers is a man hitting a bamboo block with a stick. Prominent in *orang asli* music, long bamboo poles, the *ding galung* and *goh* are used in a stamping fashion (Matusky & Tan, 213) – such is not visible in the scene. What the man in the scene appears to be hitting may be closer to *togunggak* or *togunggu* found among the Murut and Kadazan-Dusun communities of Sabah in East Malaysia (Matusky & Tan, 216).



Figure 3.3. Woman playing a *kereb* (third from left)

Thus, on a more prominent level, the music uses western signifiers of exoticism in its representation of otherness; however, I argue that it is also exoticised from the perspective of a Malay-cosmopolitan aesthetic. Urban-based Malay music producers were exoticising an ‘internal’ but unfamiliar local musical culture. Furthermore, the dances were choreographed by the Indian dancer, Devdatta Jetley, who was perhaps more concerned with choreographing exoticism by drawing from familiar Hollywood tropes of assumed vernacular musical representations of non-western cultures (Slobin 2008a, 6) There is limited understanding or reference to *orang asli* musical practices and at most such elements are used in visual representations; the instrumentation of the music remains thoroughly modern and globalised – the hand drums heard are Latin American bongos and congas. The Jakun dance scene presents Melur and the tribe as internalised others; quite literally ‘internal’ as the *orang asli* (aboriginal) communities occupied the interior regions away from the coastal locations of the Malay kingdoms; thus, excluded from the ethno-national space of sovereign and ‘civilised’ Malays such as Hang Tuah. The *Jakun* dance scene is an internally-exoticised representation; the *orang asli* are ‘internal’ to the Malay national space but on the margins of Malayness. It is very interesting that Western representational means are used to exoticise the *orang asli* in this musical moment.

The musical othering of the *Jakun* is further complicated by Melur’s love-connection with Tuah. In many ways, she is portrayed as innocent and genuine in her affection for Tuah and sheltered from the nationalistic sense of duty that deters Tuah from engaging in a

committed relationship with her. Thus, what I will call the “Melur Motif” is sung by both Melur and Tuah throughout the narrative as a signal for the marginality of their relationship. More so, I hear the motif as antipathetic to the blind feudalistic loyalty embodied in Tuah’s actions. However, this reading of resistance in the “Melur Motif” has to be tempered by an understanding of the film as a modern, cosmopolitan and commercial production. The use of a leitmotif is indeed a cosmopolitan construct and can be linked to both Indian and Western film music practices.

The first performance of the motif is sung by Melur and Hang Tuah in the forests of Ledang Mountain in a scene that follows a vigorous *silat* training session in Adi Putra’s cave (**Example 3.6**). It is apparent at this point of the film, that Tuah and his friends have reached the end of their training. Melur begins by singing the melody with lyrics in what may be an *orang asli* language. In figure 2.4 I provide an approximate transcription of the motif sung by Melur in standard western notation using a $\frac{3}{4}$ time signature at 60 beats per minute. This is merely an approximation to indicate the F sharp dorian mode (with raised seventh) of the melody that is accompanied by an accordion (or harmonium) drone on the same root note; while indicating the general contour of the melody. The sung melody has many embellishments and bent pitches and is performed in a free tempo. Therefore, this melody is not a conventional ‘western’ melody by any means; it is more reminiscent of a vaguely Malay traditional folk style of singing in its use of characteristic embellishments that include trills, turns and bent pitches, commonly found in *asli* and *dondang sayang*. However, the dorian mode mixed with a raised seventh is uncommon to traditional Malay vocal genres. The modality heard in this motif contrasts greatly with the *syair* mode heard in opening credits. From a western ‘supercultural’ perspective, the melody has an exotic and haunting quality – overtly marked as ‘foreign’ or external to the other Malay musical themes that underscore the film.

In the scene, Melur’s ‘call’ is then answered by Tuah singing the same motif a minor third above. It appears that the melody is a personal call and response ‘game’ that the two lovers have developed to find each other in the forest of the mountain. After some flirtatious exchanges, the mood of their conversation shifts drastically when Tuah tells Melur that he must leave Gunung Ledang for Melaka the following day. As she cries in dismay, he tells her in a fatalistic tone: ‘but what can I do? My responsibility to my homeland (*tanah air*) beckons’.³⁰ The nationalistic tenor of this statement is also present in *Sergeant Hassan*, the film that will be analysed next. The recurring use of the Malay term, ‘*tanah air*’ is used to denote a sense of obligatory patriotism to a homeland or nation. Thus, the nationalistic discourse of homeland and sacrifice is present intertextually across time in

³⁰ ‘*Tetapi apa boleh buat? Kewajipan tanah air telah memanggil*’

both Malay film narratives. In the World War Two story, the Ramlee-portrayed protagonist also leaves his lover – also played by Saadiah – with a sacrificial sense of duty to his nation. The next day, Melur secretly watches Tuah and his friends leave Ledang Mountain. As the men descend the mountain, the shot focuses on Melur sadly watching her lover leave and singing the “Melur Motif” (**Example 3.7**). Here the motif, reproduced verbatim to its first performance (inclusive of accompanying accordion drone), takes on a different meaning; one of sadness, yearning and, in line with the overarching theme of the narrative, sacrifice.

♩ = 60

Oh... Oh... Ah... Ah

Ee Ku Su Ma Wa Ti Wa... Ku

Ma - ri a - ba - di...

Rin - du ham - ba

Figure 3.4. "Melur Motif"

We hear Melur’s motif again when she enters the city of Melaka in search of Tuah (**Example 3.8**). This happens while a group of court officials who bear animosity towards Tuah are plotting to defame him. One of the officials mentions a rumour that Tuah is ‘crazy’ for an aboriginal girl in Ledang Mountain, using the derogatory term ‘*perempuan darat*’, or woman of the (interior) lands, implying a discriminatory hierarchy of coastal peoples over interior ‘land’ peoples.³¹ Thus, Tuah’s relationship with a low other would be more than enough to put his credentials in disrepute. Just as she is mentioned, Melur’s voice is heard singing the motif. She uses it to call for Tuah just as she did in the mountain. Unfortunately, Tuah is away in Pahang, courting Tun Tijah for the Sultan of Melaka. The

³¹ ‘*Dia gilakan perempuan darat di sana,*’

plotting officials seize an opportunity by interrogating Melur. In her innocence she reveals to them her intention of seeking Hang Tuah. They then ask her to sing for them but she tells them she only sings for 'her Tuah'.³² Infuriated, one of the officials hits her across the face demanding her to sing. Amidst fearful sobs Melur sings the motif again, now aware of her subjugated position. This time, Tuah's friends hear her singing voice from outside the building in which Melur is being interrogated. Despite the officials' attempt to hide her presence, Hang Jebat discovers she is in their custody but is unable to save her. Melur is consequently indentured to serve the court as a courtesan; kept close to Tuah's enemies to be used against him.

Meanwhile, in Pahang, Tuah's romantic deception of Tun Tijah is at its head. Sparked by his false romance with Tijah, Tuah sings the "Melur Motif" in his room in Pahang to express his longing for Melur (**Example 3.9**). He sings it antagonistically to his proclamation of nationalistic duty, further revealing the tension between such notions of selfless loyalty and his personal desires. Here the motif more clearly provides a musical critique of feudalism in the narrative and by extension, could be heard as a questioning of colonial rule in this pivotal period. This aspirational sense of autonomy is then heard again in Tijah's appropriation of the "Melur Motif". She hears Tuah singing the motif from a distance and echoes, in Tuah's key, the last two phrases (bars 5-9 in Figure 2.4). Tijah's performance of the motif, unlike Tuah's, is hopeful – in anticipation of absconding to Melaka and avoiding her dreaded arranged marriage with a Terengganu prince. Thus, the motif is now reflective of an aspiring freedom for Tijah; a hopeful sense of self-determination that she places in her love for Hang Tuah. Intertextually, this hope for an autonomous future also parallels nationalistic movements leading up to Malaysian independence. However, Tijah's articulation of the "Melur Motif" is the last of the film as the hope for freedom is violently quelled in the ensuing sacrificial deaths of the film's key characters.

Resistance in Death

While the hope for Tijah's freedom is crushed, more tragedy ensues for Melur. Upon Hang Tuah's triumphant return from Pahang, he is distraught to learn of Melur being made a courtesan, deeming any personal contact between them illegal and disrespectful to the Sultan's authority; an offense punishable by death. Tuah's enemies devise a way to 'frame' him in front of the Sultan and he is charged accordingly. The sympathetic Prime Minister saves Hang Tuah from execution by secretly hiding him in an undisclosed village. Melur,

³² 'Oh tak boleh. Aku nyanyi untuk Tuahku sahaja,'

believing that Hang Tuah was executed exacts revenge upon one of Tuah's enemies, the Javanese representative from the Majapahit kingdom, Karma Vijaya. She performs a semi-seductive dance for him and a group of court officials incorporating a 'small curved dagger' called a *kerambit* into her dance (Muhammad, 102) (**Example 3.10**). At the climax of her dance, she slices Karma Vijaya's throat, killing him, but is immediately impaled by a palace guard's spear, uttering Tuah's name in her dying breath.

Melur's dance of death articulates multiple representations of otherness or marginalised identities. Given that it demonstrates similar choreography to the *Jakun* dance described above, McGraw suggests that Melur's final dance was adapted from styles performed in Burmese courts (50). He further argues that music and dances in 1950s Malay film that portray external cultures exhibit a supercultural 'tendency towards musical displacements and erasures and the musical leveling of distinct ethnic groups into stereotyped cues' (Ibid). McGraw observes in *Hang Tuah* musical 'displacements' such as the substitution of Johor gamelan for Javanese court music and as I demonstrated earlier, musical 'erasures' in the exoticised aboriginal dance (49-50). The process of othering is also evident in the deaths of individuals that fall outside the bounds of acceptable Malayness. The outsider-Javanese official, Karma Vijaya, was the only court official to die for Tuah's wrongful punishment. Melur, as an exoticised and eroticised internal other also dies violently.

The sacrifice of Melur contributes to Tuah's disenchantment with his role of servitude to the kingdom. The final scene involves the death of Hang Jebat (Ahmad Mahmud), Tuah's best friend. Jebat dies in the hands of Tuah for revolting against the Sultan of Melaka, a gravely treasonous act. The overarching irony is that Jebat did so in retaliation for Tuah's unjust (and presumed) execution. With no one able to subdue him, the Prime Minister reveals his deception to the Sultan and suggests that Tuah be pardoned and summoned to end Jebat's rebellion. Thus, Tuah proves his loyalty to the Sultan, despite his wrongful conviction, and commits the ultimate act of sacrifice by killing his closest and most loyal friend. Tuah is awarded handsomely for his actions but at the end of the film, he is demonstrably remorseful of his actions. As his mother consoles him in his sadness he says,

If I release all my tears for but once, it would not be able to wash away the flow of blood from the bodies of Melur and Jebat. They have sacrificed their lives because of my death. In truth, I was alive.

As he says this, the villagers surrounding his house chant, 'long live Hang Tuah!' and 'long live the admiral!'.³³ He then walks to his window and pensively asks, 'Who was right? Was Jebat right or was I right?'.³⁴

³³ '*Hidup Hang Tuah!*', '*Hidup Laksamana!*'

All these statements in which Tuah questions his absolute sense of duty provides an antithesis to the original historical narrative, making it a ‘revisionist’ account of Hang Tuah, who is commonly depicted as being unfaltering in his loyalty to the Sultan (Van der Heide 2002, 183). More so, *Hang Tuah* becomes a ‘thoughtful modern critique...’ of feudalistic values that ‘continually throws a challenge to its audience’ with its open-ended final quandary. Thus, while characters such as Jebat and Melur who pose a challenge to the status quo are ultimately sacrificed, Tuah in the end embodies the position of an anti-hero, bearing the burden of injustice in his loneliness. The background music in the final scene is sombre, providing ironic counterpoint to the triumphant and patriotic chanting of the village in the background. Thus, in line with the moralistic ‘challenge’ posed in the narrative, the music amplifies for the audience a sense of resistance to blind patriotism and autocracy. If the narrative of *Hang Tuah* can be read as an allegory of resistance, the music embedded throughout it further mobilises the questioning of absolute power during a period of nation-making; reflecting through the reinvented feudalistic Malay myth a process of decolonisation characterised by ‘the slow, fractious, blood-soaked decomposition of the British Empire’ (Gilroy 2011,14).

Projecting the Future: *Sergeant Hassan* (1958)

In contrast to *Hang Tuah*, the film *Sergeant Hassan* (1958), starring P. Ramlee and directed by Lamberto V. Avellana from the Phillipines, articulates a narrative of nascent independence from a perspective that supports British colonial rule. The film, released on 28th August 1958, a year after Malaya had gained independence from the British, is set during World War Two (Ahmad Sarji 1999, 353).³⁵ Its fictional story chronicles the exploits of Hassan, a young man who joins the Malay Regiment just prior to the onset of the war, and sees himself in a heroic position to liberate Malaya from the occupation of Japanese forces.³⁶ The narrative also revolves around the romance of Hassan and his

³⁴ ‘*Siapakah benar? Jebatkah benar atau akukah benar?*’

³⁵ The popularity of World War Two films, globally evident in this period, was perhaps due (but not limited) to the popular acclaim of David Lean’s *A Bridge Over River Kwai* released in 1957. 1958 also saw the release of another Malay film set in World War Two title, *Matahari*, by Filipino director, Ramon A. Estella, starring Maria Menado and produced by Shaw Brothers’ MFP. Some notable British films released in 1958 that are set in the Second World War include *Ice-Cold in Alex* (dir. J. Lee Thompson), *Dunkirk* (dir. Leslie Norman), *Sea of Sand* (dir. Guy Green) and *The Silent Enemy* (dir. William Fairchild). Another notable World War Two film from American film studios from that year is *The Young Lions* (dir. Edward Dmytryk), starring Marlon Brando, Montgomery Clift and Dean Martin.

³⁶ This fictional narrative of a Malay war hero parallels and was most likely inspired by the more gruesome and widely-known exploits of Lieutenant Adnan Saidi, a ‘real-life’ Malay war hero who

childhood friend, Salmah, who patiently waits for him during the Japanese Occupation. The theme of their patient and enduring love underscores the patriotic and militaristic narrative of the film. The first half of the film features the tribulations of Hassan growing up as an orphan, falling in love with Salmah and eventually becoming a Sergeant in the Malay Regiment. The second half of the film is set during the Japanese invasion and occupation of Malaya and involves Hassan fighting in the jungles of the Malay Peninsula as part of a guerrilla resistance force against the Japanese until the end of the war.

In this second part of the chapter, I would like to draw attention to the use of the film's theme song "*Tunggu Sekejap (Wait for Awhile)*" as a leitmotif of decolonisation that projects a future of aspiration and ambivalence for a Malay nation-in-the-making. Unlike most Malay films of the 1950s to 1960s³⁷, there is only one song in this film. However, the song and its melody, composed by P. Ramlee with lyrics by S. Sudarmaji, is utilised and expanded upon creatively at different junctures in the film's narrative. An intertextual reading of the film's music, narrative and historical context suggest that articulations of colonialism, post-colonial independence and nationalism are expressed through a cosmopolitan aesthetic of nation-making. Expanding on my analysis of musical motifs in *Hang Tuah*, I am specifically interested here in how the main melody of the "*Tunggu Sekejap*" song is used throughout the film as a leitmotif of decolonisation to produce a heart-felt ideological sentiment of a nationhood in waiting.

Narrative Utilisation of the Leitmotif

In the following pages, I examine how the "*Tunggu Sekejap*" leitmotif in *Sergeant Hassan* articulates sentiments of nation-making during the period of decolonisation in mid-1950s Singapore and Malaysia (see Figure 3.5). Unlike *Hang Tuah*, the narrative of *Sergeant Hassan* prominently evokes a jingoistic patriotic fervour that is overwhelmingly favourable towards the British colonial administration. As such, I suggest that the overt utilisation of a single theme song throughout the film – uncommon in Malay films that usually contained at least three varying musical numbers – indicates an unusually western aesthetic in the film and its music that aptly resonates with its pro-colonial message. The

died in his fearless and stubborn defence of Singapore during the invasion of Japanese forces (Nureza Ahmad and Nor-Afidah A. Rahman 2005). L. Adnan commanded the C-Company of the Malay Regiment's 1st Battalion, stubbornly defending Pasir Panjang Ridge and Bukit Chandu (Opium Hill). After two days of intense fighting, L. Adnan's forces gave way to Japanese forces and he was executed. His exploits were dramatised in a recent Malaysian film, *Leftenan Adnan* (2000) directed by Aziz M. Osman and starring Hairie Othman.

³⁷ Most Malay films from this era produced by the Shaw Brothers' Malay Film Productions usually included more than three musical numbers. Therefore, this film is exceptional in its limited repertoire. However, I discuss later the two contrasting performances of the same song in the film.

leitmotif of decolonisation in *Sergeant Hassan* thus underpins a conservative vision of Malay nationhood; one that was very favourable towards the capitalist and British-facilitated postcolonial regime and its aversion to radical and Marxist politics.



Figure 3.5. The “*Tunggu Sekejap*” motif developed throughout the film

A leitmotif is a melody, ‘theme, or other coherent musical idea, clearly defined so as to retain its identity if modified on subsequent appearances’, which is used ‘to represent or symbolise a person, object, place, idea, state of mind, supernatural force or any other ingredient in a dramatic work’ (Whittall 2012). The film studied utilises a ‘monothematic’ or ‘theme score’, in which the song “*Tunggu Sekejap*” is used as a leitmotif, ‘arranged as an integral piece of music that is extractable from the score’; however, the theme or song is also ‘varied and repeated in response to the dramatic and emotional needs of the film’ (Kalinak 1992, 185-186). Adorno & Eisler (1947) were pessimistic about the use of the leitmotif in cinema. They viewed its use in film as a far cry from the deeper symbolisms and meanings that could be associated with Wagnerian musical dramas (5) and attributed the leitmotif’s use in film as merely an efficient but unimaginative compositional tool for film scorers under pressure from high volumes of work in a film industry of capitalist mass production (4-6). It is possible that the use of the theme score in *Sergeant Hassan* may be a reflection of the commercial pressures of the Singapore film industry. Films had to be made quickly and on a limited budget. Kalinak (1992), however, believes that the use of classically-influenced film scores inclusive of leitmotifs did not degrade the classical tradition but more so, revealed the ‘force of that structural foundation and the flexibility of its idiom’ (159). Kalinak observes complex uses of the theme score, in which musical themes are varied in tempo, style and instrumentation to ‘clarify and comment’ or even

reinterpret or ‘undercut’ the ‘visual content’ and narrative of a film (170-1). This chapter considers such possibilities for reading social meaning in leitmotifs in its analysis of the interactive relationships between music, narrative and history in *Sergeant Hassan*.

The “*Tunggu Sekejap*” title theme is introduced in the opening credits of *Sergeant Hassan* (**Example 3.11**).³⁸ As is typical of most theme scores, the opening credits are underpinned by an orchestral arrangement of the theme song that operates to present ‘the musical ideas which unify the score’, whereby the theme will eventually be varied in relation to the visual narrative (Kalinak 1992, 186). The first image seen is a close-up of a *songkok*, a traditional Malay headpiece, pinned with a metal badge denoting the formal attire of the Malay Regiment. The opening credits are then superimposed over the *songkok* (Figure 3.6). The music that accompanies the credits opens with an energetic snare drum roll and trumpet fanfare, followed by an upbeat march version of the theme song, effectively evoking a militaristic style and clearly denoting the genre of the war film. In this instance, the style of the theme song in conjunction with the image of formal military headgear also articulates symbols of Malay national pride and military might. The *songkok* is a definitive marker of Malay ethnicity, an image that signals a forthcoming narrative of triumphant Malay nationhood. This ethnic-nationalism is expressed with supercultural western musical conventions; no trace of vernacular Malay music is heard. However, the juxtaposition of western music over the image of a *songkok* suggests a colonial-cosmopolitan version of Malayness. After this opening sequence, the *songkok* is picked up and worn by P. Ramlee and a shot of him from the waist up shows him in formal, non-combat Malay military attire. The protagonist introduces himself as Hassan and begins to tell his story. The moment that Hassan speaks there is no musical score, signalling a brief shift to the ‘present-day’ reality of the film to break with the non-diegetic³⁹ music of the opening credits and to segue into Hassan’s ensuing story.

³⁸ In the film, the Malay Film Productions Studio Orchestra is given screen credits for ‘musical scoring’ with P. Ramlee getting credits for ‘original composition (of) theme: “Tunggu Sekejap”’. No particular person was given credits for orchestration.

³⁹ In film, *diegetic* music is music that can be located ‘with a source visible on screen’ in the film and can be heard by the film’s characters, while *non-diegetic* music is usually not located on screen, ‘heard by the audience but inaudible to the film’s characters’ (Kalinak 2007)



Figure 3.6. Film credits superimposed on a Malay Regiment *songkok*

The “*Tunggu Sekejap*” leitmotif is reintroduced as soon as Sergeant Hassan begins his story, this time in a slower and more melancholic style. As he begins, the camera pans upwards and dissolves to the next scene. Now, the film shows Hassan as a child at the grave of his recently deceased father. In this scene, the musical theme continues in the slower melancholic arrangement. Prominent in the instrumentation is a string section playing the lead melody with a brass accompaniment. The use of the theme score effectively functions to smooth the transition of the story from the ‘present’ to the past. Here, the theme has already established its relationship to the protagonist, Hassan. It is suggested through the two stark variations of the musical theme that Hassan will emerge victorious, but not without some form of hardship, struggle or conflict. All this is conveyed intertextually, through the interaction of music with images, in less than three minutes into the film.

Another aspect of this leitmotif is its association with place. In the first scene, the score is heard at the same time that Hassan’s village and home is introduced. As I have discussed in my introductory chapter, the concept of the *kampung* (village) as the source of Malayness was an important aspect of the nationalist narrative among Malays in postwar Malaya and Singapore. The musical theme, from the outset of the film underscores Hassan’s ‘rootedness’ to the land and village. The theme plays during the image of him planting a tree at his father’s grave until being introduced to his new adoptive father’s home. A sense of self, place and belonging has already been associated with the theme song

within three to four minutes of the film, albeit with a classical-western or supercultural musical approach. The audience does not hear *zapin* music or *rebana* drums to symbolise the Malay village and Malay identity, but lush orchestral arrangements inspired by a European musical tradition.

Clearly articulated in the thematic score to the film's introductory scenes, then, is a utilisation of western or supercultural film-music conventions to support the narrative. Was the use of a western score intended to give the film more emotional weight? Or was the use of western film scoring merely a 'universal' convention that most non-western films utilised? Was the choice of a lush orchestral score intended to signify the sophistication of a newly independent and modern Malaysian nation? As I will show, what is evident is that *Sergeant Hassan* musically articulates a notion of nation-making that is much less subversive than *Hang Tuah*. I suggest that this more passive and conservative approach to nation-making is expressed in the theme of longing and waiting that encapsulates the film and its monothematic score. The "*Tunggu Sekejap*" motif, hence, projects an ambivalent future of postcolonial Malay nationhood that parallels the uncertain and contentious historical period of decolonisation in which it was made.

Musical Projections

A prominent theme articulated by *Sergeant Hassan* and its feature song, "*Tunggu Sekejap*", is that of longing and sacrifice. This is the main theme of the song, in which Hassan leaves his love, Salmah, to join the Malay Regiment in Port Dickson. Salmah is forced to wait for her lover, a sacrifice she must bear while her lover defends his nation, which was, ironically, a British colony. I suggest that a narrative of nationhood is being formed here, in which notions of affection, longing, loyalty and sacrifice feature prominently. The song articulates this theme of nation-making in a less overt manner serving the dual purpose of love song and patriotic anthem. Intimacy is intertwined with national identity; very much a cosmopolitan notion that may have roots in the Malay culture of loyalty to a Sultanate as in *Hang Tuah*. However, unlike *Hang Tuah's* embedded message of anti-colonial resistance, *Sergeant Hassan's* narrative and music articulate a passive idealism towards national identity and intimacy, as the main protagonists wait patiently to be united. This sense of waiting and longing for independence clearly expressed in the film's theme song, parallels the protracted and tumultuous nation-making process in postwar Malaya.

The narrative of nation-making is implicit in the development of the two main protagonists, Salmah and Hassan, who transition visually from childhood to adulthood

within the timeframe of a single performance of “*Tunggu Sekejap*”. The scene where the song is introduced in its entirety shows Salmah as a young girl singing the first verse of the song while hanging laundry outside her house (**Example 3.12**).⁴⁰ She sings the first three lines of the verse but melodically replaces the ‘adult’ lyrics with ‘la’s’ (replaced lyrics in parentheses; Appendix D.1, measures 6-7):

<i>Tunggu sekejap wahai kawan (/kasih),</i>	Wait for awhile my friend (/love),
<i>Kerana hujan masih renyai,</i>	Because the rain is still pouring,
<i>Tunggu sekejap dalam pelukan,</i>	Wait for awhile in an embrace that’s,
<i>la la la la....</i>	la la la la...
<i>(Tunggu sekejap dalam pelukan asmaraku)</i>	(Wait for awhile in my passionate embrace)

The lyrics here are modified from the ‘adult version’ to accommodate Salmah’s innocence as a child. When Salmah sings the ‘la’s’ in place of the adult lyrics, two young boys are shown looking at her cheekily and throw a stone in the water vase that Salmah leans over. A shot of the stone dropping into the rippling water of the vase is shown while a dramatic orchestral interlude is heard that eventually introduces an adult female voice singing a much more ‘mature’ melodic interlude of ‘la’s’ (see Appendix D.1, measures 11-14). The camera pans upwards from the vase to reveal an adult Salmah played by Saadiyah continuing the song:

<i>... Malam ini,</i>	... Tonight,
<i>Belum puas ku bercumbu dengan kanda</i>	I am not satisfied flirting with you,
<i>Sayang...</i>	My love...

She continues to sing the second verse of the song:

(Verse 2)	(Verse 2)
<i>Tunggu sekejap wahai kasih,</i>	Wait for awhile my love,
<i>Tunggulah sampai hujan teduh,</i>	Wait for the rain to subside,
<i>Mari ku dengarkan,</i>	Let me serenade you,
<i>Jangan mengenang orang jauh,</i>	Don’t long for those who are far away
<i>Jangan pulang,</i>	Don’t return (When you return),
<i>Jangan tinggalkan daku seorang</i>	Don’t leave me all by myself,
<i>Tunggu sekejap kasih,</i>	Wait for awhile my love,
<i>Tunggu.</i>	Wait.

⁴⁰ Unfortunately, it is unclear from the film’s credits who played the child version of Salmah. Further research is required to determine the identity of the child actor and singer.

While Salmah sings she is hanging laundry, replacing the scene of her as a child. This time, a shot of Aziz (Jins Shamsuddin), Hassan's step-brother and rival, is shown smiling at her, but she is taken aback and retreats into her house. She closes a window to avert Aziz's stares and turns to another window that frames the now adult, Hassan, standing in a masculine pose with his arms crossed and smilingly at her charmingly. All this occurs while Salmah sings the passage above.

It is evident at this point in the film that Salmah's childhood friendship with Hassan has transformed into an adult romance. Thus, the melodic theme of the song that was initially introduced in the background score has now 'matured' along with the film's protagonists to the foreground of the narrative. Symbolic associations with the theme not only encompass a sense of Hassan's self and place, but also Salmah's, and more importantly, the couple's romance. The musical theme in a very overt way has 'grown up' and 'grown on' the audience, its development signaling positive associations with the leitmotif as the film's narrative progresses. Following this juncture in the film, the "*Tunggu Sekejap*" leitmotif is repeated in the score with a string arrangement to accompany Salmah and Hassan's flirtatious but humorous exchanges. Salmah longs for Hassan to admit his love for her but he awkwardly avoids telling her directly. This signifies that Hassan is still in a liminal stage in his life, as he has yet to find his calling to be a soldier. Regardless, he has already affirmed a sense of where his home and heart reside, and the repeated use of the leitmotif indicates this clearly.

This musical metamorphosis is symbolic of a slow process of a young nation achieving maturity or independence; a conservative and patient approach to independence is implied, unlike the radical questioning of authority implied in *Hang Tuah*. Ideologically embedded in the music is an established sense of self and place and now evoked in the subtext is a sense of love and affection for that place. This articulates a narrative of nation-making, in which conceptions of an autochthonous identity are coupled with a patriotic and unquestioning 'love' for one's country. Thus, through the conventions of supercultural film music, the transformational presentation of the theme song articulates a western musical aesthetic that subdues the possibility of radical or subversive (ie. Communist-Marxist or socialist) notions of nation-making. The local self and sense of belonging is naturalised within the western musical aesthetic of the "*Tunggu Sekejap*" leitmotif.

The final and most complete performance of "*Tunggu Sekejap*" occurs towards the middle of the film, marking the end of the pre-war period leading up to the Japanese Occupation. The song is performed by Hassan after he completes his basic training at the Malay Regiment camp in Port Dickson (**Example 3.13**). Thus, the final performance of this song also signals the complete realisation of Hassan's identity as a man, soldier and dutiful

citizen of the (colonial) Malay nation that he is entrusted to defend. Here, the musical expression of Hassan's militaristic identity suggests the realisation of a postcolonial nation – albeit a passive one subjected to British rule – in the process of being conceived.

Upon receiving the rank of Sergeant, Hassan sends a *selendang* (shawl) to Salmah. In the following scene, Salmah is seen in her room with Minah (Annie Jasmin), and is wearing her new *selendang*. A sole organ is heard in the score playing a monophonic melody. When Minah leaves, a close-up camera shot from behind Salmah shows her holding a photograph to her chest. She lifts the photograph to reveal to the camera, a studio-pose shot of Hassan in army attire (Figure 3.7). Synchronous with this action, the organ plays the theme song melody. Here, the leitmotif is used to recall Hassan's fully-realised identity and Salmah's love for him, but the sparseness in instrumentation suggests the melancholic longing of the two protagonists who are apart from each other. Salmah says longingly, 'Hassan, when will you return to me?'⁴¹ (Figure 3.8).



Figure 3.7. Hassan's Photograph for Salmah

⁴¹ '*Hassan, bilakah kau akan kembali padaku*'



Figure 3.8. Salmah in her new *selendang* (shawl), longingly awaiting Hassan's return

That is followed by an instant cut to a shot of Hassan in t-shirt and *sarong*,⁴² sitting on a bed and strumming an acoustic guitar as he begins to sing, “*Tunggu Sekejap*” (Figure 3.9). He sings the first verse of the song with sparse rubato accompaniment from his guitar (Appendix D.2, measures 1 to 6). It is revealed that he is singing casually in the army barracks in the company of his fellow soldiers. The performance transitions from a diegetic to non-diegetic context towards the second verse, when an orchestral accompaniment is heard in the score overshadowing his sparse guitar playing (Appendix D.2, measure 7 onwards). The accompaniment includes a flute, string section, brass section and piano, arranged in a grandiose style. Congruent with the musical accompaniment that ‘grows’ in texture, so does the crowd of soldiers surrounding Hassan to watch him perform (Figure 3.10). The transition from diegetic to non-diegetic music is particularly significant here in its intensification of the song’s emotional content. The song’s lyrics and form are also heard in its entirety (Appendix A.3; see Appendix D.2 for musical transcription):

This is also the last sung performance of the song in the film, marking the end of the second act that precedes the following war scenes. This performance signifies the full maturation of Hassan’s identity as well as his love for Salmah. The character has now completed the first stage of metamorphosis from passive orphan child to fully fledged soldier-lover. In congruence to Hassan’s identity, the song itself has also been fully

⁴² *Sarongs* are used by Malay men as casual wear or pajamas. In this scene, such dress depicts a leisurely moment in contrast to the westernised military uniforms worn by Hassan in his military training scenes.

realised. Perhaps the climactic performance of this song also marks the last days of innocent love as the ensuing narrative involves the beginning of the Second World War in Malaya and the eventual occupation by the Japanese army. The song is only heard in the (background) score from this point onwards.



Figure 3.9. Hassan performs “*Tunggu Sekejap*” in *sarong* and t-shirt in the army barracks



Figure 3.10. As the orchestration grows, so does Hassan’s audience

While the song does not return as a sung performance, there are two more notable uses of the leitmotif in the film. After a substantial third act of fighting scenes, Hassan narrowly escapes a Japanese prisoner of war camp and is washed up against a riverbank. He is found by a Malay soldier and the British Captain, Holiday, of a British intelligence and resistance outfit. Captain Holiday helps Hassan to his feet and says, ‘Don’t be afraid. You’re among friends. Let me help you’. As Hassan is being helped by the British captain, the leitmotif is heard as a lush string arrangement reminiscent of the first string leitmotif heard when introducing Hassan’s village (**Example 3.14**). Hassan reveals that he is a local to the area and he offers his knowledge of the surrounds to help Holiday’s resistance force.⁴³ One of the last times the theme is heard is toward the end of the film. Hassan recaptures his village and kills the film’s primary villain, Buang (Salleh Kamil), who is a member of the Japanese police (*Kempetai*) (**Example 3.15**). The leitmotif is heard immediately after he kills Buang and makes an overtly nationalist speech proclaiming: ‘Our nation is still young and weak. That does not bother me. My only hope is that we unite as a nation’ (Trans. by Barnard 2009, 65). Then, the leitmotif is reiterated when Salmah comes to embrace him.⁴⁴

In these uses of the theme, strong positive associations are made with Hassan’s sense of home or homeland (*tanah air*). The leitmotif signals his freedom and renewed determination to fight the Japanese. It also marks the end of his patriotic speech, his conclusive union with Salmah and the return to his *kampung*. More importantly, this final iteration of the leitmotif also marks the end of the Japanese Occupation and World War Two; projecting a hopeful future for a Malay-British postwar alliance.

Awaiting Independence

The final performance of the “*Tunggu Sekejap*” song and its culminating melodic development as a leitmotif symbolises the establishment of a firm notion of national identity. The completion of Hassan’s identity as a man parallels the national narrative of Malay consciousness, specifically the ethnic consciousness of a Malay ‘race-nation’; the first step to creating or projecting a tangible nation-state. There is also an overarching theme of longing and waiting in the film, in which the local population of Malaya have to enduringly wait for the Japanese Occupation to end for their British-colonial ‘partners’ to return. While this may be a problematic association, I believe that the ideological affinities

⁴³ Muhammad (2010) notes that Captain Holiday’s group is a reference to the British Force 136 who operated as a resistance force in Japanese-occupied Malaya (144). For more on Force 136 see Tan (1994), Trenowden (1983), Taylor (1989) and Shennan (2007).

⁴⁴ ‘*Memang bangsa kita masih muda dan masih lemah. Aku tak peduli itu semua. Harapanku hanyalah kita sama bangsa bersatu-padulah hendaknya*’.

felt by Malays with the British in the context of World War II and decolonisation are particularly relevant. For example, middle and upper-class Malays (including P. Ramlee) in the 1950s were critiqued for their western affectations including ‘big houses, big cars,... appreciating Beethoven and Picasso, doing their cocktail rounds, and wearing coats and ties in equatorial heat’ in addition to their conservative political stance towards obtaining national autonomy from the British (Harper 2001, 226, cit. Noordin Selat 1978, 56). Thus, Malay culture was quite intertwined with western cultural practices, evidenced further in the vernacular cosmopolitan musical practices that had existed since the turn of the century (see Tan 2013; Keppy 2013).

Towards the end of the film, nationalist associations with the leitmotif become ever clearer. However, a sense of national autonomy apparent in the patriotic tenor of the film is unsettled by its rosy portrayal of colonialism. The British forces and colonial administration are never critiqued. In fact, the British soldiers in the film are revered as kind and friendly superiors. Thus, also emerging from the European conventions of orchestration is a narrative of paternalistic colonialism. This is symbolically poignant as the music of the film, while evoking a sentiment of autonomous Malay-nationalism, was thoroughly western in style and instrumentation, save for its use of the Malay language and Malay protagonists. As I have mentioned earlier in this thesis, the paradox of Malay-nationalism in Singapore and Malaya is that agency was expressed in modern-western terms and mediums. Cosmopolitan aesthetic conceptions however, reflect the paradoxical relationship between local/internal agency and foreign/external modes of aesthetic production. As such, the themes of nation-making and decolonisation apparent in the music of *Sergeant Hassan* evoke the transitory nature of early independence in the Malay Peninsula:

Traditions were to be honoured, but Malays living in an independent Malaya were to be open to a future of debate, complexity and modernity. By the late 1950s, the world of Malay film was promoting a modern outlook, engendering a community open to change. Yet the nation-state remained largely absent from comment on the screen. It was the modern individual, clearly rooted in his or her own ethnic community, which mattered (Barnard 2009, 80).

The transition between colonialism and independence represented a contestation between modernity and tradition. Central to this transition was the subject of the Malay individual in facing these changes while upholding an ethnic rooted-ness. However, change was the constant that was inevitable, and individual agency was at the centre of such change.

The use of the “*Tunggu Sekejap*” leitmotif in *Sergeant Hassan* as a narrative device is an example of a cosmopolitan aesthetic in which conceptions of a local identity embrace a ‘friendly’ foreign power; resulting in a passive decolonisation. The film’s narrative and use of musical devices are relevant to a postcolonial reading in which independence from

colonial rule is subject to a British-sanctioned freedom; specifically, an autonomy that is restrained by the boundaries of western parameters and conditions of nationhood. In *Sergeant Hassan*, independence from Japanese occupation is achieved with the leadership of British commanders. In *Sergeant Hassan's* music, Hassan and Salmah's patient romance is intimated by a thoroughly western approach to film scoring in the form of a monothematic leitmotif. The production of the film itself was helmed by a Filipino director, Lamberto V. Avellana, who gave the film a more American-inspired aesthetic and pace, along with a lush orchestral score atypical of most Malay movies from the period.⁴⁵ As such, a 'universalist' cosmopolitanism is present in the construction here of Malay national identity. In fact, I would argue that the conception of Malaysian and Singaporean nationhood in this movie is thoroughly cosmopolitan. Such a 'universal' conception of statehood is achieved by the film's projection of the universal aspiration to be liberated from the evil and inhumane Axis forces. In this case, the defeat of Japan is the rallying point that ideologically merges subservient local Malay soldiers and villagers with compassionate and determined British forces. A utopian myth of collaboration and goodwill is created to ease the British censors based in Singapore⁴⁶ while inspiring a sense of patriotism among a newly independent Malaysian and Singaporean cinema-going public.

What remains more striking in this intertextual reading is the ambivalence of national belonging. For what allegiance are Salmah and Hassan sacrificing their love? Malaya prior to World War Two was still a colony of the British Empire. Yet, in the film, there is constant mention of loyalty to the *bangsa* (race) and *negara* (nation) with no reference to the (many) Sultanates of the Malay Peninsula – unlike the overt reference to Malay royalty in the film *Hang Tuah*. Thus, *Sergeant Hassan* in multiple ways, both musically and narratively, expresses the ambivalence of decolonisation and a nation-in-the-making. More importantly, "*Tunggu Sekejap*" comes to represent the leitmotif and 'soundtrack' to this historical process. In the same way that it expresses the intimacy between Salmah and Hassan, the song expresses the values of love and sacrifice that are part and parcel of patriotism, albeit for an ambiguous "nation" whose parameters of citizenship or, more specifically, ethno-national belonging had not yet been clearly defined.⁴⁷ For an emerging

⁴⁵ Muhammad notes how *Sergeant Hassan's* 'full orchestration for the music makes it seem more expensive' than other Malay films of the time, particularly in comparison to another Malay film set during the Japanese occupation, *Matahari* (*Sunshine*, 1958, dir. Ramon E. Estella)

⁴⁶ Singapore was not fully independent from British rule until 1965. In addition, Barnard (2009) observes that there was a 'continuing presence of former British civil servants in positions of authority in Singapore and Malaysia... and (this) had been an important issue in the negotiations leading up to political independence' (83).

⁴⁷ It is important to mention here Martin Stokes' (2010) musical study of cultural intimacy and nationhood, in which he observes the importance of sentimentalism and love in Turkish national

nation to truly gain an emotional and ideological independence, the people of Malaysia and Singapore, like Hassan and Salmah, had to *wait for awhile*.

Conclusion

For the increasingly politicised Malay community of the mid-1950s, independence was looming but not firmly at hand – the shadow cast by the British Empire was ever pervasive in matters of forming a new nation. Thus, in considering the nationalist-masculinist narrative of *Hang Tuah*, the women who are sacrificed are objectified reflections of the anxieties and struggles of emerging nationhood. As such, both Tijah and Melur become victims of the patriarchal order and their embodiment of the anxieties of decolonisation are heard in the film's music. However, beyond their death, the songs and musical motifs in *Hang Tuah* greatly amplify a discourse of resistance that is embedded in the film's narrative. This is somewhat unlike the more conventional use of the monothematic leitmotif found in *Sergeant Hassan*, in which the nation is required to submissively 'wait for awhile' for its fully-realised autonomy. I suggest that the passivity of *Sergeant Hassan's* message was a reflection of British anxieties towards decolonisation during a period of mounting resistance in the form of the communist insurgency. As such, the film reflected the need for a strong and positive depiction of the British Empire, something that is evident in the distinctly overt musical structure of the film. As Gilroy (2011) observes, commercial films produced during the twilight of British colonialism had 'the dual significance as a governmental tool for simultaneously "engineering" the consent of domestic forces while maintaining the colonial order and perhaps re-enchanting it for its primary victims overseas' (24). However, just as much as an overarching agenda of re-enchantment was overtly present in British-sanctioned Malay films, narratives of resistance were embedded within the frames of vernacular films and resonated through the musical articulations of the restless colonies. My analysis of music in mid-1950s Malay film has attempted to tune in to the intertextually subversive voices of an aspiring anti-colonial national consciousness that permeated the social spaces of film studios and cinema halls. In analysing *Hang Tuah* and *Sergeant Hassan*, there were divergent ways of reinventing the past and projecting the future. The latter was done with a positive portrayal of colonial rule in defending the new nation against its enemy – the communists – while the former used pre-colonial Malay

discourses and how Turkish musicians, since the 1950s until present day, were crucial in articulating such national discourses of cultural intimacy (1-34).

feudalistic excess as the justification for resisting dominant powers such as European colonialism.

Music in Malay films, despite their commercial frames of production, express ideas of agency in their musical articulations; especially when read intertextually against the films' narratives and historical context. Malays, while marginal in the means of cultural production were able to embed sentiments of self-determination in covert and possibly subconscious ways. Thus, this social agency or resistance in film music was something that echoed the Malay activist sentiments and political tensions that were circulating in 1950s Malaya. This was a period that saw the mass mobilisation of the Malay community against the British-imposed Malayan Union, an encroaching Malayan independence that would, in principle, be authored by locals on ethno-national terms, a rise of class-consciousness and labour movements of the left, and most fractiously, the communist insurgency that resulted in an outpouring of colonial government propaganda and increased autocratic control. While the Malay films of the mid-1950s reflect the cosmopolitan and commercial frames of production of the studio film industry, I contend that an intertextual musical analysis of such films draws out the politics of decolonisation and resistance that could not be articulated on the visual surface of the silver screen.

The radical critique of feudalistic regimes in the Malay world in adaptations of the *Hang Tuah* narrative was propagated more overtly in modern Malay stage plays and films such as *Hang Jebat* (1960, dir. Hussein Haniff); however, I do not discuss the music of this film in the thesis. Instead, I develop my exploration of postcolonial-nationalist critique and ideology in the next chapter by presenting a biographical history of the Malay film composer, Zubir Said, alongside a musical analysis of his music in Hussein Haniff's historical epic, *Dang Anom* (1962). While musical narratives of covert resistance were articulated in mid-1950s Malay films, the late 1950s to early 1960s saw more overt anti-colonial narratives due to the increasing presence of Malay directors in films. This dovetailed with the musical-nationalist ideologies of film composers such as Zubir Said who were inspired by the possibilities of an emerging Malay nation beyond colonial rule. While films like *Hang Tuah* employ a commercial approach to the representation of pre-colonial Malay history, films by Hussein Haniff set in similar eras expressed a more auteurist approach to postcolonial and modernist discourse. Zubir Said's music corroborated Haniff's progressive inclinations by emphasising a distinct aesthetic conception of a nationalised Malay tradition in his film scores.

CHAPTER FOUR

Nationalising Tradition or Traditionalising Nation? The Film Music of Zubir Said (early 1960s)

In 1953, the release of the first Malay film to include original background music by a local composer marked a watershed in the musical history of the Malay Peninsula.¹ That composer was the already prolific *bangsawan* musician, record producer, and film song composer, Zubir Said. Until then, films of the Singapore-based Malay film industry used pre-recorded European orchestral music to save on production costs (Rohana Zubir 2012, 82 & 84, citing Zubir Said 1984, Reel 13). Following his foray into scoring film music, Zubir Said won two awards, first from the Sixth Asian Film Festival in the category of ‘Best Film Portraying Traditions and Folk Music’ for the film, *Jula Juli Bintang Tiga* (*The Magical Tale of The Three Stars*, 1959, dir. B.N. Rao), and then from the Ninth in the category ‘Best Folk Songs and Dances’ for the film *Dang Anom* (1962, dir. Hussein Haniff). Aside from his film music, Zubir Said is best known as the composer of independent Singapore’s national anthem “*Majulah Singapura*”, which had previously been made the official state anthem in 1959.

Zubir Said was a paragon of the fluid Malay cosmopolitan of the postwar years. Born of Minangkabau descent in Bukit Tinggi, Sumatra, he embarked on a professional music career in Singapore in 1928 and eventually became a citizen in 1967, two years after the formation of Singapore. Prior to composing for film, he worked as a photographer for the Indonesian Embassy and managed the Indonesian Club in Singapore (Rohana Zubir 2012, 74). After composing Singapore’s national anthem, he was invited in 1957 to write a national anthem for the Federation of Malaya but all three of his submissions were rejected (106-107). Riding on the wave of emerging nationalism leading up to Malayan independence from British colonial rule, he passionately advocated for Malay nationalism in music by composing numerous patriotic songs and writing nationalistic articles (102-120, Zubir Said 2012a; 2012b; 1967 and 1956/1957).

¹ The film *Buloh Perindu* (1953), directed by B.S. Rajhans was also the first film produced by the newly set up Cathay-Keris Film Productions (Hamzah Hussin 2012, 63).

Zubir Said's prolific background in music and his involvement in emerging Malay nationalism suitably frames this chapter on how aesthetic practices and political ideas intersect in the medium of film through the construction and promotion of a traditionalised conception of nation. In this chapter, I observe how tradition and nation were imagined and created in 1950s to 1960s film music through a vernacular film industry that indirectly expressed the ideologies and aspirations of postwar cosmopolitan Malay nationalism. I postulate that a Malay musical aesthetic was established systematically through the musical compositions of Zubir Said in historically-themed Malay films such as *Dang Anom* (1962, dir. Hussein Haniff). During the period, an essentialised 'pure' Malay tradition was sought as part of a postcolonial nation-making discourse, but it was expressed in complex and contradictory ways. In the previous chapter, I examined how Malay film music in the mid-1950s articulated sonically the politics of decolonisation. Yet, the music of these earlier films did not express an explicitly Malay nation-making aesthetic. This chapter is concerned with how the aesthetically cosmopolitan Malay film songs of the early 1960s – particularly the works of Zubir Said - articulated the notion of a national Malay tradition in music. Unlike the films discussed in the previous chapter, films such as *Dang Anom* are an example of the historical shift to complete Malay authorial control in the Malay film industry; the film's narrative, aesthetic and musical direction was helmed by Malay individuals with an explicit nationalist agenda. *Dang Anom*'s director, Hussein Haniff was widely known for his modernist approach to pre-colonial narratives that indirectly critiqued colonial rule and autocratic leadership. The film's composer, Zubir Said, was a passionate Malay cultural nationalist, profoundly inspired by the mid-1950s period of nascent independence in the Malay Peninsula. In this chapter's intertextual reading of *Dang Anom*, I argue that the creation of a Malay tradition in film music was a paradoxical articulation of the nation-making process that involved the creative agency of individuals operating within the restraints of a commercial film industry and the discursive boundaries of postcolonial modernity.

Nationalising Tradition

A Traditional Aesthetic?

The Malay aesthetic of films can be said to have combined evocations of customs and practices from the pre-modern ‘past’, previously repressed or challenged, with the ideas of the modern colonial and then postcolonial ‘present’.² Such cultural referentiality was indicative of the modernist ideologies of emergent nation-making articulated by Malay screenwriters and directors.³ As Gunaratne observes of Hussein Haniff, the seminal director of *Hang Jebat* (1961) and *Dang Anom* (1962) for Cathay-Keris:

Haniff’s films appear to have been a vehicle for his world-view rather than views of the world he lived in: his epics, set in a feudal past of warring states... appear to have been set in stylized worlds that were allegories of contemporary society and its various ills rather than representative portrayals of them” (Gunaratne 2003, 163)

In much the same way that Hussein Haniff’s ‘worldview’ was inclusive of a modern-cosmopolitan social critique of his times, I argue that Zubir Said’s musical compositions for film, despite being intended to represent a traditional ‘Malay sound’ or ‘mood’ were instead more indicative of the musical conventions and aesthetic preferences of the 1950s to 1960s than the aesthetics of a ‘traditional’ Malay music.⁴ Moreover, his aesthetic concerns were intertwined with his Malay nationalist aspiration to create music that was at

² Kahn’s (2006) study of Malay cosmopolitanism uncovers a consistent narrative in politics, arts and literature that places the Malay *kampung* (village) as the locus of Malay identity. As such, the *kampung* becomes a discursive site for the source of Malay customs and morality which is either challenged or defended through nationalist ideologies.

³ The issue of modern nation-making and the traditional referentiality is explored in Srivastava’s (2004) article on the iconic and gendered meanings derived from Lata Mangeshkar’s voice in Hindi film music. Here Mangeshkar’s omnipresent voice is regarded as a stable marker and embodiment of Indian national identity on film, while also representing ‘the ideal of Indian performative femininity’ (2019).

⁴ It is fitting to mention Richard Taruskin’s (2009) book on musical authenticity that disputes the claims of authenticity in Baroque performance practices of the 19th Century. He argues that performances of the pre-modern era in fact applied modernist performance aesthetics thereby falsely claiming ‘authenticity’ on the performed material. The same can be applied to modern artistic interpretations of ‘traditional’ practices in the post-colonial era of national narrative constructions in film and music.

once suitably unique in its ‘Malayness’ while adaptable to the conventions and technologies of modern nationhood such as films and national anthems.

The film music of Zubir Said relied on aesthetic references to Malay culture such as melodies and accompanying percussive rhythms drawn from regional folk song genres.⁵ In addition to the use of existing musical styles there was also a marked creative agency in the musical output of composers like Zubir Said whose institutional and social limitations determined the boundaries of such assumed aesthetic parameters. Later in this chapter, I observe how Zubir Said’s musical innovations were born out of budgetary constraints imposed by the film production studios in Singapore. He could only employ around eight musicians per film due to cost, but the resulting sparseness in orchestration (in comparison to Western and Indian film scores) inadvertently contributed to the uniqueness of his sound. Thus, an aesthetic subjectivity and creative agency is ever-present in the music of Zubir Said that is ironically bound to the structural limitations of a profit-oriented film industry in the immediate postcolonial era.

In my understanding of the musical aesthetics of nation-making and the process of traditionalising nation through Malay film music, I consider two specific ideological-structural considerations in the production of 1950s-1960s Malay film music: 1) the use of the Malay language and literary forms and 2) the inequities of postcolonial power relationships in the conception of an ethnicised, national self. Beyond these limitations, I argue that the creator (Zubir Said) and cultural product (the film and its music) simultaneously and paradoxically challenge these structural limitations through articulations of self-actualising political awareness and artistic agency. While confined to the use of the Malay language, vernacular musical styles and the budgetary constraints of a commercial film-industry, Zubir Said delighted in the opportunity to realise a musical soundscape of Malay aesthetic autonomy that was set apart from other hegemonic cultural film music canons (Eg. American, Chinese, Indian). This resulted in unique and original compositions that were far from conventional or ‘traditional’; his compositions in fact, were very modern and conveyed a more cosmopolitan than “purely” Malay aesthetic.

⁵ A useful reference for Malay folk songs genres with musical transcriptions, stylistic and instrumental descriptions can be found in Matusky & Tan (2004). I also outline in the introductory chapter of this thesis the local and regional musical precedents to Malay film music.

Linguistic Agency

While musical creation was part of a process of nation-making, the creative productions of Malay individuals in the film and literary community were dominated ideologically by ethnic-linguistic nationalism. As Hobsbawm (1992) articulated:

... any body of people considering themselves a 'nation' claimed the right to self-determination(,) which... meant the right to separate sovereign independent state for their territory... and in consequence of this multiplication of potential 'unhistorical' nations, ethnicity and language became the central, increasingly the decisive or even the only criteria of potential nationhood. (102)

The independent Malay nation was constituted of diverse Malay and non-Malay linguistic and ethnic communities, but was bound by the ethno-linguistic unifier of the Malay language (Barnard 2004; Kahn 2006; Milner 2006)⁶. In the cosmopolitan environment of Singapore where the seeds of such nationalism were planted and coming into fruition, the industries and technologies of print media, film and music played a vital role in defining this ethno-linguistic conception of a 'Malay' nation.

The influence of the Malay literary group ASAS 50 in creating this unified sense was pervasive. Very much a product of the creative cosmopolitan and politically charged environment of Singapore, the members of ASAS 50 championed the use of the Malay language to promote Malay nationalism. As such, nationalism was promoted overtly and covertly in Malay films and print media. A convergence of the two media forms occurred in film magazines such as *Bintang*, edited by P. Ramlee, that was known for nationalistic content that encouraged 'readers to question their colonial mentality' while 'promoting a vision of an independent Malaya' (Barnard 2012).⁷ Film magazines articulated this vision of Malay independence explicitly through the promotion of the national language. The first issue of the Shaw Brothers'-owned, *Majallah Filem (Film Magazine)* contains an editorial by P. Ramlee that echoes this linguistic-nationalist sentiment:

⁶ For demographic data on ethnicity and linguistic groups in the late-colonial Malay Peninsula see Anderson ([1983] 2006) and for specific data on ethnic demographics in Malaysia from 1911 to 2005 see Khoo (2005).

⁷ The magazine *Bintang*, established in 1953, operated as a fan magazine for the ever prominent Ramlee. This magazine was replaced by *Gelanggang Film* in 1958, also under the editorship of Ramlee and even more popular than its predecessor (Barnard 2012).

... 'MAJALLAH FILEM' will expand widely in (our) society as a 'benchmark to guide its readers in their foray into the world of films; also as an important instrument to raise the standard of the National Language'

As this magazine is published in the National Language and its (official) spelling, it is not wrong for me to say, 'MAJALLAH FILEM', is a courageous magazine. Courageous to strive in the midst of an arena that is in the process of being built.

The courageousness of 'MAJALLAH FILEM' that is needed in initiating this process will endure and be ever fertile until its goal - (to be the) Magazine of Our National Language - is achieved. (P. Ramlee 1960, 4)

The pride displayed in promoting the use of the national language in a monthly publication for a popular market signals the shift towards an explicit sentiment of nation-making that was rising in the 1960s. This period in the Malay Peninsula also saw an increased interest in modernising the Malay language – the reference to National 'spelling' denotes the replacement of the Arabic script (Jawi) that was used in most Malay film magazines prior to the 1960s with romanised Malay. Thus, it was in this modern nationalist literary milieu that a unified Malay "tradition" was being created through the imagination and authorial agency of individuals who suddenly found themselves in positions of national influence.

Zubir Said himself was no stranger to the vibrant political exchanges of the Malay community in Singapore. During the postwar period, he had weekly informal group meetings with his peers of Minangkabau descent that included important Singaporean-Malay figures such as Singapore's first President, Yusof Ishak, the prominent journalist, Abdul Rahim Kajai and author Zainal Abidin Ahmad @ Za'aba (Reel 12, 1984). It is highly likely that Malay-nationalist ideas about language and culture were exchanged in these meetings, with ideas from Zubir Said's more politicised peers having a direct impact on him and his consequent work.

While drawing noticeably on this literary activist environment, Zubir Said contributed to the nation-making project of Singapore and Malaysia through a selection of patriotically-themed songs written for a concert in celebration of Malaysia's independence in 1957 (148-50). Notably, Zubir Said's song, "*Majulah Singapura*", that officially became a state anthem in 1959 (149) would become the national anthem of Singapore upon the state's separation from the Federation of Malaysia in 1965 (Andaya & Andaya 2001, 288). However, his location is complicated by Zubir Said's fluid attachments to multiple spaces and identities: he was a citizen of the Dutch East Indies who migrated to Singapore to earn

a living. While he subscribed to a general patriotic attachment to ‘Malay’ (linguistic-cosmopolitan) nationalism, Zubir Said wrote the national anthem of a state that stood apart from neighbouring Malay nations as a ‘non-Malay’ state surrounded by the Malay world (see Rahim 2009). Despite this apparent contradiction, it is undeniable that Zubir Said was influential in the process of Malay nation-making through music.

Despite Zubir Said’s musical articulations of self-determination, however, there remained a disjuncture between the new radical ideas of Malay film-makers and the rigid colonial structures of knowledge and power that largely remained in place in the industry. The Malay film studio industry in the 1950s had a social structure that loosely reflected the British colonial ideology of organising racial groups into specific labour roles: Chinese “entrepreneurs” owned the studios and occupied technical positions (eg. camera operators, sound recordists, studio managers); Indians were the “creatives” who directed, wrote scripts and occupied technical roles as well; and Malays were the “performers” – the stars, musicians and composers⁸. By the early 1960s, Malays began taking on greater roles of authority in the studios as directors and writers, replacing the previously ‘imported’ directors from India⁹. It is on this period of transition from non-Malay authorship to Malay authorship that I focus in my musical-narrative reading of *Dang Anom*. Specifically, I am interested in the articulation of this period’s postcolonial nationalist ideas that were expressed subversively in Zubir Said’s film music.

Postcolonial Considerations

Zubir Said’s film music was composed with the intention of articulating a ‘natural’ cultural style that embodied a Malay musical aesthetic, but he did this in a postcolonial

⁸ British authorities during their colonisation of the Malay Peninsula categorised the economic activities of colonised people by race: the Chinese were small business-owners and traders, the Indians were estate-workers and labourers (although some South Asian castes occupied professional positions and operated businesses), the Malays were mostly farmers and fishermen (see Alatas 1977 and Lim 1984). I also note that Malays formed a sizable population of the entertainment class prior to and post-World War Two.

⁹ While these directors were actually ‘imported’ from Indian and were Indian nationals, it is worthwhile to note that South Asian communities and culture existed in the Malay world centuries prior to European colonialism. The South Indian director of Malay films, L. Krishnan, would stay on and eventually become a Malaysian citizen and successful producer of Malay films past the demise of Singaporean Malay studio film industry (see Prem K. Pasha 2003)

environment that to an extent insisted on conceptual goals of fixing a ‘pure’ musical tradition. While drawing from local folk music practices, though, he also had to adapt such music to the formal methods and structures of western orchestration for film.¹⁰ His authorial agency could largely be imposed on what could or would not be included to represent a Malay ‘mood’ or sound in his selection of instrumentation, melodies and textures (Rohana Zubir 2012, 82). In order to unravel the complexities of the postcolonial structures of knowledge that governed Zubir Said’s creativity I apply a methodology of intertextual musical analysis to consider the relationship of authorial agency and larger structures of power. The application of postcolonial analysis in studying music requires:

... meticulous attention to textual detail, but always sees such analysis as subsidiary to the larger project of thinking through the implications of cultural expression for understanding asymmetrical power relations and concomitant processes of marginalization and denigration. (Born & Hesmondhalgh 2000, 5)

This sets the tone for my methodology of using intertextual analysis to unravel the power relationships present in processes of authoring a national identity through film music. However, to what extent are internal process of ‘marginalization’ and ‘denigration’ present in Zubir Said’s music? For this study, instances of exclusion are more appropriately observed in the traditionalising of Malay identity in Zubir Said’s compositions. His film composition and arrangement methods involved a process of exclusivity that ultimately left out certain local musical practices and traditional instruments in favour of modern instrumentation as this was what he deemed aesthetically acceptable for the modern medium of film.

Thus, it could be argued that Zubir Said was also exoticising, to an extent, the musical cultures of the Malay Peninsula and subsuming them under his aesthetic boundaries of what would be considered ‘traditional’ Malay music. This is perhaps not as explicitly problematic as the music of the non-west portrayed in films made in the west; the ‘*assumed vernacular*’ film music as observed by Slobin (2008a, 25-29). I propose that the apparent auto-exoticism that could be heard in Zubir Said’s film music can, instead, be considered a

¹⁰ Slobin (2008a) terms this aesthetic of film music the ‘Steiner superculture’ – a reference to the classically trained composer, Max Steiner, whose methods to film scoring in the 1930s have become the ‘norm’ for all film music since. I mention this in greater detail in the Chapters One and Three.

constitutive vernacular, as the postcolonial power relations that are present in western films musically representing the non-west were not an issue in Malay films. Rather, Zubir Said's film music articulates the desire of Malay nationalists during the mid-1950s to early 1960s to actively create a modern national culture that was independent of colonial rule, but, ironically, not free of colonial-western criteria of nationhood. Thus, while Zubir Said was, retrospectively, reproducing a (western) superculture of film music, such a system of musical production was 'neither monolithic nor omnipotent' and consistently gave way to 'systematic cracks' that allowed 'for variation and even subversion', especially in the hands of aspiring composers such as Zubir Said and P. Ramlee, who saw themselves as important agents of postcolonial nationalism (Slobin 2008b, 60).

Therefore, this chapter is not limited to postcolonial observations and analysis, as such an approach can easily ignore 'questions of agency' (Born & Hesmondhalgh 2000, 7). I observe that Zubir Said and his compositions for film – despite the colonial and modernist limits within which they were created – had a crucially agential role in creating the sound palette of Malay national identity. Zubir Said's personal motivations appear in his own writings on Malay music, which are enthusiastic about the future prospects of Malay national autonomy. The following is an excerpt from an article he wrote in 1958, shortly after independence (*merdeka*) in the Malay Peninsula:

During the age of *merdeka* music should as far as possible exert a positive influence on society. The music must be original, not imitations. Music should be the pride of the nation and convey the beliefs and values of the nation.

During the age of *merdeka* music should arise from a creativity that is free to explore new forms and ideas, but at the same time rational, while staying true to what is indigenous to the nation, even for modern compositions.

During the age of *merdeka* there should be an understanding that a nation's creativity should not be an exercise in imitation, rather it should be an effort to discover new forms of national music, grounded on the artistic expressions of the nation. (Zubir Said 2012, 95)¹¹

¹¹ It is worth mentioning the striking similarities of Zubir Said's views with English composer and staunch music-nationalist, Ralph Vaughan Williams' expressed at length in his book, *National Music and Other Essays* (1987). Williams' essay entitled 'National Music' was published in 1934, so it is highly likely that the Zubir Said could have been inspired by Williams' ideas, although this cannot be confirmed in any existing sources on Zubir Said.

Zubir Said's manifesto on the importance of music in the construction of Malay nationalism reveals how he intended to create original music in his films that were also 'rational' in their references to a traditional Malay sound; more than that, he believed his compositions were 'staying true to what ... (was) indigenous to the nation, even for modern compositions'. Furthermore, the manifesto indicates the unquestionable importance that Zubir Said accorded his musical compositions in shaping the culture and character of the newly independent Malay nation.

This statement then indicates that he considered his compositions 'modern' musical works that were integral to the making of an independent nation. He emphasises the promotion of a national aesthetic that should be 'original', ie. not imitative while containing references to indigenous forms and styles. Indeed, as this chapter will show, Zubir Said's film music evokes all of these seemingly 'national' qualities through his stylistic adherence to (the already inherently cosmopolitan) Malay folk music genres such as *joget* and *dondang sayang* while using 'iconic' Malay instrumentation such as the *rebana* frame drum. The 'modern' aspect of his music includes subtle textural additions from non-indigenous musical sources such as western tonal harmony and orchestration and 'non-Malay' instruments such as vibraphones and saxophones. This musical Malay-western hybridity is thus a product of Zubir Said's positionality as a "rooted cosmopolitan" and as such, reveals the disjunctive processes of inclusion and exclusion in seeking an imagined cultural 'purity' or 'naturalness'; an aspiration concomitant with postcolonial ideologies of modern nation-making. Evident in Zubir Said's film music, these contradictions highlight the contestatory narrative of postcolonial nation-making in the Malay Peninsula.

Traditionalising Nation

Nation-making Narratives in Film Music

Music-making operated as a practice of nation-making in the postcolonial era of Singapore's emerging Malay-language film industry. As such, music in Malay film was a means of making history through implying definitions of a 'tradition' demarcated by ethno-

national boundaries. Concomitantly, Zubir Said's music articulated emergent nationhood through the genre of historically-themed films.¹² This expressive space required Zubir Said to imagine and create a sonically 'Malay' aesthetic by drawing from his experience in local popular performing arts such as *bangsawan* musical theatre (Rohana Zubir 2012, 44; Hamzah Hussin 2012, 67-69). Music in Malay film, thus, provides an insightful example of how national narratives are shaped through the authorial and creative agency of individuals in spite of the limits imposed by postcolonial conditions, assumptions and ideologies.

In this chapter, I analyse Zubir Said's film music 'as a means of making history: not only as a form of social action directed at realising a future, but also as a medium for the retrospective definition of tradition' (Waterman 1990, 369). The film music of Zubir Said is viewed as a historical text that uncovers the vibrant nationalistic sentiment of the Malay Peninsula in the 1950s and 1960s. The musical biography of Zubir Said and his creative process in composing for films reveals how Malay nationalists of the era conceived postcolonial sovereignty by evoking forms of cultural expression out of a pre-colonial past. This cultural construction of nationhood, explained in Benedict Anderson's (1983) study, is 'an imagined political community – and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign' (6). The conception of nation is defined by limiting boundaries such as geography, cultural communities or linguistic affinities while sovereignty relates to the nation imagined as being autonomous from 'divinely ordained' or 'hierarchical' dynastic spaces (7). What appeals greatly to music scholars is Anderson's example of how cultural groups are recognised 'not by their falsity/genuineness, but by the style in which they are imagined' (6; cited in Waterman, 376). Studies of 'expressive culture' and nationalism thus provide an integral point of departure for observing how nation-making is articulated as creative processes in cultural practices (Waterman, 377-8). As such, music as an expressive practice can be heard as a form of discourse on nation that seeks organic boundaries amidst natural

¹² 'Historical' Malay films were also termed '*bangsawan*' films in reference to the repertoire of narrative themes derived from *bangsawan* (translated, 'nobility') plays set in the feudalistic pre-colonial past of the Malay World. Such stories were derived of classic Malay texts such as *Sejarah Melayu (Malay Annals)*, *Hikayat Hang Tuah (The Romance of Hang Tuah)*, *Hikayat Merong Mahawangsa (The Romance of Merong Mahawangsa)*, etc. Interestingly, Malay film magazines such as *Majallah Film* (1960-1965) refer to such historically themed films as '*bangsawan*' films in contrast to *masyarakat* (social) films set in modern, urban contexts.

conditions of plurality. Music, thus, operates as an expression of ‘national discourse’ understood in its

... relation to boundedness, continuities and discontinuities, unity in plurality, the authority of the past, and the imperatives of the present. It moves along two interesting axes: space and time. In terms of the space axis, the dominant question is territorial sovereignty; in terms of the time axis, the central question is the velocity of history, the continuity with the past. The way these two axes interact produces results that bear directly and challengingly to the problematic of nationhood. What is important to bear in mind is that the manifold issues related to these axes are man-made and not natural givens. *They are human constructs seeking the status of the natural*. The privileged narrative of nationhood tends to submerge the local narratives of resistance that attempt to bring into play the historically determined discourses of memory and the challenges to the hegemony of the nationhood. (Chatterjee 1993, xi, my emphasis)

It is in this way that the musical aesthetics found in the film music of Zubir Said are referential to a discourse about emergent nationhood by actively creating an imaginary ‘traditional’ style that nonetheless assumes a ‘natural’ status of Malayness. The notion that this ‘narrative of nationhood’ was created or imagined musically is evident in Rohana Zubir’s observations about her father when composing music for Malay films:

Having composed contemporary, modern music and now legendary music, ... (Zubir Said)... found composing the legendary (historical-epic or mythical-themed film) music more challenging. For modern music he could listen to other recordings, but not so for legendary music, where he had to depend much on his own imagination. (83)

For Zubir Said, composing music for films on premodern themes was most challenging because unlike films set in the modern era, he had no examples of Malay music to reference; thus, in his own words, he had ‘to imagine it’ or conjure a suitably Malay musical aesthetic based on his own creativity (1984, Reel 13). In effect, Zubir Said invented Malay musical ‘tradition’ in his film music. Such creation of tradition however, was far from arbitrary as he did have his own personal preferences – as opposed to *references* – as to what constituted ‘Malay’ music. Moreover, in the absence of a specific Malay-film-music tradition, there were nonetheless Western art music conventions that Zubir Said drew upon for his original Malay film scores. He wasn’t making a traditional or folk music but, rather, re-presenting the Malay tradition musically. To complicate matters further, Zubir Said was originally trained in the practices of Malay *bangsawan* theatre

(Rohana Zubir, 43-53);¹³ a genre already immensely diverse in cultural influences that was a hugely popular form of entertainment in the Malay Peninsula for a predominantly Malay-speaking audience (see Tan 1993). As well as hailing from a *bangsawan*-musician background, Zubir Said also wrote music for films adapted from famous *bangsawan* plays including *Jula Juli Bintang Tiga (The Tale of Three Magical Fairies)*, *Yatim Mustapha (The Orphan Mustapha)*, and *Gul Bakawali* (Rohana Zubir: 44, Hamzah Hussein, 69). However, a major difference between performing music for *bangsawan* and scoring music for Malay film was Zubir Said's authorial agency as a composer in creating a "traditional" Malay musical aesthetic. As we have already seen in Chapter 2, the historical Malay film was a potent technology for the promotion of a Malay nation through narratives of a pre-colonial Malay past that offered visual and aural representations of 'Malayness'. Malay audiences could actualise their cultural 'selves' on the silver screen as part of a cohesive national imaginary framed by the Malay language, and articulated through culturally resonant tropes and narratives such as mythical stories, Malay prose and poetry (*pantun*). Such elements were used in the films' dialogue and songs, but they were also underpinned in the film score by sonic markers of Malayness in the form of Malay-sounding melodies, rhythms and instrumentation. Taking into account Zubir Said's vibrant cosmopolitan experience of music-making in Singapore in his *bangsawan* days, as well as his clearly defined yet complex Malay-nationalist stance on the arts, I examine in the next section of this chapter how his experiences and ideologies are present in the traditionalised Malay music aesthetic of his film compositions.

Before engaging an analysis of music and narrative in the film, *Dang Anom*, I discuss two concepts that frame my intertextual analysis: 1) the notion of "tradition" in Malay film music and 2) the observance of melodramatic cinematic form. I contend that the concept of nationhood in Zubir Said's film music was actualised through 'traditionalising' processes

¹³ Rohana Zubir (2012) relates her father's illustrious musical career in pre-World War II Singapore that started in 1928 (43). He started his professional musical career at the *bangsawan* Happy Valley Opera company playing violin, where he also learned to read Western staff notation, (prior to this he was adept only at Sumatran numerical notation), Western music theory, taught himself how to play the piano and eventually would go on to arrange music for and lead the company's orchestra (44-9). Following this, until the war, he became a talent scout and record producer of Malay-language music for HMV based primarily in Jakarta (49-53).

that were in fact a hallmark of modern consciousness, or more than that, reflective of global aesthetic and commercial trends in film music in the 1950s to 1960s. *Dang Anom* demands to be read as a melodrama – a common cinematic genre in Hollywood films of the same period (see Gledhill 1987, 5-6 and citing Schatz 1981, 224-5). Interpreting films as melodrama provides a critical approach for discerning social and gendered power relations in film narratives beyond the surface of cinematic (and musical) style or aesthetics. I observe in this chapter that *Dang Anom* is in fact a modern take on a historical narrative and reading this narrative alongside and against Zubir Said's aesthetic expressions of a Malay musical tradition in the film reveals disjunctive and conjunctive relationships to the film's ideological undertones. Thus, it is necessary to consider the melodramatic articulations of *Dang Anom*'s narrative in order to understand the musical tradition or 'traditionalising' representations that occur in the film's music.

Music Traditionalised

In what ways, then, is Zubir Said's film music 'traditional' to the Malay Peninsula? A comprehensive analysis of Zubir Said's film music by Joe Peters (2012) appears in the booklet of a ten-day film festival titled, *Majulah! The Film Music of Zubir Said*, hosted by the The National Museum of Singapore Cinémathèque.¹⁴ This screening was held to commemorate Zubir Said's contributions to national music in Singapore, most notably the national anthem. Peters' essay attempts to systematically analyse Zubir Said's music from a collection of forty-eight films, in which Peters notes a 'neo traditional' style of composition that reflected an attempt to suture the disjunctures between a commercial film industry and creative expression.

Peters observes the synthesis between popular Western styles and traditional folk music through processes of 'on-loading' and 'in-loading' (76-7). The 'on-loading' process involves the addition of local elements 'on top' of foreign (read Western) structures, or conversely adding foreign elements to local forms (77). For example, commonly found in Malay film music is the 'addition' of Malay lyrics and singing 'on top of' a Latin American

¹⁴ In my interview with Peters, he informs me that the essay appearing in the booklet is considerably shorter than his original contribution, which included more ethnomusicological analysis (Peters 2013)

rhythmic and harmonic accompaniment. ‘In-loading’ involves a more ‘self contained’ representation of an external musical style and form with little or no addition or integration from foreign elements. He argues that Zubir Said’s increased use of in-loading resulted in the production of ‘original forms’ that ‘are now invaluable historical documents of local culture and customs’ (Ibid). Peters approach here is quite slippery, as it is difficult to discern what practices or forms were internal or external. If Zubir Said wrote a Malay-sounding melody to be performed by a western orchestral arrangement, could that not also be considered ‘on-loading’?

This mechanistic and ambiguous view of musical creation is quite problematic as it does not account for the longer history of interactivity between the diverse musical genres and styles in the Malay region. Peters assumed a ‘pure’ or absolute aesthetic of Malay musical practices without problematising their diverse and pluralistic origins. As I noted in Chapter Two, many musical practices in the region were already ‘hybrid’ and cosmopolitan prior to European colonial control: this was true of many of the popular folk music styles that were familiar to Zubir Said, who spent most of his prior professional music career in *bangsawan* music ensembles. Unfortunately, Peters did not describe in detail specific musical examples that differentiate ‘on-loading’ and ‘in-loading’ approaches in Zubir Said’s film music. What is more convincing in Peters’ analysis, however, is evidence of the individuality of Zubir Said’s style of film scoring, discerned from his use of repeated and recognisable melodic motifs.

Peters presents the notion of a ‘freedom motif’ evident in Zubir Said’s traditional-sounding compositions that contained ‘ascending and almost bugle-like movement of notes on the harmonic series and also, a falling melisma that is usually heard in *dondang* (*sayang*) and *asli*’ (87).¹⁵ Aside from observing multiple instances of this musical motif in films such as *Dang Anom*, *Bawang Putih Bawang Merah* (*Garlic and Onions*, 1959, dir. S. Roomai Noor) and *Sri Mersing* (1961, dir. Salleh Ghani), he points out that the ‘freedom motif’ was part of an eight-bar section that was removed from the original draft of the City Council anthem that became the national anthem of Singapore (88). In summary, Peters’ systematic analysis is insightful in its observation of a traditionalised nationalist narrative

¹⁵ For a detailed description of the *dondang sayang* genre see Matusky & Tan (2004, 333-342); the falling melismas noted by Peters can be seen in Matusky & Tan’s transcript of a *dondang sayang* melody (335-337). *Asli* suggests both a rhythmic pattern and a repertoire of Malay folk songs.

in the musical themes that are reproduced across films. A national-traditional aesthetic is clearly thus evident in Zubir Said's Malay film compositions.

While Peters notes in passing issues such as cultural synthesis and capitalist production, I suggest there is greater need to consider the postcolonial process of conceiving a 'tradition' and 'nation' through musical signifying in film. Peters' empirical analysis is limited to the musical motifs of Zubir Said's film scores and unfortunately overlooks the interactive relationship between Zubir Said's music and specific film narratives. The unequal power relations between agents of independence and colonial structures of knowledge are intertextually articulated in Zubir Said's film music and this requires a detailed and qualitative analysis of film music operating within a specific film narrative; an analysis that I aim to provide in this chapter.

Melodramatic Modernities

As I will discuss in greater depth below, the film *Dang Anom* is on the surface portrayed as a historical Malay epic, but it is in fact a modern melodrama, in which its female protagonist (and namesake of the film) is the primary subject of a narrative that questions feudalistic or pre-colonial Malay values. Gledhill observes that melodrama films in the 1960s, despite their pejorative and commercial associations offered critical cinematic possibilities for 'apparently ideologically complicit films to be read 'against the grain' for their covert critique of the represented status quo' (6). She explains how melodramatic forms are concerned with

... what cannot be said in the available codes of social discourse;... (operating) in the field of the known and familiar, but also... (attempting) to short-circuit language to allow the "beneath" or "behind" – the unthinkable and repressed – to achieve material presence. This dual recognition – how things are and how they are not – gives popular culture much of its strength, suggesting the way it may be drawn to occupy gaps in political, ideological, and cultural systems, and how the subordinated may find a negotiable space in which certain contradictions and repressed desires are rehearsed. (1986, 45)

Here I will discuss how the narrative structure and music of *Dang Anom*, while seemingly 'traditional' in style and context, actually critique and re-imagine tradition in subversive and modern ways. Beyond the internal critique of feudalism in the film's

narrative there is also an underlying anti-colonial sentiment that resonates with the 'repressed desire' for a fully realised ethno-national autonomy. Thus, what I aim to highlight in the following case-study are the convergences and disjunctures of film narrative, post-colonial power relationships, expressions of modernity, emergent nationhood and creative agency in Zubir Said's film music.

Dang Anom (1962)

Historical Setting, Modernist Narrative

The narrative of *Dang Anom* is steeped in tragedy. It is framed as a Malay historical epic centred on the invasion of the Malay Temasek kingdom by the Javanese Majapahit empire. The film is, in fact, a modern melodrama that places idealistic agency in its female protagonist, Dang Anom (Fatimah Ahmad), while overtly critiquing the pre-colonial Malay feudalistic system as immoral and unjust. The film is set in pre-colonial Temasek, the region known today as Singapore. Dang Anom, the main protagonist, is the daughter of Sang Rajuna Tapa (Ahmad Nesfu), a high-ranking minister in the court of the Malay Sultan of Temasek (M. Amin). She is tragically forced to become the concubine of the lustful Sultan when her lover, the warrior Malang (Noordin Ahmad), is sent to lead a war against the Javanese Majapahit kingdom. When Malang returns from his successful campaign he is distraught to learn of Dang Anom's unfortunate situation. Eventually, the two lovers are 'framed' for treason by Malang's jealous enemy, Dato' Bijasura (Mahmud June) and are sentenced to death. Desperate to save his daughter, Dang Anom's father reluctantly conspires with Majapahit spies to open the fortified gates to Temasek to facilitate an invasion of the Sultan's palace. The movie ends tragically with the death of Malang, Dang Anom and her parents. Dato' Bijasura kills Dang Anom's mother (Siti Tanjung Perak) who pleads to the Sultan for her daughter's life. At the end of the film, while the Sultan escapes Temasek with his consort, Dang Anom is brutally raped and murdered at the hands of Dato' Bijasura and her father dies trying to save her. The film, then, is a Malay historical epic that paradoxically challenges the concept of feudal power. This is achieved through a narrative

of tragedy and injustice experienced by the lead character that also reveals her ethical aspirations for self-determination and freedom.

Central to the film's narrative is Dang Anom's position as a woman subjugated by patriarchal forms of control. Dang Anom's body is contested between the Sultan and her lover, Malang, while the exchange of her ownership is mediated by her father. In this gendered power relationship the Sultan is allegorical to the antiquated and anti-modern practices of precolonial Malay society, while Malang is the archetype of a blindly loyal and powerless subject of feudal oppression. Dang Anom's quest for self determination and freedom, hence, positions her as a mediator of postcolonial modernist ideals.

This portrayal is in sharp contrast to the historical source of inspiration for the film, the *Sejarah Melayu (Malay Annals)*¹⁶. C.C. Brown's (2009) translation of the *Sejarah Melayu* contains the story of an unnamed daughter of the Singaporean (Temasek) Sultan's treasurer, Sang Ranjuna Tapa, who was the 'mistress' to Sri Sultan Iskandar Shah (50). She was slanderously accused of 'misconduct' by other women in the Sultan's court and was 'publicly exposed' in the local market (50-51). In Winstedt's (1938) version of the text, she was similarly accused of disloyalty to the Sultan and without investigation 'impaled in the market square' (cited by Cheah 1993, 2).¹⁷ The main focus of this story in the text is the humiliation of Sang Ranjuna Tapa and his consequent treasonous role in assisting the Majapahit empire's conquest of Temasek. Unlike the *Dang Anom* film, the female concubine is not even named and merely a minor character in the narrative. The story of Sang Ranjuna Tapa's betrayal is linked to a generational curse due to the ruthless actions of the Sultan's father. In the moralistic vein of the *Sejarah Melayu*, the Sultan in repeating an unjust act is then punished with the loss of his kingdom to Majapahit. Cheah reads the women in this story as 'capable of great guile, manipulation and ruthlessness which could

¹⁶ The prominent Malay text, *Peraturan Segala Raja-raja (The Rules of all the Rajas)* was re-titled *Sejarah Melayu (History of the Malays)* in John Leyden's translation (see Chapter Three, footnote 6). This text was promoted extensively and operated to discursively construct a homogenous identity based on the selective codification and canonisation of linguistic and literary sources that were 'deemed' Malay by the colonial British administration in the Malay Peninsula (Vickers 2004, 33-35).

¹⁷ Again, further parallels can be drawn to South Asian musical and filmic culture. The tragic history of subjugation of the North Indian female courtesan is elaborated Schofield's article that ties in the history of the courtesan with their typecast tragic narrative trajectory in Hindi film representations (2012, 165, citing Booth [2007, 7]). Also see Booth's article on female courtesan protagonists in Hindi films (2007).

produce deadly results' and further observes in the *Sejarah Melayu* instances of courtly women assassinating sultans and acting as major forces of resistance to oppressive monarchs (Ibid). Hussein Haniff's *Dang Anom* propels this pre-colonial proto-feminist role of women found in classical Malay narratives into a modern vision of women's resistance to feudalistic regimes.

What role then, does music play in Malay feudal history? Contrary to the screened music of *Dang Anom* in which music challenges feudal authority, rulers in pre-colonial Malay society used music to assert their divine sovereignty. Barbara Andaya (2011) discusses the extension of Malay monarchical power through the use of loud sounds, particularly the *nobat* drum and wind ensemble.¹⁸ She argues that the use of sound-producing instruments in pre-modern Malay society sonically and symbolically reminded Malay villagers 'of their subordination to the temporal power of the ruler' while reassuring them of their protection 'by the supernatural powers such sounds evoked' (32). More importantly, sounds in pre-modern Malay society 'were part of an interactive acoustical space, conveying messages that helped to define a community's cultural parameters and affirm the place of the ruler at its emotional core' (Ibid). Andaya's observation resonates with Zubir Said's music that attempted to portray a Malay tradition in *Dang Anom*'s film music. The traditionalised music and dance in the film was used to symbolise feudalistic control over the film's protagonists. Considering Andaya's concept of sounded authority in the commercial and cosmopolitan context of Malay film music production highlights a paradoxical, musical critique of the inherent acoustic-kingship-kinship association. As I demonstrate in my analysis below, traditional-sounding music is not only used to denote and impose monarchical power, it is also applied in a disjunctive-aesthetic articulation for depicting that power in a negative light. In my analysis, the interaction of these musical discourses, congruent and disjunctive with the film's melodramatic narrative, exposes a concealed critique of sounded authority and, by extension, questions the structural inequities of a postcolonial condition.

¹⁸ There is a forthcoming PhD. thesis on the Malay *nobat*, tentatively titled, *Malay Nobat: A History of Encounters, Accommodation and Development* by Raja Iskandar Bin Raja Halid at King's College London.

Traditionalising Music

I will now proceed to discuss how music is used and represented in discourses about tradition in 1950s to 1960s Malay film. In this portion of the chapter, I analyse musical motifs present in the opening title theme of *Dang Anom* and uncover other musical moments throughout the film. In order to contextualise traditionalising discourses about music in this film, I explain how music in films produced by Cathay-Keris Studios were known for their overt Malayness and inaccessibility to audiences in comparison with the more contemporary and commercial songs of their rival film studio, Shaw Brothers' Malay Film Productions (MFP). Following that, I provide a response to such comparisons by providing an intertextual analysis of select musical moments in *Dang Anom*. I aim to reveal that the evocation of tradition in Zubir Said's film music was not a straightforward process. Despite the film's feudal Malay setting and tragic narrative, the ethno-nationalistic and cosmopolitan ideals of both the composer and director are articulated covertly in a subtext of western imperialist critique that signal postcolonial aspirations for agency and self-determination.

The music of Zubir Said interacts with the melodramatic narrative of *Dang Anom* in unique ways by drawing on Malay melodies and styles combined with 'dark' or sombre-sounding, non-traditional textures to underscore the tragic narrative and modern subtext of the film. The orchestration sounds rich and full – in spite of only using eight studio musicians¹⁹ – but is coded culturally and affectively through varying use of instrumentation. The instrumental music for the opening credits (title theme) starts with a distinct resonating gong strike followed by a *gamelan*-sounding descending melody played on a vibraphone (Figure 4.1; see Appendix C for transcription) (**Example 4.1**). This acts as an indexical code for Javanese music, relating to the involvement of the Majapahit empire in the narrative. This 'Javanese' melody reappears in measure 9 and is hinted at with an ascending vibraphone melody at measure 23 towards the end of the piece (measure 23: Figure 4.2). Additionally, the use of a descending chromatic passage (measures 15 to 17: Figure 4.3) uncommon in Malay traditional and folk music provides melodic contrast to the

¹⁹ As mentioned indicated earlier in this chapter from Zubir Said's interview (1984, Reel 13).

culturally-coded ‘Malay-sounding’ theme that recurs frequently throughout the title theme, background music and songs in the film. All these musical devices converge with and complement the film’s overarching allegory of self-determination in the face of unjust authoritarian rule.

Figure 4.1 shows a musical score for two instruments: Gong and Vibraphone. The tempo is marked as ♩ = 80-88. The time signature is 4/4. The Gong part starts with a double bar line and a '1' below it, followed by a 4/4 time signature and a note with an accent (>) and a fermata. The Vibraphone part starts with a treble clef, a key signature of three sharps (F#, C#, G#), and a '1' below it, followed by a 4/4 time signature and a descending melodic line.

Figure 4.1. Gong hit and descending ‘gamelan’ melody (measures 1 to 2)

Figure 4.2 shows a musical score for Vibraphone (Vib). The tempo is marked as ♩ = 80-88. The time signature is 4/4. The key signature is three sharps (F#, C#, G#). The score starts with a treble clef and a '23' below it, followed by an ascending melodic line.

Figure 4.2. Ascending Vibraphone (measure 23)

Figure 4.3 shows a musical score for two instruments: Vibraphone and Violin. The tempo is marked as ♩ = 80-88. The time signature is 4/4. The key signature is three sharps (F#, C#, G#). Both parts start with a treble clef and a '15' below it, followed by a chromatic descent.

Figure 4.3. Chromatic descent (measures 15 to 17)

The instrumental music of the opening credits reiterate the ‘freedom motif’ as described by Peters (2012, 87) in various configurations. I will call this melody and related variations the ‘Dang Anom motif’ due to its frequent occurrence in the film and the centrality of the main character. Following the Javanese melody, the Dang Anom motif (Figure 4.4) is announced by the violins (measures 2 to 7), rearticulated by a two-part saxophone section

(measures 17 to 20: Figure 4.5), and finally, a solo electric guitar melody (measures 25 to 28: Figure 4.6). This motif is repeated in various orchestrations throughout the film, especially in the love duet between Dang Anom and Malang, Dang Anom's lament,²⁰ and the final scene of the film where Dang Anom's father discovers his dead daughter (see Peters: 87-8). For example, the Dang Anom motif is articulated by flute and saxophone in this excerpt from the instrumental introduction to the love duet in figure 7 (measures 1 to 5) (Example 4.7).

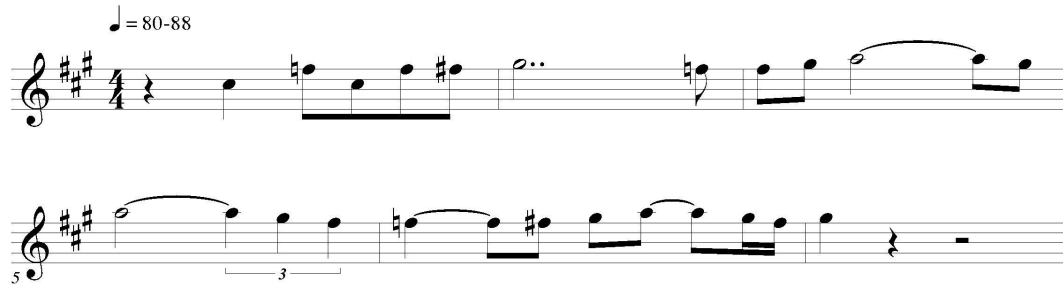


Figure 4.4. Violin motif (measures 1 to 5)

Figure 4.5. Saxophone motif (measures 17-20)

Figure 4.6. Guitar motif (measures 25-28)

²⁰ I have not ascertained the titles for the two songs as they are not stated in the film or in any other sources. The exception is Dang Anom and Malang's love duet that is referred to as "Segala Kita" in Peters' essay but I have been unable to verify this. The first line in the song starts with the words 'segala titah (all orders)' not 'segala kita (all of us)' so I am unconvinced that this is the real title of the song.

The musical score for Figure 4.7 is an instrumental introduction in 4/4 time, key of D major, with a tempo of 55-60. It consists of four staves: Violins, Vibraphone, Flute, and Tenor Sax. The Violins play a melodic line starting with a tremolo. The Vibraphone plays a harmonic accompaniment with a triplet. The Flute and Tenor Sax play a melodic line with a grace note.

Figure 4.7. Instrumental introduction to love duet

I will suggest that the sequence of musical codes in the title theme sonically encapsulate the major narrative themes of the film. The musical themes are framed by the Javanese gamelan melody indicating the limited appearance but major role played by the Majapahit Empire in the story. The Dang Anom theme played by the violin section refers to the cautiously optimistic idealism and love between the two main protagonists. In this, the violin signifies a ‘pure’ Malay tradition as it has for centuries been used in Malay folk ensembles.²¹ The tension between ‘tradition’ and ‘modernity’ or, in the context of the story, between individual aspirations and feudal restrictions, can be heard in the use of saxophones and electric guitar to play the Dang Anom motif. Moreover, the saxophones are harmonised in sixths in an expression of western (or modern) tonality. While saxophones and other western instruments were common in the *Orkes Melayu* (Malay Music Ensembles) used in *bangsawan* theatre (Weintraub 2010, 38-41; Tan 1993, 76-78) it is uncommon and therefore striking to hear such instrumentation in a ‘traditional’ Malay film epic.

Zubir Said’s creative musical agency can be heard in relation to the aspiring agency of the film’s female protagonist as an aesthetic disjuncture between modernity and tradition.

²¹ The combined use of the *rebana* and *violin* is one example of pre-modern cosmopolitan Malay instrumentation; Kartomi has suggested its connection to Moorish culture imported by Portuguese colonists to the Malay Archipelago (1988 cited in Tan 1993, 77, supra note 6; also see Tan 2005)

When made a concubine, Dang Anom is resolute in her expression of unhappiness. Unlike the other concubines who eventually warm up to the lustful but charming Sultan, she expresses her displeasure openly to the point of her execution, rejecting the Sultan's plea to ask for his forgiveness in exchange for her life. The musical references in conjunction with the actions of Dang Anom are allegorical to the struggle for independence from colonial rule in the Malay Peninsula. The film music of Zubir Said, therefore, expresses a nation-making aesthetic inspired by modern cosmopolitan ideas of emergent national autonomy.

Further oppositions are observed in the composer's use of musical 'moods'. When composing for films, Zubir Said understood 'Malay' music to be rooted in vocal melody that was limited to two moods: 'happy singing... and sad singing' (1984, Reel 13). This contrasting use of Malay musical 'moods' can be heard clearly in the two songs featuring Dang Anom in the film: initially, an aspirational love duet between Dang Anom and Malang; and later, a tragic lament sung by Dang Anom. Zubir Said's writing process involved extensive experimentation on the piano to create instrumental (background) music that he considered aesthetically suitable to Malay film (Ibid). Moreover, he worked with a restricted budget of \$3000 per film and a meagre 'orchestra' of only eight musicians, which limited his goals to create lush and grand textures easily achieved with a larger orchestra (Ibid).²² Because of this, he devised ingenious techniques to achieve his intended sounds by using more percussive instruments such as gongs and frame drums (Ibid). In place of large or atmospheric orchestral textures the vibraphone is heard extensively in *Dang Anom*; providing a lush, dark, 'dreamy' and perhaps, ominous presence throughout the film's music.²³ Thus, while restricting his music within self-imposed cultural boundaries, Zubir Said nonetheless composed music with a modernist aesthetic; using approaches that in fact challenged a rigid conception of tradition in music.

However, in line with a postcolonial conception of nationhood, a 'Malay' musical tradition, no matter how contested, had to be made visible even if it was not heard. A

²² The currency stated is in Malaysian Ringgit (\$) that was at the time valued at £0.14 for \$1.00. Most Malay films would have an overall budget of \$30,000. Hence, the budget for music was only one-tenth of a film's entire budget.

²³ The vibraphone is not an instrument common to Malay folk music but it was immensely popular in Malay films from the 1950s to 1960s. Zubir Said's use of the vibraphone can be heard in most of his film scores, notably for films set in mythical or historical settings such as *Bawang Puteh Bawang Merah* (*Garlic and Onions*, 1959, Dir. Salleh Ghani) and *Jula Juli Bintang Tujoh* (*The Magical Tale of the Seven Fairies*, 1962, Dir. B.N. Rao).

photograph of musicians recording at Cathay-Keris studio in the presence of Hussein Haniff (Figure 4.8) presents a ‘purely’ Southeast Asian spectacle: two *angklung* players, a *gambus* player, a flautist with wooden and metal flute, a *kompang/rebana tar* (cymballed-frame drum) player, a man standing by an Indonesian gong set²⁴ and Zubir Said holding a *kompang* and what appears to be three wooden flutes, a crash cymbal on a stand beside him, a harmonium and clarinet in front of him (Peters 2012, 76; Rohana Zubir 2012, 29). It appears that this photo was taken as a publicity shot in the recording studio, so additional instruments are placed for display such as more *angklungs*, a floor tom drum, a *gendang* and a *rebana*. What is noticeably absent from this photo are the modern instruments actually heard in Zubir Said’s film scores such as the vibraphone, piano, guitar and saxophones. The most modern ‘instrument’ to be seen is the large microphone in front of Hussein Haniff.²⁵ I can only speculate whether this was a ‘traditional’ instrument recording session or a conscious effort to promote the Cathay-Keris brand as being distinctly ‘Malay’.



Figure 4.8. Zubir Said (seated, front row, first from right) and Hussein Haniff (standing, far right) (in Peters, 76; Rohana Zubir, 26)

In fact, Cathay-Keris distinguished its productions from their rival Shaw Brother’s Malay Film Productions (MFP) by focusing on the genre of the Malay epic. Unlike MFP,

²⁴ The man is Wahid Satay, a popular actor at Cathay-Keris known for comedic acting and singing abilities.

²⁵ I discuss the role of the microphone in shaping Malay film music aesthetics in greater detail in the following chapter.

Cathay-Keris was the only Malay film production company that allowed its composers to write original background music, whereas MFP's composers focused more on writing commercially viable songs. Thus, Cathay-Keris was known for its more 'traditional' aesthetic offerings in Malay film and music. Kassim Masdor, a composer and musician who used to work for MFP as a continuity clerk suggests that the more aesthetically modern commercially-inclined film songs from MFP had a greater mass appeal compared with Cathay-Keris' film songs that were 'more... traditional(ly inclined), which are harder to sing'²⁶ (1999, Reel 6). He elaborates:

A lot of the film songs from Cathay-Keris were too excessively Malay. So, they were not accepted by society possibly because, sorry to say, they weren't that exciting but despite the Shaw Brothers films not having any, what people call very typical Malay songs... (Shaw Brothers film songs) have a *commercial touch*. (1999, Reel 7, my emphasis)

This statement does not necessarily disparage the musical productions of Cathay-Keris but rather indicates the reality of a Malay film audience's musical taste in the 1950s and 1960s. The 'commercial touch' of prominent Shaw Brothers MFP song writers such as P. Ramlee and Kassim Masdor constituted a cosmopolitan popular music aesthetic that included non-Malay styles of music such as jazz, samba and later, rock & roll, albeit sung in the Malay language. The 'commercial' musical approach of the MFP Shaw Brothers' studio culminated in the final transition out of Malay folk and traditional music in the rock & roll film *A Go Go '67* (1967, dir. Omar Rojik) which featured Malay *pop yeh yeh* bands – rock guitar groups with singers a la the Beatles and Rolling Stones.²⁷ Unfortunately, this film was one of the last Malay films produced by the Studio in Singapore, marking the beginning of the end of a vibrant era of music in Malay films (Johan, 2014).²⁸

Challenging Tradition

²⁶ '... Kita punya (lagu) more to modern. Cathay-Keris punya more to traditional yang payah dinyanyikan'

²⁷ Ironically, Cathay-Keris was the first to produce a rock & roll-themed Malay film. *Muda Mudi* (*Youths*, dir. M. Amin) starring Siput Sarawak and Roseyatimah was released in 1965, two years prior to *A Go Go '67*.

²⁸ I discuss the musical currents that coincided with the end of the Malay film studio system in Chapter 5.

The traditionalising discourse that positions the music of Cathay-Keris films as ‘excessively Malay’ and ‘very typical Malay’ are ironic in retrospect, considering the modern approach and critique of tradition contained in those films. This modern approach is evident in the ample use of diegetic and non-diegetic disjunctures in these films that articulate a discourse of cultural and emotional conflict among the protagonists. The characters Malang and Dang Anom are trapped within the boundaries of their culture and customs (*adat*), in which unquestioning loyalty to the Sultan is paramount. However, their cultural loyalties are significantly challenged when it devastatingly affects their personal relationship. Music is interestingly used as contrast to the emotions of these characters at crucial points of conflict in the narrative. Furthermore, the use of traditional-sounding music disjunct to the narrative amplifies the anti-authoritarian themes of the film’s story. These music-narrative disjunctures are observed in two crucial scenes in the film. In these scenes I analyse how Hussein Haniff’s modern melodramatic narrative interacts with the multi-layered representations of tradition contained in Zubir Said’s film music, articulating poetically and musically the contestations of power tied to postcolonial Malay nation-making.

First, I consider the ‘lament’ sung by Dang Anom when she discovers her unfortunate fate of becoming the Sultan’s concubine (**Example 4.3**). It is performed in a *dondang sayang* style replete with traditional-sounding melodies and instrumentation (see Matusky & Tan 2004, 333-4).²⁹ The song occurs as a dream that Dang Anom experiences the night before she is bound for the Sultan’s palace to become a concubine. As such, it fittingly portrays the protagonist’s despair (Appendix A.4). The song initially articulates Dang Anom’s sadness in the form of her desperate longing for her lover, Malang. It expresses her many anxieties regarding the safety of Malang confronting the Majapahit kingdom and her own impending subjugation to the Sultan’s harem. The song also implies her anxiety for the anguish that Malang will feel if he returns safely; only to discover that she is the Sultan’s concubine. When Malang enters the song sequence to advise her not to ‘idolise shadows’, she is elated to see him and just as he embraces her from behind he drops a stone into the

²⁹ Matusky & Tan indicate that the *dondang sayang*, translated as ‘love song’ has two possible origins; the first locates it in Penyengat or Riau and the second locates it ‘in Malacca at the height of the Malay kingdom in the 15th century’(334). Evidence of this performance style can be dated to the 17th and 18th century in the Malay world in the classical Malay texts the *Tuhfat al-Nafis* and the *Hikayat Hang Tuah* (Ibid).

pond below them (Figure 4.9). The shot of the stone dropping into the pond is synchronous to a loud and punctuated F minor chord played on the vibraphone; the chord seems out of place from the accompanying music and is used as a sound effect (Figure 4.10). They are both shown singing the final line of the song together through their distorted reflection in the pond. Following that, the next shot clearly reveals the Sultan singing next to Dang Anom in place of Malang (Figure 4.11). While singing the final line, Dang Anom turns around to face who she thinks is Malang but is horrified to see the Sultan instead. She then pushes herself away from him, and the song transitions into an energetic and harrowing instrumental and visual sequence that amplifies her horror. The song ends with Dang Anom's terrified screams as she wakes up sobbing from her nightmare. The lyrics towards the end of the song imply that Dang Anom's longing for a 'pure' and unimpeded union with Malang ('We, who are pure cannot be obstructed') is merely a false hope ('Don't always idolise shadows'). The idolisation of shadows is also in reference to the false idolisation of the Sultan; as such, the lyrics suggest that the Sultan is a false idol. Moreover, the Sultan is clearly portrayed as an obstruction to Malang and Dang Anom's 'pure' love. As the final song sequence of the film, this scene anticipates the tragic fate of Dang Anom at the end of the film. Ultimately, the melodramatic, foreboding lyrics and interpretive context of the song articulate an overt critique of the injustices of blind loyalty to feudal power.



Figure 4.9. Malang (left) and Dang Anom (right)



Figure 4.10. Malang and Dang Anom's distorted reflection



Figure 4.11. To Dang Anom's horror, Malang is 'replaced' by the Sultan

This 'excessively' Malay song is juxtaposed against an impressionistically edited *mise en scène* of Dang Anom's dream that include shots of her face and the Sultan in multiple exposures and long-angle shots of her silhouette next to a barren tree on a hill (Figure 4.12). The most famous and iconic still from this film – the multiple exposure shot of Dang Anom's face – is also from this song sequence (Figure 4.13). A prominent Malaysian film maker, U-Wei Haji Saari, in an article for the *MAJULAH!* Zubir Said Film Festival companion booklet notes the modern aesthetics of this particular song sequence and image:

The scene that particularly strikes me, and I've watched it recently, is Fatimah Ahmad's (Dang Anom's) daydream scene. The way it was edited makes it look like the earliest MTV-style Malay music clip ever produced... It's a good song to edit around... and indeed director Hussein Haniff started as an editor. (2012, 59-60)

In other words, this scene and Hussein Haniff's editing techniques were at the time considered comparatively modern and experimental in comparison with other Malay films. At the end of the song sequence, the Sultan's image is multiplied as double exposures to amplify the horror felt by Dang Anom (Figures 4.14 and 4.15). The duplication of his image within the song suggests the inescapable reach of his incessant lustful desires due to his unquestionable position of power. These modern visuals juxtaposed with the tragic melodramatic narrative and the traditional-sounding music of Zubir Said act to separate the protagonist from 'traditional' notions of Malay loyalty to feudal order.



Figure 4.12. A long angle shot of Dang Anom in the distance



Figure 4.13. The iconic multi-exposure shot of Dang Anom



Figure 4.14. The Sultan in a double-exposure shot



Figure 4.15. The multiple-exposure shot of the Sultan mirror his inescapable reach of power and incessant lustful desires

Another important aspect of this song to consider is the intricate orchestration and arrangement. While the song is sung in a *dondang sayang* style, especially in the vocals, the instrumentation is more rigidly structured and melodically repetitive. The instrumental introduction refers back to the Dang Anom motif present in the opening theme and love duet. This melodic motif is deployed as a responding phrase to Dang Anom's sung verses. Each sung line is 'answered' by the Dang Anom motif, indicating a rigid but organised compositional structure. This is an explicit reference to the *dondang sayang* genre, in which a call and response between singers and instrumentalists (usually a solo violinist) is typically heard. However, the instrumental responses are usually performed in a more fluid and extemporised manner. Zubir Said's arrangement, by contrast, formalises the *dondang*

sayang. In this way, this song by mixing Malay folk music practices with western compositional practices begins to articulate a musical aesthetic of a traditionalised nationhood; practices from the past are effectively modernised. The film's narrative can be viewed as paralleling the musical structure; the past is referenced in its historical setting but the modern desire for post-feudal and postcolonial autonomy is the dominant structuring theme. The film's music and narrative analysed together reveal some of the antipathies and aspirations that constituted the paradoxes of a Malay nation in the making.

The next scene for analysis is set in the court of the Sultan, in which a group of female dancers are performing to celebrate Malang's triumphant return to Temasek (**Example 4.4**)³⁰. The Sultan summons his concubines to be present for the festivities and Dang Anom enters the room to a slow and melancholic melody that is diegetically heard as the introduction of a new dance. Suddenly, just as Malang notices her, the music is punctuated by a loud percussive accent that becomes a fast and lively percussive *joget* rhythm (see Matusky & Tan 2004, 108). This sped-up tempo in the music is in starkly contrast to Malang's unsettling realisation that his lover is now a concubine of the Sultan. Infuriated, he leaves the court in haste amidst the festive dance performance. The interplay of diegetic music in contrast with the repressed emotions of Malang and Dang Anom operate to highlight the overarching anti-feudal theme in the film. The traditional dance music heard above everything else represents the subsuming limitations of a feudal culture in which individual desires and actions (except the Sultan's) need to be repressed. Additionally, the dance performances represent an embodied expression of loyalty to culture and tradition as well as a sexualised objectification of female subjects in service to the king's lustful desires. At this crucial point of the film, Malang leaves the court abruptly as he is unable to stomach the reality of his predicament: he fought for his Sultan and country only to have his heart broken by the cultural order that he was serving without question.

This scene resonates with the notion of sounded authority that was mentioned earlier (Andaya 2011). The portrayal of traditional Malay music and dance as a representation of the Sultan's authority in a disjunctive relationship to the narrative amplifies the critique of Malay feudal power. While the Sultan's authority and even his magnanimity is reflected in the festive occasion, it contrasts with the anger felt by Malang and the despair felt by Dang

³⁰ The dance here features Lela Sani who is mentioned in the title credits.

Anom when they see each other across the room. Upon Malang's abrupt exit from the festivities, he immediately goes to confront Dang Anom's father. The exchange between Malang and Dang Anom's father, Rajuna Tapa, clearly indicates the radical critique of tradition or Malay customs (*adat*) that fuels the film's narrative. Malang learns that Rajuna Tapa had no choice in giving up his daughter to the Sultan. This however, infuriates Malang even more. Upon Rajuna Tapa asking for him to be patient, Malang replies:

Sir, everything in this world has its limits. The same goes with patience... If the Sultan is free to appease his lustful desires then I too as a free human being should be free to express the words from my heart that are true.

Rajuna Tapa (RT): Your words are true but the citizens cannot be treasonous to the Sultan. Moreover, it is wrong on the side of our customs.

Malang (M): Ah! Customs! Are not customs a manifestation of desire to spread cruelty? Meanwhile, the Sultan is free to abduct peoples' children and wives to fulfil his lustful desires, but the citizens; the citizens are bound to ruthless customs. Where is the justice, Sir?

RT: Malang, do not give in to your the feelings of your young blood. It will destroy your body.

M: Never, never. For the safety of Anom and the truth I am willing to sacrifice anything at all to demolish these ruthless customs.

Here, Malang's overtly anti-feudal opinions critique Malay customs (*adat*) or tradition that allow for a monarch's unjust abuse of power. The exchange between Malang and Rajuna Tapa also reflect the tensions between the younger and older generations. Indeed, the Malay community in the 1960s was divided across a spectrum of beliefs: liberals, conservatives, monarchists, Islamists, socialists and Marxists. Hence, the exchange above not only articulates the tensions between Malay nationalists and the colonial order but also the antipathies within a diverse Malay community in a period of decolonisation and nascent independence. Some sought a more conservative approach to independence that upheld the integrity of the Malay monarchy, while others wanted a more radical change: a dissolution of the monarchy altogether. Another subtext that can be interpreted from this is a critique of colonial rule; the uncontrollable lust of the Sultan can be likened to the unbridled capitalism and political domination of the colonial administration. The women and children of the citizens of Temasek are ruthlessly abducted just as the natural resources of the Malay Peninsula had been appropriated violently by the erstwhile colonial rulers.

The social critique derived from the film's narrative and dialogue is even more complex, however, when considering the film's music. What can be heard in the film's music then, is a representation of tradition that contrasts with the radical, 'anti-tradition' message of the film. *Traditionalising* music is used to signify the sounded authority of the Malay feudal order but a closer, intertextual reading of such music reveals a more nuanced relationship. In Chapter Two, I demonstrated how the use of the leitmotif indicates a cosmopolitan musical approach rooted in western art music. However, such a leitmotif in the context of a film's narrative can also signal an aesthetic of emergent nation-making. The Dang Anom motif functions similarly in its articulation of two opposing notions. On one hand, the motif may be seen as a rigid structural imposition of formal western compositional practices; it assumes the baggage of colonial modes of structuring, simplifying and other-ing the culture of the colonised. On the other hand, the musical convergence of western conventions with local music is congruent with the postcolonial process of nation-making; Zubir Said and Hussein Haniff were actively creating their own nuanced discourse about Malay nationhood in *Dang Anom*. It was a discourse about the paradoxes and contestations of an emerging Malay nation that was potentially bound by conservative notions of tradition and a colonial mentality of dependence. The tragic narrative of *Dang Anom*, however, loudly implores its audience to challenge corrupt leaders who derive their power from tradition, customs or archaic belief systems. In this allegory for ethical nation-making, the musical tradition that Zubir Said created actually represented his own desire for a modern Malay nation that could free itself from colonial dependency by adapting the local musical practices of the past to the aspirations of the present.

Throughout this section, I analysed intertextually how musical modernisms clashed with notions of Malay tradition. Evident in Zubir Said's film music is an interplay between a traditionalised-national music aesthetic with 'classical' narrative themes about a pre-modern Malay feudal society. Issues of feudalism and class inequities are highlighted in films such as *Dang Anom*, while the aesthetically-modern approaches used in Zubir Said's compositions underscore a critique of antiquated notions of Malayness. However, such film music simultaneously challenged pre-colonial Malay feudal culture while reinforcing western conceptions of modern nationalism through the supercultural aesthetic conventions of film music and the economic demands and limitations of a commercial film industry.

Beyond this unequal relationship of power between a postcolonial economy and aspirant nationalists however, there are instances of agency that emerge between the lines of discourse about tradition and modernity. For instance, I observe the integral role of the film's female protagonist, Dang Anom, whose tragic predicament but resolute and moralistic stand for autonomy parallel the composer's and director's personal aspirations for postcolonial self-determination in a period of emergent nation-making. As I have demonstrated earlier in my discussion of Zubir Said's personal views on music and nationalism, the notion of national or traditional 'authenticity' was ambiguous at best. My interpretations of modernity and agency are therefore, not descriptive of Zubir Said's true intentions but instead reflective of his unique musical, cultural and political experience in Singapore during a period of burgeoning nation-making and imagining.

Conclusion

Listening to Zubir Said's film music uncovers how a postcolonial nation is imagined through the evocation of tradition. Traditions are not 'authentic' practices that a nation draws from. Rather, the process of creating or re-imagining traditions is constitutive of nationhood. In drawing from Waterman's study, tradition-making is indeed very much a process bound up with postcolonial modernity. A musical and historical analysis of the film *Dang Anom* reveals how the notion of tradition and nation were imagined and discursively formed through a commercial film market that intersected with the ideologies and aspirations of postwar cosmopolitan Malay nationalism. It is apparent that Zubir Said aesthetically deployed the 'traditional' in his music to express an ethno-national Malay discourse. As part of the cosmopolitan discourses on nation-making during the period, an essentialised 'pure' Malay tradition was seemingly evoked but closer attention to musical content reveals a modernising musical approach that used Western instrumentation and compositional practices. Beyond that, despite being limited by the budgetary constraints of a commercial film industry, he found solutions that further contributed to the uniqueness of his music that led to the development of a distinctive Malay musical aesthetic of nation-making in historically-themed Malay films. While music from Cathay-Keris films' may be

heard as canonical symbols of a national Malay culture in Malaysia and Singapore it articulated a more nuanced and contestatory notion of Malay statehood grounded in modern ideals of freedom and resistance to the feudal-colonial order.

In answering the question posed in this chapter's title, I argue that nationalising a tradition is strongly predicated upon the existence of a supposedly unchanging repository of culture. This is negated by a case study of Zubir Said and his musical compositions. I argue that the film music composed by Zubir Said actually demonstrates the reverse in that he was instrumental in the process of creating an aesthetic of Malay musical tradition for the nascent postcolonial nation.³¹ As noted earlier in this thesis, Malay musical practices prior to colonial rule were already intensely pluralistic and cosmopolitan. Therefore, the process of creating a musical tradition for an emergent Malay nation was a selective process facilitated by creative individuals in positions of nation-making. Zubir Said was a composer that was given the opportunity to compose a 'modern' musical 'tradition' for an emerging Malay nation, using ambiguous cultural boundaries of Malayness that were and remain highly contestatory (see Waterman 1990). As such, Zubir Said had to creatively construct a Malay musical tradition for the silver screen, drawing on, at his own discretion, selected musical genres, instrumentation and folk melodies to portray a sense of musical authenticity rooted in an 'imagined' organic past. While Malay films drew on Malay feudal history as a source of its vernacular cultural past, the traditional-sounding music and melodramatic narratives of such films actually challenged archaic notions of tradition to articulate a subversive message of ethical modernity, freedom and self-determination. From the disjunctural narrative juxtaposition of Malay folk music and dances like the *dondang sayang* and *joget* to harmonising a Malay melody in sixths on saxophones, Zubir Said's film music, in tandem with the radical ideology of Malay nationalists active in the Malay literary, print, film and music community subversively sounded a postcolonial critique of unequal power relations between despotic rulers and innocent subjects, British rule and

³¹ Inspiring my argument here are studies that deal with modernist reformism and the construction of musical traditions in Malaysia may be found in Tan (1993, 2005) and Sarkissian (2000, 2002). A comparative study of how Southeast Asian and South Asian music is formalised as an elite national cultural practice or 'classicised' can be found in Moro (2004). Additionally, substantial scholarly discussion exists on modernist reformism in the classicisation of South Asian music with regard to nationalism and postcoloniality (Subramanian 1999, 2011; Jakhle 2005; Weidman 2006; Schofield 2010). I discuss in detail the formation of Malaysian and Singaporean national music culture in Chapter Seven.

Malay activism, colonial oppression and self-determination. Through their narrative works, Malay literary activists, film-makers and composers championed new postcolonial ideals by challenging antiquated notions of Malay feudalism. As one of the first film composers for the postwar Malay film industry, Zubir Said was instrumental in initiating a musical aesthetic discourse of Malay nation-making that resonated throughout Malay films of the early 1960s.

This chapter has examined how the pre-colonial past was represented in Malay films in the early 1960s, a period that saw a rise of Malay authorship in Malay films and music. These rising Malay directors, writers and composers also saw a need to more directly portray the social issues and problems that were facing a rapidly modernising Malay society on the silver screen. As such, the early 1960s began to see more Malay social films (*filem masharakat*) helmed by Malay directors. Such films, especially the ones directed by P. Ramlee, also featured musician-protagonists in prominent roles. As we shall see in the next chapter, musician-protagonists in these film narratives effectively mediated the concerns and anxieties of a rapidly changing Malay community that was facing increased urbanisation and the social inequities of class in a modern capitalist economy. Moreover, the cosmopolitan music and musical technologies of such films also played a role in mediating an acceptable and embodied modernity a period of emergent national consciousness in Malaysia and Singapore.

CHAPTER FIVE

Narratives of Class and Technologies of Classiness: Mediations of Modernity and Music in P. Ramlee's Social Films (early 1960s)

A man in shirt and tie is seen sitting behind a large broadcast microphone announcing in Malay, 'This is Radio Singapore!'.¹ This scene cuts to an image of a pair of hands striking a bongo. Then, in sequence to the building musical arrangement, images of hands on musical instruments are seen playing: a double bass ostinato, an accordion striking a minor chord, a piano doubling the bass pattern, a drum kit playing a fill, a pair of maracas outlining the beat, and finally, to mark a break in the developing groove, P. Ramlee is shown playing a melody on a tenor saxophone that brings the whole band together.² He makes a gesture with his hands to signal the last phrase of the song, ending the band's performance in unison. The radio announcer goes on to say, 'That was the opening song by the Kassim Selamat Orchestra, led by Kassim Selamat'.³ The scene then cuts to a young woman dusting a table beside a large radio cabinet. Upon hearing Kassim Selamat's name, she rushes downstairs to alert her employer's daughter of around the same age about the band leader's radio appearance.

This is the opening scene of *Ibu Mertuaku* (*My Mother-In-Law*, 1962) (**Example 5.1**); arguably the most beloved, influential and critically-acclaimed film directed and starred in by P. Ramlee. Critics and scholars observe in this film a fluid portrayal of the complications of class and the anxieties regarding modernity in the Malay-speaking world of the 1960s (Muhammad 2010; Barnard 2005; Van der Heide 2002). Beyond this view, I aim to highlight in this chapter how 'social' films such as these used music, musical instruments, musical technologies, musicians and music listeners as integral subjects in the articulation of such modernity. Moreover, while such representations of modernity may have been regarded with ambivalence in Malay film narratives, the musical discourses and practices presented in such films reveal a greater consonance with 'western' modernity and

¹ 'Inilah Radio Singapura!'

² It is important to note that all the tenor saxophone parts were performed by Yusof B., a prominent film song composer who worked for Shaw Brothers' Malay Film Productions. He is shown in the film playing a jazz song reminiscent of Lester Young's tenor saxophone style in the 'blind date' scene set at the cabaret night club, The Capitol Blue Room.

³ "Itulah lagu pembukaan Orkestra Kassim Selamat, yang di bawah pimpinan Kassim Selamat."

the ideologies and expressions that are presumed to be exogenous to Malay culture. The Malay films of the 1960s were inclusive of a indigenously-rooted cosmopolitan aesthetic that reflected the increasingly urbanised and nation-conscious inclinations of their producers and consumers. These complex articulations of modernity and nascent nationhood are evident in the films' class-based narratives that negotiate traditional-rural Malay values with musical expressions that convey a modern-cosmopolitan aesthetic.

The films I will observe also include culturally poignant statements about the placement of musicianship as an occupation with a liminal position in a class-based modern society.⁴ The infamous line that is remembered by most fans of P. Ramlee films is proclaimed by the rich and domineering mother-in-law of *Ibu Mertuaku* when she inquires about the occupation of her daughter's new love interest. Her daughter, Sabariah (played by Sarimah) replies that he is a 'musician (*ahli music*)' to which her mother angrily responds, 'A musician? My ancestors curse this! A musician... You ungrateful child!'⁵ (see Muhammad 2010: 225-6). This notorious line is delivered by the actress, Mak Dara, who played the mother-in-law of the movie, Nyonya Mansur. Prior to her film career, Mak Dara was herself a famous singer and actress of *bangsawan* operas.⁶ This admonishment and its attendant ironies also echo in the cultural memory of contemporary Malaysians and Singaporeans. When I was an aspiring music undergraduate, my mother and older Malay relatives would jokingly quote Mak Dara's statement - 'A musician?'⁷ - when I mentioned pursuing a career in music. Ramlee's musician-themed films such as *Ibu Mertuaku*

⁴ My understanding of the liminality of musicians considers them as being in an adaptable social position that affords them access to both the upper-class and lower-class spaces of cultural production and social interaction. My understanding draws from Brown's (2007) view of how 'musicians...possess social liminality - unusual cultural sanction to cross ordinarily strict boundaries that are of particular significance to a particular society' (6). Brown expands on Merriam's (1964) observance of the high cultural value accorded to musicians despite their 'low social status' (Ibid). Further, musicians are integral in representing the voice of the masses to the powerful' and hence, are 'institutionally liminal' and 'continually moving between fixed categories' (Ibid, also see Turner 1969: 94-130).

⁵ 'Ahli muzik? Memang pantang datuk nenek aku! Ahli music. Anak yang tak mengenang jasa!'

⁶ A notable performance by Mak Dara singing and dancing an improvisatory *dondang sayang* style song can be viewed in the film, *Seri Mersing* (1961, dir. Salleh Ghani). This performance is a useful reference to sung performance styles found in *bangsawan* theatre. For a brief overview of *bangsawan* music styles see Tan (2005, 294-8).

⁷ 'Ahli muzik?'

poetically articulated a performative discourse about music, musicians, class and modernity that would resonate throughout Malay culture until the present day.⁸

This chapter will build on the previous chapters on decolonisation and tradition by analysing music as articulating and mediating modernity in the films *Ibu Mertuaku* and *Antara Dua Darjat* (*Between Two Classes*, 1960, dir. P. Ramlee). These are significant examples of ‘social’ films (*filem masharakat*) that address issues of class inequality in an increasingly urbanised and modernising Malay Peninsula from the mid-1950s to early 1960s.⁹ Such films and their musical content provide insight into the social issues that concerned film-writers and the diverse musical styles that were popular among the urban populace of 1960s Malaysia, Singapore and Indonesia. The early 1960s was a transitional period of nationhood as The Federation of Malaysia was officially independent from British rule, but Singapore – the centre of Malay film production at the time – was a Straits Settlement of the British colonies that was still in transition towards autonomous rule. This transitional period of nation-making marks the beginnings of the Malaysian and Singaporean states; specifically the formation of Malaysia in 1963 that included The Federated Malay States, Straits Settlements, Singapore, Sabah and Sarawak. Thus, films from this era reflected and documented daily life issues, directly or indirectly commenting on the concerns and anxieties of Malays living in the postcolonial social environment of a modern multicultural society. However, the confines of a vernacular film industry and its expressions of ethno-national ideologies presented a more homogenous vision of nation in such social narratives. As such, my reading of nation-making narratives in the films analysed must be understood within the context of an era in which the shaping of a modern Malay citizen – adaptable to changing times, but also true to traditional values – was essential to the emerging nation. In the following pages, I will analyse in Ramlee’s social films the discourses of modernity through and about music. I argue that music from his

⁸ Prior to this, Ramlee directed, starred and wrote music for the class-themed social film *Antara Dua Darjat* (1961), in which he plays a pianist. Another notable film, *Ibu* (1953, dir. S. Ramanathan) features him as a trumpet player but does not deal with class issues as explicitly as his 1960s films.

⁹ The monthly magazine, *Majallah Filem*, devoted three issues (Various 1960a; 1960b; 1960c) to fan letters debating the value of *filem masharakat* (social films) over *filem bangsawan* (pre-modern themed films). The term ‘social film’ is also employed in Vasudevan’s studies of films of a similar genre in 1950s Hindi cinema (1995, 1996)

films indicate a history of pluralistic practices in the region that ultimately articulate a conciliation with modernity.

In this chapter, I argue that the music of social Malay films articulated the complexities of modernity and emerging nation-hood with *narratives of class* and what I call *technologies of classiness*. ‘Activist’ film-writers used class-oriented narratives in an attempt to instill a sense of social consciousness in their audiences. However, since the Malay film industry was profit-oriented and subject to colonial censorship, overtly radical ideas were tempered with ambiguous narratives and mediatory characters. Historical and critical analyses of Ramlee’s social films draw attention to the tensions between traditional Malay morality conflicting with the social ills brought about by modernity and wealth. While such films present melodramatic narrative themes of poor against rich, rural against urban, tradition against modernity, a closer intertextual analysis reveals multi-layered interactions and negotiations of these themes.

Musical technologies in the form of modern, western and cosmopolitan instruments and genres further mediate such class and cultural tensions aesthetically. Musician protagonists, who represent the working class, dress in western clothes, play modern musical instruments and perform cosmopolitan music. I argue that the visual and sonic portrayal of such elements are representations of *classiness* in the sense of style, as opposed to economic status. Moreover, the medium of film itself is a modern technology that frames these class-conscious narratives of nation-making. A further social interplay is present in the commercial aesthetic shaped and facilitated by technologies of music and film; the musical styles and instruments affected by on-screen protagonists are representative of a cosmopolitan and global-capitalist sphere of entertainment production and consumption.¹⁰

Female characters were especially important in negotiating the tensions between commoners and nobility, the lower classes and the upper classes, tradition and modernity. Women protagonists in class-based narratives are generally of the upper-class but forge intimate relationships with the lower-class male musician-heroes (portrayed by Ramlee).

¹⁰ The history of capitalist production for the consumption of a discreetly Malay demographic dates back to the period of the Great Depression. The construction of a Malay market of consumers in that period is examined by Van der Putten (2010). The capitalist production and consumption of Malay-language music via the European-based gramophone industry in the 1930s is discussed in Tan (2013;1996/97). A pre-World War Two history of the Malay population’s consumption of films through film magazines is discussed in Barnard (2010).

As such, the gendered constructions of modern Malay women characters in social films were liberating to an extent; women were portrayed as possessing considerable agency in their roles of bridging the gap between traditional ignorance and modern excess. Of course, the extent of women's agency in these films is limited as traditional roles highlighting female submission are also perpetuated throughout the films' male-authored scripts. For instance, the two contrasting female heroines in *Ibu Mertuaku* are objectified as a dichotomous allegorical representation of urban superficiality against small-town compassion. Exceptionally, the earlier film, *Antara Dua Darjat*, presents for the first time a female protagonist learning and playing a musical instrument (the piano) to accompany the male protagonist's singing – Malay films until then generally featured the reverse (female singer, male instrumentalist). In fact, it is a notably overlooked point in Malay film scholarship that the film's female character is featured as a skillful musician that does *not* sing in duet with Ramlee. These are some of the gendered aspects of modernity and music represented in Ramlee's films that I will discuss in greater detail throughout the chapter.

Considering the history of cosmopolitan musical practices in the Malay world, I will observe in this chapter the narratives of modernity and the technologies of musical expression that articulated the nation-making aesthetic particular to Malay films from the 1950s to 1960s. Before an analysis of music in the films *Antara Dua Darjat* and *Ibu Mertuaku*, I will discuss the role of musical technologies in the Malay film industry that effectively shaped a 'modern' and cosmopolitan aesthetic particular to Malay films from the 1950s to 1960s. This will be followed by a social history of class-conscious narratives expressed by independence-era Malay activists and film-writers to provide a frame of reference for analysing two musical 'social' films, *Antara Dua Darjat* and *Ibu Mertuaku*, in which Ramlee directed, starred, performed and composed music.

Technologies of Classiness

The Malay recording and film industry of the 1950s to 1960s introduced a plethora of postwar musical styles to Malaya that extended the pluralistic aesthetics of *bangsawan* theatre music. I suggest such aesthetic developments were due to the crucial role of new musical technologies that mediated a sense of postcolonial modernity and emerging

nationhood. The postwar Malay film industry, especially in its social films, portrayed an aesthetic of modern urban-cosmopolitan themes, characters, narratives and music. The music and representations of musicians in their spaces of performance such as nightclubs, hotels and private parties (hosted by wealthy patrons) presented the film-going audience with a sonic and visual display of *classiness*. Such classiness is portrayed through iconic modern-cosmopolitan musical styles such as jazz, *rhumba*, and *samba*, and specific instrumentation (pianos, saxophones, accordions, violins, congas and bongos). I argue that these musical technologies of classiness mediate the disjunctures of social class structures articulated in Malay social films. As mediators of modernity, working-class Malay musicians occupy a social position of liminality; the unique ‘cultural sanction to cross ordinarily strict boundaries that are of significance to a particular society’ (Brown 2007, 6). I discuss the social position of musicians later in this chapter. The focus of this section is to consider the history and prevalence of technologically-shaped aesthetic practices in Malay film music that expose an inherent cultural acceptance and embodiment of modernity in 1960s Malay society. I contend that the technology-shaped musical aesthetics of the postwar Malay music and film industries reconciled a modern and cosmopolitan lifestyle with a traditional and rural Malay identity; a theme that is reflected clearly in Malay social films of the period.

My analysis of musical mediation in this chapter pertains to how music articulates the space between structural expression and social meaning. Hennion (2007) suggests art and mediation as

... the reciprocal, local, heterogenous relations between art and public through precise devices, places, institutions, objects and human abilities, constructing identities, bodies and subjectivities. (80)

Moving beyond a strictly sociological paradigm of music research, Hennion argues for a re-acknowledgement of the autonomous ‘work’ of music to be considered alongside the sociological factors that determine the distribution and reception of music. Music is thus mediated on multiple levels; transforming society while adapting, autonomously and creatively throughout history and social contexts. Thus, it is this approach to musical mediation that I discuss with regard to the shaping of post-independence Malay society by musical technologies and the representation of such technologies on the silver screen. In

this way, film narratives and the social-historical context in which they are produced, consumed and re-consumed provide a further space for musical mediations.¹¹

Specifically, this chapter is interested in the iconic portrayal of modern musical technologies and cosmopolitan musical aesthetics in Malay films that sonically and visually articulated the aspirations of an era of nascent independence. Such technologically-shaped music and its attendant visual representations mediated an aesthetic of cosmopolitan modernity in Malay films. Malay film music was also mediated by the technological, economic and social context of the film studio system in 1950s and 1960s Singapore and Malaysia. Observing the musical mediation of modernity through specific musical technologies of production such as playback recording methods, musical instruments and the medium of film itself exposes an inherent cultural acceptance and embodiment of modernity in the Malay Peninsula of the 1950s and 1960s.

Technologically-Shaped Aesthetics

Th  berge (2001) considers how technologies of popular music such as the microphone and electric amplification are largely ignored yet crucial to the formation of popular music since the turn of the twentieth century. In line with this view, the postwar technologies of musical reproduction significantly contributed to a shift in the vocal aesthetics of Malay music during the era of film and recorded music. According to Th  berge, the extensive use of the microphone gave rise to ‘a new, intimate style of singing, known as “crooning”’ (5). This vocal style was popularised by American singers such as Bing Crosby who developed an approach to singing that

... exploited the intimacy offered by the microphone to great effect: his more ‘masculine’, ‘husky’ sounding baritone voice not only differed from the style of singing adopted by many of the other early crooners but its low register was also particularly enhanced through the microphone through the physical phenomenon known as the ‘proximity effect’. (Ibid)¹²

¹¹ The re-consumption of Malay film music is discussed in Chapter Seven, in which I discuss the politics of remembering Malay film music icons in contemporary Singapore and Malaysia.

¹² My discussion of the role of the microphone in shaping national musical cultures is inspired by similar studies of its use in other non-western musical cultures. Stokes (2009) examines historically the social, gendered and nostalgic implication of 1950s Egyptian crooner and film star, Abd. Al Halim Hafiz’s prominent and iconic use of the microphone. Weidman (2007) discusses the

This microphone aesthetic can be heard in the vocal style of Indonesian comedian and baritone-ranged crooner, Saiful Bahri, who assumed the explicitly referential stage name, ‘Bing Selamat’. He was well known in the recorded and live music scene of the 1950s to 1960s in Indonesia and the Malay Peninsula (Azlan Mohamed Said 2013: 240-1; Asby 1961: 6-8). In the Singapore-based Malay film industry, P. Ramlee's baritone crooner style as well as the smooth, ‘husky’, alto-ranged voices of Normadiah and Saloma were suited to the vocal amplification provided by microphones; such vocal qualities could not have been projected adequately in an un-amplified context.

I argue that there was a gradual aesthetic transition from live *bangsawan* or Malay-theatre performances and gramophone recordings prior to World War Two to the improved recording technologies of the postwar record and film industries. Female *bangsawan* singers such as Mak Dara – still heard in 1960s Malay films – continued to employ the higher registers and ‘nasal’ timbres in their singing that developed for unamplified projection in a large *bangsawan* theatre.¹³ Miss Rubiah, in her performance of the *keroncong* song “*Sayang Di Sayang* (Sweetheart is Loved, comp. Zubir Said)” in the film *Rachun Dunia* (*Poison Of The World*, 1950, dir. B.S. Rajhans) embodies in her singing a transitional style; at times slightly ‘nasal’ in higher registers but also ‘smooth’ in lower registers. Prior to being a Malay film playback singer and widely popular gramophone recording artist in the late-1940s, she was an active *bangsawan* performer.¹⁴ Therefore, like most popular singers around the world in the 1950s to 1960s, the successful careers of singers such as Rubiah, Normadiah, Saloma, Bing Selamat and Ramlee were substantially attributable to the technological mediation of an increasingly electrified film and popular music industry aesthetic.

paradoxical and contestatory politics regarding the use of the microphone in shaping a new aesthetic of classical Indian music since the 1930s (59-60, 86-97)

¹³ A notable performance by Mak Dara singing and dancing an improvisatory *dondang sayang* style song can be viewed in the film, *Seri Mersing* (1961, dir. Salleh Ghani). This performance is a useful reference to sung performance styles found in *bangsawan* theatre. For a brief overview of *bangsawan* music styles see Tan (2005, 294-8).

¹⁴ Her most famous recording was “*Bunga Tanjung*” recorded in 1947 on H.M.V. Records. (see Ahmad Sarji: 330 and Azlan Mohamed Said: 108-9)

This technological-aesthetic shift in Malay films can also be heard in the use of instruments corresponding to specific musical styles. Jazz or jazz-like music was commonly used as a marker of musical modernity and classiness. As such, modern jazz instruments were fetishised in musician-themed film narratives as important markers of character identity. Ramlee's unique position as film-star and musician afforded him leading roles that articulated this fetishisation of modern musical technologies. Simultaneously, Ramlee took on lead roles as a musician-protagonist in the following films: *Ibu* (*Mother*, 1953, dir. S. Ramanathan), which features him as a jazz trumpeter that performs in cabaret halls (Figure 5.1); *Anakku Sazali* (*My Son Sazali*, 1956, dir. Phani Majumdar), which showcases him as a commercially successful violinist-composer that gets his songs pressed on records (Figure 5.2); *Antara Dua Darjat* (*Between Two Classes*, 1960, dir. P. Ramlee), which portrays him as jazz pianist, piano-tuner and piano teacher (Figure 5.3); *Ibu Mertuaku*, which employs him prolifically as a radio broadcasting tenor saxophonist and band leader (Figure 5.4) and *Tiga Abdul* (*The Three Abduls*, 1964, dir. P. Ramlee), which sees him wielding an electric guitar as a musical-instrument-store owner (Figure 5.5). In all these films, iconic western instruments and technologies (trumpets, gramophones, pianos, electric guitars, saxophones, radios) and musical styles such as jazz mediate a cosmopolitan modernity for Malay musician-protagonists. Furthermore, such music mediates the experience of modernity and capitalism to the films' vernacular audience who are consumers of the mass-produced technology of the cinema and popular music industry. In considering these musician-hero archetypes with their attendant iconic musical instruments, I argue that musical technologies presented in screened narratives mediated Malay identities that were modern and cosmopolitan; highly indicative of the social-economic life of urban artists in the entertainment industries of the colonial and post-colonial Malay Peninsula. While these images or personae are visually and sonically indicative of a cosmopolitan modernity, what then, might we discern from the technological processes or practices used to create the portrayals of musical characters on the Malay silver screen?



Figure 5.1. Ramlee plays the trumpet in a jazz-cabaret nightclub in *Ibu*



Figure 5.2. Ramlee listens to his composition on the gramophone in *Anakku Sazali*



Figure 5.3. Ramlee teaches piano in *Antara Dua Darjat*



Figure 5.4. Ramlee the studio-recording musician, wields both the saxophone and microphone in *Ibu Mertua-ku*



Figure 5.5. Ramlee plays the electric guitar in *Tiga Abdul*

Recording Playback Film Songs

A glimpse of how music was recorded in a film studio environment is presented in the pages of the Shaw Brothers' MFP-published, *Majallah Filem*, in a feature article titled 'Merekam Lagu Filem (Recording Film Songs)' (Uncredited May 1960). In this article featuring the recording of a traditional Malay folk song, "Ikan Kekek (Kekek Fish)" for the film *Sumpah Wanita (A Woman's Oath, 1960, dir. Omar Rojik)*, the process of recording a

film song prior to shooting a film is explained.¹⁵ In addition to a list of musicians involved, photographs of them in the recording studio are displayed.¹⁶ The photographs include an image of P. Ramlee on the vibraphone and acting as the ‘music conductor’ for the recording. In addition, the vocal parts of the song involved a chorus of male actors and one director (H.M Rohaizad) that worked for the film studio.¹⁷ The interaction of the film’s director with recording technology is aptly noted:

While the musicians and singers adhere to their individual (musical) responsibilities, the director, Omar Rojik is not left out (of this process) as he intently watches the meters of the recording console... (33)¹⁸

The article concludes by stating that the new arrangement and recording will bring ‘new life’ and ‘increased popularity’ to the already famous song.¹⁹

This example from the promotional magazine indicates how technological processes were promoted positively to film audiences by depicting the modern aspects of film and music production. Intertwined with this promotion of modernity was also a sense of valuing local tradition in the reproduction of Malay folk-songs like “*Ikan Kekek*”.²⁰ Thus, the modern musical methods were seen as a way of renewing the practices of the past. At the same time, the involvement of multiple studio personnel portray a communal environment resonant of the Malay *kampung* (village) in tandem with these modern technologies of reproduction. Thus, a *kampung* ideal is enmeshed with the modern, urban space of a

¹⁵ This is a process of playback recording, a practice for recording film songs prior to the films being shot in order for the actors to lip-sync to the pre-recorded song while the film is being shot. This production process and its history in Indian cinema is documented and explained in detail in Morcom’s (2007) and Booth’s (2008) comprehensive monographs.

¹⁶ The musicians listed are Yusoff Osman on bass; on violins: Subrinyo, Nordin, Osman Ahmad, Chee Sai, Boon Liew, Wandu, Kam Leng; Yusof B on tenor saxophone, Ahmad Kassim on piano, A. Rahim on bongos and Kassim Masdur (Masdor) on guitar (33).

¹⁷ The male singers listed are H.M. Rohaizad (an emerging film-writer and director at the time), Salleh Kamil, Ali Fiji, Omar Suwita, Muhammad Hamid, Aziz Jaafar, M. Rafie dan Omar Harun (Ibid).

¹⁸ ‘*Sementara pemain2 musik dan penyanyi2-nya patoh dengan kewajipan masing2, pengarah Omar Rojik tidak ketinggalan mengamati meter perkakas rekording...*’

¹⁹ ‘*Lagu Melayu yang terkenal ini, di-perchayai akan menjadi lebih popular dengan susunan musik baru, lagi hidup.*’

²⁰ For a transcription of this song for Malay caklempong (gong-chime) ensemble see Matusky & Tan (170, citing Md Nor 1993, 1986).

recording studio.²¹ Interestingly, all the personnel involved – while exclusively male in this recording – were of different ethnicities, notably the instrumental musicians and staff in the isolated recording booth.²² This magazine article effectively fetishised a technologically-mediated space of film music recording in its idealistic portrayal of the film studio's communal atmosphere and multi-ethnic personnel. The film music studio was portrayed as a microcosm of the modern Malay nation; a nation constructed from the visionary leadership of a Prime Minister/director, aided by the technical expertise of its government administration/sound engineers with the collective support of its citizens/musicians-singers.

Such mediations of modernity through musical technologies signal the cosmopolitan aesthetic and active adaptation and embodiment of the modern technologies that permeated Malay films in a period of emergent national autonomy. While much has been said about the expression of postcolonial autonomy in the Malay world through media such as newspapers and other print media, less has been said about the political and social impact of musical practices.²³ Musical practices reproduced and disseminated through emerging technologies were important in shaping the narrative culture of nation-making that would follow the 1960s. As indicated by the intersecting music recording and film production economies, the technological mediation of Malay voices and music was a cosmopolitan process that extended the pluralistic interaction of musical practices that had existed prior to the local film industry's emergence. Ironically, the mediation of cultural plurality by new technologies was expressed within the homogenised frames of a vernacular Malay film and music industry that was and continues to be imagined as embodying a narrow ethno-national aesthetic.

Ethno-nationalist narratives also intersected with concerns about rapid modernisation and an attendant growing class-consciousness. The nascent nationalistic and social

²¹ I mention earlier in my thesis, drawing from Kahn (2006) that postwar Malay texts and films depicted in opposition to the ills of modernity the idealistic notion of the *kampung* (village) as the source of positive moral and communal values.

²² For a list of the musicians see footnote 5 above. In the isolated recording console booth, aside from Omar Rojik, the assistant director, Kemat Hassan and recording engineer Kam Sim Boon are mentioned.

²³ Perhaps the most important studies on the social and political impact of musical practices in Malaysia during this period can be found in Tan (1993) and Mohd. Anis Md. Nor (1993). Recently, Tan (2013) and Keppy (2013) wrote articles on cosmopolitan recording musicians that challenged colonial rule in the Malay Archipelago from the 1900s to 1940s.

ideologies of the urban-centred Malay intelligentsia permeated the narratives of Malay film from the mid-1950s to early 1960s. I am particularly interested in social films because until the 1960s they were quite rare due to the fact that *bangsawan* or traditional-themed films were more popular among the mass Malay vernacular film audience. As such, social films were a new means in the 1960s of relaying contemporary issues amidst an ever-modernising independent Malay Peninsula. In Malay social films, local concerns and traditional values are musically mediated with visual and sonic representations of western modernity and urban immorality in the postcolonial context of independence-era Malaysia and Singapore. Malay social films of the 1960s, thus, represent musical ‘westernisms’ as a mark of cosmopolitan modernity or progress; qualities required of emergent post-colonial nations in need of a definitive national culture. Musical technologies and the representation of those technologies were integral to this portrayal of post-colonial modernity and national autonomy.

Narratives of Class

The films *Antara Dua Darjat* (*Between Two Classes*, 1960) and *Ibu Mertuaku* (*My Mother-in-law*, 1962), highlight the issue of class inequality brought about by postwar modernisation, urbanisation and capitalism in the Malay Peninsula through a focus on musical personalities. These were films set largely in the multi-ethnic colonial urban centres of Singapore and Penang that depict the social life of musicians as part of a communal Malay working class. The narrative of Malay communal values in the face of rapid urbanisation and modernisation was an effective way to articulate ethno-nationalist ideology in a period of intense nation-making for a mass vernacular audience. The emphasis of nationalist, anti-colonial and socially-conscious themes in Malay literature and political writing were directly impacting upon film narratives. The Malay writers’ collective, *Angkatan Sasterawan 50* (ASAS 50, see Chapters Two and Three), promoted such political themes through literature, modern theatre and film. Direct interaction of ASAS 50 with Malay film-makers furthermore occurred through the contributions of the organisation’s writers including A. Samad Said, Masuri S.N and Noor S.I. to P. Ramlee’s

Gelanggang Filem (Film Arena) magazine (Harper 2001, 285; Barnard 2012).²⁴ Hence, by the early 1960s issues of colonialism, nationalism and class pervaded Malay literary and film culture. These issues were articulated as central to the experience of being a Malay in the modern urban conditions of an emerging postcolonial nation. Such Malay-centred social narratives expressed

... a critique of British rule, not only for its cultural impositions, but for its encouragement of a division within Malay society between a Malay bureaucratic elite and the masses. The Malay experience was represented as an interplay between the forces of feudalism and colonialism and the masses. The survival of the suffering and steadfast poor in an inhospitable social environment was contrasted with the lives of hypocritical and callous rulers, obsessed with sensual gratification... The city, no longer an evil in itself but colonised by Malays on the move, was a chalice of corruption, dominated by upper classes in a state of moral collapse. ‘Malayness’ was associated with values embedded in the rural masses; it rejected elitism. (Harper 2001, 302)

Unlike the 1950s, during which Malay films were primarily helmed by directors from India, the 1960s saw a surge of authorship by Malay film-writers and directors who articulated more class-conscious and nationalist narratives²⁵. The slow but steady increase of ‘social’ films set in contemporary and urban settings also marked a shift from commercial-vernacular themes to more political-nationalist narratives.

Interestingly, modern-sounding or westernised popular music flourished as it suited the contemporary setting of these social films. The most famous song from the Malay film music ‘canon’, “*Getaran Jiwa (Reverberating Soul)*” featured in the social, class-conscious film, *Antara Dua Darjat*. The song stands out in its overtly ‘modern’ style, employing a Latin American beguine rhythm and a pseudo-classical romantic or jazz-like piano introduction and harmonic arrangement. While the song is commonly perceived as a sentimental love song, it was presented in the context of a very socially-conscious if not actively political narrative about the ills of a feudalistic mindset in modern times. Before I analyse the social and musical discourses of this film, I will place into historical perspective

²⁴ I mention this link between P. Ramlee and ASAS 50 in Chapter Three of this thesis.

²⁵ For a table of Malay film productions in Singapore from 1953-1965 that indicate film directors by race, see Barnard 2009 (77). The year 1955 saw the first and only film helmed by a Malay (instead of an Indian or Filipino) director but that number steadily rose to 14 films directed by Malays in 1965. Also see Harper who indicates that by 1960, four Malay directors were employed by Cathay-Keris Films (283).

a trajectory of social themes in Malay films by briefly discussing the first commercially successful ‘activist’ social film produced and written by Malays in the Singapore film industry.

The Shaw Brothers’ MFP film, *Penarek Beca (Trishaw Pedaller, 1955)* was the directorial debut of P. Ramlee adding to his already prominent status as a Malay film star, singer and songwriter. The film also marked the beginning of Malay activists raising social and political concerns through the wide reach of the popular medium of film. Ramlee wrote the film in collaboration with literary activists, Abdullah Hussain and Jamil Sulong, highlighting issues of poverty and class inequalities to convey a message that championed individual – and by extension, national - agency in the face of archaic traditions and anxieties towards modernity (Barnard 2009, 75; Barnard & Van der Putten, 145). In this film, the positive values of modernity are highlighted in strong female characters that mediate moral relations between the impoverished and the wealthy, the traditional and the modern (Paseng Barnard & Barnard 2002, 20). The film’s heroine (and *de facto* ‘hero’), Azizah (Saadiah), is a modern and confident young Malay woman from a rich family. She is a student in an all-women’s vocational school that teaches young Malay women modern domestic skills such as using sewing machines and baking Western cakes. A similar school in Singapore close to the offices of the film’s writers was the inspiration for the Azizah character (Barnard, *Ibid*). Barnard further argues that the film’s poor, trishaw-peddaller-protagonist, Amran (P. Ramlee), is primarily motivated by Azizah ‘to look beyond his traditions’; an ideal that captures the modern nationalist aspirations of young Malay activists at the time (*Ibid*). Van der Heide views Azizah’s self-determination in the face of patriarchal barriers as more blatantly defiant than ‘her counterparts in Indian films’ (2002, 174).²⁶ It is useful to draw comparisons across these film cultures – especially considering the avid consumption of Hindi films by Malay-speaking audiences – as Van der Heide’s observation indicates an agential depiction of female characters particular to a Malay-modernist narrative.

The notion of individual agency operates within a class-based narrative that emphasises communal values over selfishness and greed. Kahn suggests that the emphasis on Malay

²⁶ Van der Heide cites the films *Awara* (1951, dir Raj Kapoor) and *Andaz* (1971, dir. Ramesh Sippy) for comparison.

communalism in Ramlee's films mediates 'between the nationalist narratives of Malay intellectuals and the experience of the broader (Malay) public' (130). As such, what has been observed by Paseng Barnard & Barnard as 'binary oppositions' in the film – eg. an arrogant and greedy villain versus a humble and poor hero - are used allegorically to facilitate the eventual realisation of positive Malay communal values (12-13). Amran's kindness and humility originates in his modest rural community as he works tirelessly on his trishaw to earn a meagre living to support his ailing mother. Conversely, the film's villain, Ghazali (Salleh Kamil) owns a car and obnoxiously requests *samba* music in preference to traditional Malay *inang* music at a nightclub.²⁷ Azizah's rich but miserly father (Udo Umar), eventually sees the error of his ways and welcomes Amran into his family. However, it is argued that an ambivalence is present in the mediating role of Azizah; the saintly, upper-class protagonist that sympathises with the poor and uplifts Amran from his lack of self-confidence to overcome his dire situation (20-21). The character of Azizah can be seen as reflective of the unique position of the Malay activists that wrote the film; Ramlee and his collaborators were successful Malay urbanites in the bustling city of Singapore. They were, like Azizah, mediating their modern-cosmopolitan aspirations for national autonomy with the concern of the working-class, rural Malay community for upholding traditional values in the face of rapid and uncertain social change.

Antara Dua Darjat (Between Two Classes, 1960)

Between Class and Music

The film, *Antara Dua Darjat*, again directed by P. Ramlee continues the trajectory of class-based narratives in Malay film but presents discourses overtly shaped by music about Malay modernity, culture and society in the 1960s. The non-linear narrative²⁸ of this social film centres around the tragic relationship between Tengku Zaleha (Saadiyah), a young

²⁷ Through a discussion of Ghazali's character in the film, Kahn's book unravels the complications and paradoxes of hybridity in Malay culture (163).

²⁸ For the sake of clarity for my proceeding analysis, I present the plot in a linear fashion.

woman of royal lineage, and Ghazali (Ramlee), a pianist of humble means.²⁹ Zaleha meets Ghazali while on vacation with her family at their ‘countryside’ mansion named “Anggrek (Orchid) Villa”. It is revealed that Zaleha and her family are residents of Singapore and the ‘country’ home is situated somewhere across the causeway in Johor – a quiet rural respite from the bustling city. Zaleha’s father (Ahmad Nisfu) is resolved to ensure that Zaleha does ‘not mingle with youngsters who are not of the same royal blood lineage’.³⁰ Replacing an indisposed band from Singapore, Ghazali and his band who reside in the nearby Malay village are hired to perform for Zaleha’s birthday party. The band performs a range of western and Latin American styles that is portrayed as a musical montage; slipping from a cha-cha to jazz ballad to samba to waltz for a dancing crowd (**Example 5.2**). Upon hearing Ghazali mesmerize the birthday party crowd with his original song, “*Selamat Panjang Umur* (Best Wishes For A Long Life)” (**Example 5.3**),³¹ Zaleha is smitten and finds a way to spend more time with him by convincing her father to employ him as her piano teacher. Over an undetermined period of time – weeks or months, perhaps – screened as a piano-centred musical montage, Zaleha’s piano skills progress exceptionally (**Example 5.4**). After Zaleha’s exceptional musical progress on the piano, Ghazali decides to test her with his own composition, “*Getaran Jiwa*” (**Example 5.5**). Aside from marking Zaleha’s competence on the piano, the song’s performance also confirms the blossoming love between the two protagonists. When Zaleha’s father learns of their relationship, the lovers are dramatically separated; Ghazali is beaten unconscious and Zaleha is forcefully sedated and immediately taken to Singapore. In Singapore, when Zaleha awakens, a verbal fight breaks out between her mother (Rahimah Alias) and her step-brother (Kuswadinata). Zaleha’s step-brother reveals disparagingly that her mother was a ‘cabaret woman’ and does not have the right to stand up for her daughter. Upon calling the police to circumvent

²⁹ The honorific ‘Tengku’ is accorded to Malays born of royal lineage. In the spirit of the class-conscious ideals of this film I will proceed to refer to the character as ‘Zaleha’ *sans* title.

³⁰ ‘*Tidak layak kamu bercampur-gaul dengan pemuda-pemuda yang bukan keturunan darah diRaja...*’

³¹ The lyrics for this song were written by S. Sudarmaji. He is also portrayed in this film as a saxophonist for the band performing this song. Interestingly, in the film, before he performs it, Ghazali informs his band mates to play “*Selamat Hari Jadi* (Happy Birthday)”. However, the ‘official’ name for the song is “*Selamat Panjang Umur* (Best Wishes for a Long Life)”, as documented in the P. Ramlee songbook, *Senandung Warisan* (trans. *A Serenade of Heritage*) released by the Malaysian National Archives (Arkib Negara Malaysia 2004, 55).

his potentially violent actions, he hits her on the head with a heavy object, killing her. Zaleha manages to protect herself with a hand-gun until the police arrive. Her step-brother is arrested and her father, traumatised, becomes mentally ill; leaving Zaleha with all the family's wealth. She then marries a man of noble blood, Tengku Mukhri (S. Kadarisman), who is intent on appropriating her inheritance. He is revealed to have a love affair with a woman (Rahmah Rahmat) already pregnant with his child. Zaleha, Mukhri and his friend, Tengku Aziz, return to a neglected Anggrek Villa for the newly-wed couple's honeymoon. Eventually, Zaleha reunites with a dishevelled and broken Ghazali and explains her side of the story. Until then, Ghazali had believed her to be dead. Tengku Aziz deduces the entire situation but compassionately pleads with his friend to let the lovers be. Mukhri, unaccepting of this, attempts to kill his friend and Ghazali. In the end, Mukhri, on the verge of shooting Ghazali is shot dead by Aziz who survives Mukhri's earlier attempt on his life.

While the film highlights status or class as an impediment to morality, the responsibility to be moral lies in the hands of the upper-class protagonists. The moralistic and dramatic conclusion of the film makes Aziz, a man of royal lineage, the accidental 'hero' of the film. On the other hand, Zaleha may be seen as a mediating character similar to Azizah in *Penarek Beca*. But Zaleha is presented as more of a liminal character; she is only partially of royal blood as revealed via her mother's cabaret-woman-commoner origins. Musically, she also transcends the depiction of the working class as entertainers or producers of music who perform for the enjoyment of the upper classes. Aside from using piano lessons as a foil for her father's restrictions, she excels remarkably on the piano as a producer of music – 'performing' what is arguably the most famous piano introduction to P. Ramlee's most famous film song, "Getaran Jiwa" (**Example 5.5**)³². As a woman, like the class-mediating female protagonists of previous films she is bound by a restrictive patriarchy but she is simultaneously empowered by her upper class position. Moreover, this is significantly the first Malay film featuring a woman as an instrumental musician. Prior to this, women were portrayed in Malay films as singers but never as instrumentalists. In fact, the female voice

³² I was informed by Kassim Masdor that the pianist who performed this film-version of "Getaran Jiwa" was Ahmad Kassim; who was, ironically in opposition to the emphasis of musical literacy in the film, unable to read musical notation, playing and learning the most challenging classical and jazz repertoire entirely by ear (Kassim Masdor 2013).

is absent from all of the film's songs, save for the group chorus-singing of the birthday song, "*Selamat Panjang Umur*". Thus, it is important to note, in representation at least, the mutually reinforcing roles of music and upper class female protagonist as a mediation of the tensions between class and modernity in Malay society.³³

Further, I will suggest that in the narrative of *Antara Dua Darjat* class differences are mediated through musical production, consumption and expressions of intimacy. Working-class musicians perform music for upper-class consumption. The 'doomed' lovers separated by social standing are brought together by musical exchanges. In some instances, music is used as a means of resistance against antiquated restrictions. Music even connects the poor and the rich in brief moments of pleasure; the upper class birthday-party crowd gathers around the piano and sings along to a working class musician's composition (Figure 5.6 & 5.7; **Example 5.3**). The village-residing musicians use Western instruments and perform modern jazz and Latin American music (Figure 5.8; **Example 5.2**). The musician characters are also metaphorical of Malay village communalism. In an indicative scene, Ghazali's cousin, Sudin (S. Shamsuddin), storms off with the band's double bass to serenade his love interest (**Example 5.6**). As he walks off, Ghazali reminds him that they have a practise session later in the evening, to which Sudin retorts, 'I already paid my fees!'.³⁴ One of his bandmates then replies 'have we not paid our fees, too?'.³⁵ This indicates the communal economy of the village-band in which the band mates pool their resources to rent instruments. The village featured in the film is a very musical one. Scenes set at the village are always backgrounded by the *keroncong* music of the band practising – the scene that introduces the village features Ghazali, Sudin and the band playing the Ramlee-composed *keroncong* song, "*Alunan Biola (Sound Of The Violin)*" (Figure 5.9 & 5.10; **Example 5.7**). At the end of their performance, they are approached in the pouring rain by Zaleha's chauffer. The chauffer's uniform makes Sudin mistake him for being a 'General' and he gets the band to stand to attention in the middle of their song. After correcting this misunderstanding, the chauffer asks them to help push his car out of the mud and the band obliges without question. The band's helpfulness in this scene also reflects the

³³ In my research past the 1950s, the earliest documentation of a Malay woman in a musical role not tied to singing or dancing is in an article on Salamah Basiron, a young female song-writer in the magazine *Bintang dan Lagu* (November 1966, 14-15).

³⁴ '*Aku pun bayar yuran dah!*'

³⁵ '*Kita pun tak bayar yuran, ke?*'

ideal communal spirit of a Malay village society. Thus, musical practice and musicians are associated directly with the Malay *kampung* (village) and communal living. Music, while presented as the foundation for communal interaction is, also conversely, capable of leaving the space of the village and penetrating the modern home and social activities of the urban-nobility; acting as a ‘bridge’ between two classes. More so, music is the agential medium that penetrates these class divisions through intimacy.



Figure 5.6. The upper class party guests gather around the musicians



Figure 5.7. The party guests sing as a chorus to “*Selamat Panjang Umur*”



Figure 5.8. The party band in formal, western, band attire



Figure 5.9. The band playing *keroncong* amidst the pouring rain



Figure 5.10. For this village band, music-making is both communal and occupational

Overall, music binds the narrative and moral direction of the film in a recurring poetic metaphor of the film's script. The film starts with interior shots of the abandoned Anggerik villa amidst a turbulent thunderstorm. This metaphor is then introduced during this scene by ghost-like narration voiced by P. Ramlee. Zaleha is struggling to sleep in Anggerek Villa in the middle of an unsettling thunderstorm when she hears the disembodied voice of Ghazali utter the following: 'Zaleha, melody (*irama*) and song (*lagu*) cannot be separated. If separated, song will be disordered (*pincang*) and art will be ruined (*rosak*)'.³⁶ This phrase also emerges as a prominent theme in the lyrics of the song, "Getaran Jiwa" sung by Ramlee (Appendix A.5; **Example 5.5**):

The metaphor of melody and song is repeated again in the middle of the film's narrative by Ghazali and Zaleha as they assure each other of their mutual commitment and inseparability:

Zaleha (Z): Ghazali, why can't melody and song be separated?

Ghazali (G): If they are separated, song will be disordered and art will be ruined.

Z: What if you and I are separated?

G: Our romance will be disordered and our lives will be ruined

Such an ambiguous juxtaposition of two very closely related terms; 'melody' and 'song' are further complicated by the interchangeability of the words in the Malay language. I provide the closest logical translation of the terms *irama* and *lagu* in relation to the film's narrative but the metaphor is relatively open to multiple interpretations. *Irama* could be used to describe an entire musical style, rhythm and/or melody of a song (*lagu*).³⁷ For example, *Irama Malaysia*,³⁸ is a new genre of Malaysian music that emerged in the 1990s, while the term, *irama*, is used to denote tempo in Javanese gamelan music. 'Lagu' is used as the more general term denoting individual 'songs' of different genres or repertoire (eg. *Lagu rock or lagu "Getaran Jiwa"*), while in some instances is synonymous with the term

³⁶ '*irama dan lagu tidak dapat dipisahkan. Kalau dipisahkan, pincanglah lagu dan rosaklah seni*'

³⁷ Based on definitions sourced from the Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka (Malaysia's Institute of Language and Literature) online dictionary, <<http://prpm.dbp.gov.my/Search.aspx?k=irama>> (Accessed November 28, 2013)

³⁸ For a discussion on the *Irama Malaysia* genre see Tan (2005:303-5) and Matusky & Tan (2004, 410-12)

'*irama*'.³⁹ Aside from the poetic and ambiguous usage of the terms, *irama* and *lagu* are aptly metaphorical to the distinctions of class perceived in modern Malay society. As the moralistic narrative tries to demonstrate through this musical metaphor, the rich are interconnected to common people and both classes are mutually dependent on each other. Working class servants and entertainers service the lives of the upper class and people in the upper classes are responsible towards the welfare of the poor.

The role of music as mediatory can be viewed as particular to a specific period of modernity and nascent nation-making. In the previous chapter, I invoked the notion of 'sounded authority' in feudal Malay communities where loud sounds were used as markers of territorial control by Malay rulers (Andaya 2011). Music, as portrayed in narratives about Malay society in 1950s and 1960s Malay film, instead negotiated authority through intimacy. Morally-grounded leaders were still responsible for the dispensation of justice – as seen in Aziz's intervention – but the feudalistic class divide was no impediment to the inseparable intimacy of two lovers just as melody is intrinsically bound to song. When Ghazali presents the sheet music for "Getaran Jiwa", Zaleha teasingly says, 'Oh no! Five flats.'⁴⁰ This indicates both the difficulty of the song - five flats in the key signature indicating the challenging piano fingering of Db Major – and Zaleha's musical proficiency. Moreover, she makes the comment in a flirtatious and affectionate manner – a sentiment that is encapsulated by the Malay term, '*manja*' – expressing a veiled confidence in her musical skills. Additionally, this comment indicates a naturalisation of western musical practices into Malay musicality, whereby 'modern' musical knowledge mediates the cultural obstructions that underscore the intimate relationship between Zaleha and Ghazali. Ghazali, a commoner, is also in a position of authority as Zaleha's teacher. Zaleha however, as a woman, provides instrumental accompaniment for Ghazali's singing; the reverse of usual Malay musical practices. As such, multiple layers of authority, class and gender are reversed and rendered ambiguous in the intimate musical interactions between Zaleha and Ghazali.

Antara Dua Darjat provides layers of discourses concerning class, modernity, music and gender in the Malay narrative of emergent nationhood. However, despite the nuanced

³⁹ Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka (Malaysia's Institute of Language and Literature) online dictionary <<http://prpm.dbp.gov.my/Search.aspx?k=lagu>> (Accessed November 28, 2013)

⁴⁰ '*Alamak! Lima flat,*'

mediations of gender and class through musical intimations, people in pre-determined positions of power such as the urbanised Malay nobility ultimately decide the fate of the rural masses. I will now proceed with a more detailed reading of the film, *Ibu Mertuaku*, released two years after *Antara Dua Darjat*. Made during the peak of his career in Singapore, *Ibu Mertuaku* is considered the most critically successful of Ramlee's social films. My study does not situate *Ibu Mertuaku* as a canonic film; rather, it will be analysed as a significant culmination of the themes on music, modernity, class, gender and emergent cosmopolitan nationhood articulated by independence-era Malay films.

Ibu Mertuaku (My Mother-in-law, 1962)

In P. Ramlee's landmark film, *Ibu Mertuaku*, musicians and their social environments become symbolic of working class marginalisation in modern-urban portrayals of a postcolonial Malay nation. Aside from the social position of musicians, the tensions between tradition and modernity are expressed in various narrative themes throughout the film. I suggest, in examining this film intertextually, music mediates modernity and nation-making via three prominent themes: 1) social anxieties towards modernity embodied in the protagonist's physical blindness; 2) constructions of the modern self through musical identity; 3) an embrace of modernity in the film's musical articulations. While modernity was contested and regarded with suspicion in *Ibu Mertuaku*, it is also embodied in the musical themes and expressions contained throughout the film. As such, I suggest that the cosmopolitan music of Malay social films mediated the tensions of traditional Malay values coming to terms with the rapid changes in ideology and lifestyle brought about by nascent postcolonial independence.

Visual Anxieties, Sonic Conciliation

Ibu Mertuaku deals prominently with the trope of blindness. The musician-protagonist, Kassim Selamat (played by Ramlee), loses his vision from weeks of crying and two years of isolation after his wife's apparent death in childbirth. It is revealed later that his mother-

in-law lied about his wife's death as part of an elaborate scheme to expunge him from her upper-class family. Barnard (2005) reads this against other traditional Malay historical and film narratives in which the 'motif of blindness' is absent; the loss of sight in Ramlee's film is part of a modern narrative that emphasises 'the melancholy (*sedih*) of a character' coming to terms with 'the emptiness of the modern world' (439). In the context of Singapore in 1962, the theme of blindness functioned metaphorically to represent the alienation of Malays from traditional or rural practices and values in the face of increased urban migration and precariously forming national boundaries (447). This articulation of moral anxiety towards modernity is expressed through the blindness motif in three Malay films made in the late-1950s to the 1960s in which 'characters denigrate their servants, manipulate their relatives, place a monetary value on all interaction and even kill their mothers' (451).⁴¹ Thus, a reading of such Malay films in this period reveals how local film-makers were engaging their target Malay audiences' ambivalent disposition towards postcolonial modernity and the attendant social and political changes that were occurring in the Malay Peninsula.

How then, might blindness and moral anxiety towards modernity be linked to music in Malay film? On one hand, Kassim's blind musicality and hearing is linked to a moral purity in opposition to the excesses of modern life that are encountered through seeing. On the other hand, as I will explore throughout this chapter, musical practices in the film can be seen as modern or cosmopolitan but are ultimately naturalised as local or neutral expressions. In fact, modern musical practices are actually defended against the selfish and materialistic goals of the film's modern, upper-class antagonists. The narrative sympathetically decries the admonishment of musicians as an inferior working class. Upon their marriage, it is the irrational obstruction of Kassim's musical career by his wife, Sabariah, that indicates a conflict in their relationship and a loss of Kassim's identity. Conversely, it is the rediscovery of Kassim's musical self that heals him from his grief. Beyond the trope of blindness, the discourse of music in the film articulates a desire for modernity through intimacy. Musical discourse also reconnects the protagonist to a morally-grounded Self that eschews the ills of modernity. Furthermore, the cosmopolitan

⁴¹ The films observed in Barnard's study are *Korban Fitnah (Slandorous Sacrifice, 1959, dir. P.L. Kapur@Usmar Ismail)*, *Ibu Mertuaku (1962)* and *Sayang Si-Buta (Pity The Blind One, 1965, dir. Omar Rojik)*.

musical styles and instruments utilised throughout the film further signal an acceptance of modernity through aesthetic practices. While the trope of class reveals antagonisms towards emergent modernities, aesthetic references to ‘classiness’ provide a more conciliatory approach to modernity in the film’s musical expressions of cosmopolitanism.

Musically Shaped Identity

The musicality of Kassim Selamat is desired, dissolved and renewed at integral points of the film’s narrative. In fact, it is Kassim’s musicality that becomes synonymous with his self, whether through his occupation as a professional entertainer or through the material extension of his musicality in the form of his saxophone. Initially, at the start of the film, Kassim’s voice is heard over the radio inducing a display of desire by Sabariah, a young Malay woman from a rich family. This music scene portrays the most overtly sexual moment in the film (**Example 5.8**). It is a moment of desire for Kassim’s voice and musicality without seeing him. Sabariah is so infatuated with his musical persona that she calls the radio station in the hopes of setting up a date with him. A flirtatious exchange on the telephone between the two protagonists leads to a comedic ‘blind date’ scenario. Kassim and Sabariah only ‘see’ each other after a series of false set-ups involving their respective friends. Van der Heide reads Sabariah’s desire for Kassim as a ‘superficial infatuation’ implying that a mere hearing of the voice is not valid grounds for true emotional attachment (Ibid). This surface desire is also applied to Kassim’s character who ‘is metaphorically blinded by Sabariah’s beauty to not notice how fundamentally shallow she is’ (Muhammad 2010, 226). Unfortunately, while consonant with the thematic emphasis on blindness, these readings are deaf to the significance of music and the voice in their profound sensual and emotional impact on the characters. Sound minus vision is reduced to the ‘surface’ element of romantic desire and connection. Both readings fail to hear the centrality of the film’s musical text in charting the narrative trajectory of Kassim’s construction, dissolution and renewal of self.

In two crucial moments of his blindness, Kassim symbolically ‘loses’ his music and later regains it. At the peak of his mourning, Kassim Selamat is forced to leave his dark and modest dwelling beneath a house. To show his appreciation for his landlord’s kindness –

allowing him to stay rent-free for two years – he leaves his tenor saxophone as a form of payment. This marks an abandonment of his self whereby he states to his landlord, Ali (played by Mat Zain), in reference to his saxophone, ‘this is my life. Take this saxophone and do what you like’.⁴² This submission of his ‘life’ to Ali in the form of his saxophone marks a dissolution of self. Later in the film, when he is housed by the kind-hearted Mami (Zainon Fiji), he hears a tenor saxophone being played by a neighbour. He then asks Mami’s daughter, Chombi (Zaiton), to bring the neighbour and his saxophone to his room. The young man named Bayen (Ali Fiji), bears a striking resemblance to Ramlee in his younger days.⁴³ In an iconic moment of ‘rebirth’ he plays Bayen’s saxophone and performs an instrumental version of “*Jeritan Batin* (Wailing Soul)”, gesturing in a stylised portrayal of a fluid, natural and masterful musicality that he is Kassim Selamat, the renowned Singaporean band leader (Figure 5.11; **Example 5.9**). In contrast to Bayen’s unaccompanied saxophone practising, the non-diegetic sounds of orchestrated violins and a jazz band – similar to the one heard at the radio station – accompany Kassim’s performance. As Kassim plays, Bayen whispers to Chombi that he sounds like Kassim Selamat. This is confirmed by a friend of Mami’s, Mahyudin Jelani (Ahmad Nisfu)⁴⁴ who overhears the music upon entering the house. This musical revealing marks a recovery of self for Kassim, with the conduit for his self symbolised in the tenor saxophone.

⁴² ‘... *ini nyawa saya. Ambillah saxophone ini dan buatlah apa yang Abang Ali suka*’

⁴³ I draw this important observation from Muhammad (2010) who candidly mentions: ‘I don’t think it’s an accident that the teenage boy, Chombi’s neighbour, who’s trying to play the sax looks uncannily like the scrawny youth P. Ramlee was.’ (228).

⁴⁴ Ahmad Nisfu is also credited as the scriptwriter of the film. In the film, Nisfu’s character refers to himself as ‘Mamak’. For a Malay-speaking (or a contemporary Malaysian) audience, this immediately identifies him as part of the Jawi Peranakan or Indian-Muslim community in Penang.



Figure 5.11. Kassim Selamat plays the saxophone after a prolonged hiatus

It is important to note that upon hearing Bayen's practising, Kassim says to Chombi, 'I hear the voice (*suara*) of a tenor saxophone'.⁴⁵ The choice of the word '*suara* [voice]' over the expected '*bunyi* [sound]' is indicative of a personification of the instrument. In contrast to this, Ramlee does something amusing in his stylised emphasis on the phrase 'tenor saxophone'. The English-ness of the phrase is emphasised in a subtle moment of mockery indicating both a postcolonial sense of irony as well as an attachment to the 'classy' culture of Western popular music. An extended portrayal of this accented poking fun at Englishness is found in the film *Labu Dan Labi* (*Labu And Labi*, 1962 dir. P. Ramlee), in which P. Ramlee and Mat Zain parody 'the pretensions of Britons' by speaking 'a mixture of Malay and English' (Barnard 2009, 85-6). Such parodic slippage indicates the complications of decolonisation in that era, in which the affectations of the West were mocked but also deeply entrenched within local cultural practices. Thus, that single line in the film indicates several layers of postcolonial identity that are revealed in the character of Kassim as well as the personal positionality of P. Ramlee as a cosmopolitan musician-composer and film-maker.

⁴⁵ '*Abang Osman dengar suara tenor saxophone,*'

Following this, it turns out that Mahyudin, the owner of a Malay magazine,⁴⁶ is of entrepreneurial inclinations and offers to bring Kassim on tour ‘all around the Malay Peninsula and on radio’ guaranteeing his success.⁴⁷ He then embarks on a musical tour across the Malay Peninsula as a blind saxophonist-singer, using the pseudonym Osman Jailani. His rising popularity across the Malay Peninsula is attributed to the novelty of his blindness paired with his astonishing musical talent. Thus, the narrative circle is almost complete as Kassim’s self is reborn in a new musical persona. Throughout the narrative, Kassim’s identity is discarded, recovered and renewed through musical signifiers. Crucially, aside from his voice and musicality, Kassim’s tenor saxophone features as a prominent marker of his identity. I argue that the tenor saxophone can also be read as symbolic of embracing modernity against the overarching anxiety towards modern morality commonly read into this film.

Beyond the theme of blindness as a mode of expressing the anxieties and tensions inherent in a modernising Malay society, I am interested in how musical styles and instruments operate as signifiers of modernity. While the tenor saxophone signifies Kassim’s identification with modernity, unlike the critique of modern morality found in the tragic blindness-by-grief and consequent blindness-by-self-mutilation, the tenor saxophone in *Ibu Mertuaku* comes to represent a modernity that is morally neutral or even consonant with Malay values. The instrument is indeed a ‘western’ instrument that is not found in traditional Malay folk music, and as indicated by the film’s music underpins a more jazzy or modern-cosmopolitan soundscape. The saxophone, in its associations with such modernity is naturalised as part of a musically cosmopolitan Malay culture in the film. This is indicated from the onset of the film in the opening credits sequence that is framed by a tenor saxophone (Figure 5.12). In fact, in contemporary Malay culture, the saxophone has become synonymous with the film’s fictional character, Kassim Selamat.⁴⁸ Ironically, the

⁴⁶ In the film, Mahyudin mentions that he is the owner of a magazine named *Cenderamata Review*. Penang was a centre for radical Malay-language publications since the 1930s (Barnard and Van der Putten: 133).

⁴⁷ ‘Kassim Selamat. Mamak ada satu cadangan. Mau tak bersama Mamak kita pusing seluruh Tanah Melayu dengan radio? Mamak dah guarantee tentu baguih (bagus)’

⁴⁸ I recall multiple times when passing my tenor saxophone through security baggage screenings for flights from Malaysian airports in which the security officers would teasingly make a reference of me being ‘Kassim Selamat’. Once, similar remarks were also made by Singaporean-Malay customs officers on my way into Singapore.

film gave rise to the common misconception that P. Ramlee was adept at playing the saxophone. The saxophone parts were in fact, performed by the prominent Shaw Brothers' Malay Film Productions composer, Yusof B. In the film's opening credits, his role as 'Solo Tenor Saxophone' is prominently displayed alongside P. Ramlee's and Saloma's credits as playback singers. Thus, the display and use of the instrument was an important marker of the film's character. Alongside the film's pianist, Ahmad Wan Yet, Yusof B. is featured as a stage musician in a jazz-cabaret dance hall called the Capitol Blue Room; setting the scene for Kassim and Sabariah's first blind date (**Example 5.10**)⁴⁹. Kassim Masdor, who portrayed the 'on-screen' pianist in Kassim Selamat's band but actually performed the accordion parts (see **Example 5.1**), informed me that Yusof B. was known as a 'sweet...crying tenorist' (Kassim Masdor 2013); very much in line with and perhaps the inspiration for the film's narrative theme. When I asked Kassim Masdor if there was a 'real-life' musician that inspired the Kassim Selamat character, he told me that P. Ramlee was inspired by Sadao Watanabe, who, in the early 1960s was a fast-rising jazz alto saxophonist from Japan. This adds another cosmopolitan twist to the musical articulations of the film. The film's hero was the 'product' of a deeply cosmopolitan understanding of identity, music and modernity in early-1960s Singapore.

⁴⁹ The scene that momentarily features Yusof B. on the bandstand of Capitol Blue Room is the setting for Kassim and Sabariah's first meeting. The band, featuring Ahmad Wan Yet on the piano and Yusof B. on saxophone slip into the background from diegetic to 'source' music (the combined effect of diegetic 'source' and non-diegetic 'score' music) for the ensuing humorous narrative. Kassim and Sabariah are anxious about meeting each other for the first time, not knowing what each other looks like – having only communicated on the phone until then – so, both of them send their friends as proxies while they watch on secretly. These false representations play on the theme of not genuinely 'seeing' each other that pervades the film's narrative.



Figure 5.12. The opening credits of *Ibu Mertuaku* are framed by a tenor saxophone

This film is one of a number of films that feature P. Ramlee as a hero-musician. The construction of the ‘musician-hero’ around Ramlee was also a convenient intertextual reference for him, given that he was brought into the Singaporean film industry as a musical talent (Van der Heide 2002, 201). Moreover, the use of musician-protagonists linked seamlessly to the song sequences of Malay films from the 1950s to 1960s (Ibid). While all these convenient fictional and real-life connections regarding Ramlee’s musicality have been noted in existing scholarship on Malay films, there has been a lacunae of analysis on how the cosmopolitan music of such films articulated a conciliatory expression of postcolonial Malay cultural practices coming to terms with modernity.

Consonant Modernities

The songs written and sung by Ramlee in *Ibu Mertuaku* indicate in their cosmopolitan musical aesthetic a convergence of modernity with a narrative that seeks to critique modern morality. I argue that while an overall anxiety towards the ills of modernity is present in the film’s story, the musical formations heard accompanying that narrative are paradoxically consonant with modern and pluralistic articulations of musical styles and culture. The narrative direction of *Ibu Mertuaku* is diegetically complemented by three featured songs sung by Ramlee. The lyrical and musical content of such songs were significantly relevant to the dramatic narrative of the film. The songs also express cultural stylistic tropes that

diverge and converge with the film's overarching themes of modernity and morality in a cosmopolitan Malay world.

The light-hearted beginning of the film is in stark contrast with the rest of the film which takes on a tragic and melodramatic tone. In parallel to this narrative trajectory, the severity of blindness and the emotional register of featured songs become more sombre towards the end of the film. Musically, the theme of 'blind desire' in the first song, "*Jangan Tinggal Daku*" in relation to the initially comedic narrative is contrasted with the more emotionally weighted "*Di Mana Kan Ku Cari Ganti* (Where Will I Find A Replacement)"⁵⁰ and "*Jeritan Batin* (Wailing Soul)". The last two songs are performed at two points of Kassim's blindness. "*Di Mana Kan Ku Cari Ganti*" is sung in reflection on his tragic predicament and in sympathy with Chombi's – his second love interest's – mourning of her deceased husband (**Example 5.11**). Thus, this song marks his realisation of the unfairness of the world and connects him with a kindred spirit who shares his grief. The opening verse of the song is sung in the Malay *syair* singing style of recited poetry. Ramlee's adaptation however, more so approximates the sound and style of a *syair* performance in its use of implied Arabic maqam scales – a commonly used tonality in Malay folk music singing – and does not match the formal *syair* rhyming verse structure.^{51,52} Ramlee sings the following in the opening verse of his song:

<i>Hendak 'ku 'nangis tiada berairmata,</i>	I want to cry but there are no more tears,
<i>Hendak 'ku senyum tiada siapa nak teman,</i>	I want to smile but there is no one with me,
<i>Kalaulah nasib sudah tersurat,</i>	If fate has been written,
<i>Beginilah, apa 'nak buat.</i>	It is so, what can I do.

Alongside lamentation, the song's introduction aesthetically signifies indigenous Malay musical and cultural practices. In relation to the film's other songs, this is markedly the most 'Malay' musical moment in the narrative; such aesthetic indigeneity is narratively linked to Malay values of humility and honesty. This aesthetic indigeneity is thus

⁵⁰ Lyrics by S. Sudarmaji.

⁵¹ The *syair* rhyming verse structure was adapted to *bangsawan* and *ghazal* repertoire and in religious Islamic *nasyid* music, in which Arabic maqam scales were employed to recite such verse structures (Matusky & Tan 2004, 77, 265, 353).

⁵² Also see Hijjas (2011) for an important study on the agential role of women in *syair* texts from Riau.

rhetorically framed in opposition to the excesses of modernity seen and heard in the more cosmopolitan and western sounds of the city. Such musical ‘westernisms’ can be heard in the contrasting spaces of both Singapore and Penang portrayed in the film. Until this moment in the film, the music of the city is characterised by perceivably modern styles and contexts: Latin American rhythms, jazz cabaret halls and Western instruments. Thus, it is significant that this ‘low point’ of grieving in the film uses a distinctly local *syair* style to contrast the ills of modernity. Ironically, the *syair*-styled verse is placed over a rubato piano accompaniment; a convergence of modernity with indigeneity via cosmopolitan aesthetic. This cosmopolitan aesthetic is perpetuated further past the end of the verse in the rest of the song. Similar instruments to the radio band seen at the beginning of the film – bongos, accordion, piano, and double bass with the addition of violins – accompany Ramlee’s singing in a merged aesthetic of *syair*-inflected modalities in the voice, violin and accordion parts, Malay and Latin American percussion and Western-tonal jazz-inflected harmonisation in the piano accompaniment. Narratively, the song represents a moment of conciliation and healing for Kassim and Chombi. As Ramlee sings the song on his bed and as Chombi watches and listens to him intently on the floor, the scenes of them are juxtaposed with double exposures of Chombi and her deceased soldier husband while another double exposure shows Kassim and his presumed-to-be-dead wife, Sabariah. Thus, as the visually represented memories of their deceased beloveds are magnified by the song, they are also drawn together sonically by their mutual grief.

Musically, it is important to note Chombi’s position as a listener in this song in contrast to Sabariah’s listening in the film’s opening song. Chombi’s listening is portrayed as ‘deeper’ and more emotionally sincere in comparison to Sabariah’s ‘surface’ and sensual reception to Kassim’s voice over the radio.⁵³ To elaborate on what was briefly mentioned above, a scene of the ‘radio broadcast’ of “*Jangan Tinggal Daku*” shows Sabariah stroking her radio while listening to Kassim Selamat’s saxophone solo (Figure 5.13; **Example 5.8**). She then proceeds to lean on her bed in uncontrollable ecstasy while listening to the song (Figure 5.14). This depiction of an exclusively female sexual desire as disingenuous reflects

⁵³ As I have mentioned earlier in this chapter, such dichotomous interpretations are provided by Muhammad (226) and Van der Heide (201).

the male authorship of the film and also speaks to conservative Malay values. Acceptable morality and sincerity is more clearly portrayed in Chombi.



Figure 5.13. Sabariah stroking her radio during Kassim Selamat's saxophone solo



Figure 5.14. Sabariah swoons in ecstasy

In contrast to Sabariah, Chombi's reception of Kassim's music is portrayed as sincere and empathetic. Her emotional listening to Kassim's "*Di Mana Kan Ku Cari Ganti*" becomes a cathartic and therapeutic experience for mourning her lover (Figure 5.15). Sharing Kassim's sense of loss, she watches him praying – without his knowledge – for her well-being (Figure 5.16).



Figure 5.15. Chombi and Mami listen to Kassim sing “*Di Mana Kan Ku Cari Ganti*”



Figure 5.16. Chombi discreetly watches Kassim in prayer

From these dichotomous characterisations the problematic association of female sexual desire with superficiality arises. This is of course another moral trope articulating the overall thematic anxiety towards modernity. The extroverted, immoral and modern personality of Sabariah as a pleased and sexualised listener is contrasted with the passive, morally-grounded and non-urban personality of Chombi as a melancholic and sympathetic listener. Chombi facilitates and encourages Kassim’s career as a blind musician, whereas earlier in the film, Sabariah obstructs him from working as an entertainer. Sabariah becomes the embodiment of the shallow-minded, self-absorbed and extravagant upper-class

Singaporean, while Chombi represents the open-minded, self-sacrificing, and humble persona of a middle-class Penangite. Thus, the women of the film – as consumers, receivers and interpreters of music - are allegorical to the oppositional themes of working class to bourgeois, city to village, modernity to morality.

However, there is a convergence or conciliation of those opposing themes, as the perceived dichotomies in *Ibu Mertuaku*'s narrative are actually more nuanced. Chombi and her mother are actually from an upper-class family; they live in a significantly large (traditional-looking) Malay house, own a car and employ a chauffeur. The location of Penang as oppositional to Singapore is moreover ambiguous; Penang was also a British Straits Settlement that was similarly urban and cosmopolitan. In fact, when Kassim and Sabariah move to Penang they spend their honeymoon at a luxurious hotel and are entertained over a western-styled dinner with a jazzy cabaret song performed by the popular Malay songstress, Saloma (**Example 5.12**).⁵⁴ In a later scene set in Penang, forbidden by his wife from working as a musician, Kassim's humble job as a construction-site labourer is punctuated by the loud and modern sounds of a large pile driving machine. Thus, the location of Penang was far from antithetical to the modernity represented in Singapore. The sonic and musical content of seemingly oppositional urban spaces thus indicate a conciliation of modernities in the film's narrative.

This conciliation of modernities is further heard in the third Ramlee song of the film, "*Jeritan Batin*". The performance of this song occurs in three instances: first, as an 'instrumental' featuring the song's melody on the tenor saxophone; second, it is sung by Ramlee with musical accompaniment and third, the instrumental version is repeated in the background score in the final scene of the film. In all versions, the saxophone is overtly present. The first version is played in a private space – Mami and Chombi's home in Penang – resulting in the exposure of Kassim's true identity. The sung version includes an instrumental introduction on the tenor saxophone and is performed in a concert hall. Stylistically, all versions of "*Jeritan Batin*" are musically cosmopolitan in line with the

⁵⁴ Saloma, who was also P. Ramlee's third wife, originally performed the song, "*Jelingan Mata* (Flirting Eyes)" in the film *Azimat* (1958, dir. Rolf Beyer) but a portion of the film's song scene was included in the hotel-honeymoon scenes of *Ibu Mertuaku*. It cannot be ascertained through the existing copy of the film who composed the music as the title credits portion displaying such information seems to be damaged and was edited out for the existing digital copy. In the scene featuring the Capitol Blue Room nightclub, there is also a brief shot of Saloma's show poster.

other songs heard throughout the film. The song in all its manifestations is arranged with strings, piano, accordion, Latin-American percussion (particularly the congo) and double bass as accompaniment for the saxophone and vocal melody. Musically, the song is presented and arranged in a very cosmopolitan if not Western aesthetic. This modern musical aesthetic lends a modern-western style to the film in line with its urban setting and theme.

The song plays an integral role in the narrative development of the film as well. As I mentioned earlier in this chapter, the first performance of the song reveals Kassim's identity and marks a rebirth of his self. The second performance is set in a concert hall in Singapore at the end of Kassim's new musical tour as Osman Jailani (**Example 5.13**; Appendix D.4 for musical transcription). It is during this performance that Sabariah and her new husband, Dr. Ismadi (Ahmad Mahmood) are uncomfortably made aware of Kassim's existence and blindness. The melancholic textual content of the song emphasises the guilt felt by Sabariah and Dr. Ismadi over abandoning him for their better lives (Appendix A.6). Sabariah's guilt is then shown in her abruptly leaving the concert in the middle of the song. As the sung verse ends, Kassim plays a saxophone solo. The saxophone solo is then slipped into the background of the next scene of Sabariah and Ismadi lying down on their bed. Over the echoing and muted saxophone solo, Sabariah asks Ismadi to operate on Kassim's eyes. This sparks the last portion of the tragic narrative which leads to Kassim's sight-enabled realisation of the world's ills and unjust deceptions. Upon regaining his sight post-operation, Kassim realises that his presumed deceased wife Sabariah is alive and married to the doctor that returned his vision. The son that he fathered with Sabariah is now four years old and displays musical inclinations. After an admission by his mother-in-law of this protracted deception he mutilates his eyes with two forks. The final dramatic scene is set in the foyer of the upper-class home of Sabariah and Ismadi. Kassim, with blood dripping from his eyes, leaves the house and is met by Chombi and her family. Following this, the tenor saxophone melody of "*Jeritan Batin*" begins to play synchronously with a shot of Sabariah at the entrance of her home crying in remorse. Dr. Ismadi walks into the house in shock. As the song is heard, the final image shown is of Kassim, Chombi, Mami and Mahyudin walking away into darkness.

Allegorically, they are walking away from the modern ills of Singapore back home to the more morally-grounded Penang. As concluding music, the tenor saxophone melody of “*Jeritan Batin*” encapsulates the emotional themes of the narrative: melancholy, loss, longing, blindness and alienation. Aside from these negative aspects there are positive interpretations that may be derived; a conciliation or negotiation of different kinds of modernity was intended:

I read a recent critique of this film as being ‘defeatist’ because the hero chooses to become handicapped at the end. It was obviously written by someone who looked at the film without really seeing it, as **Ibu Mertuaku** affirms the vital importance of being able to *see* without prejudice or pretence. (Muhammad 2010, 228)

Along the lines of Muhammad’s favourable critique of the film’s nuances, I will add that such a reading can also be applied to the musical meanings expressed in the film. Listening to music in *Ibu Mertuaku* reveals the conciliatory mediation of modernity through musical style and instrumentation. Music mediates such modernity as a cosmopolitan aesthetic representative of actual cultural practices that were taking place in the Malay Peninsula of the 1960s. While the genre of ‘social’ films may have been historically fleeting, a plurality of ‘modern’ musical practices had already been present in the region prior to the production of Malay-language films. Thus, the tropes of modern anxiety and moral decay of the film’s narrative were particular to a discourse of ethno-nationalism that sought clear binaries in the process of forming a homogenised notion of nationhood. A sense of *kampung* (village) values were set against the moral ills of the city. A working class male musician was a victim of an upper-class matriarch. The kind and generous inclusivity of Penang was preferred to the cold and superficial exclusivity of Singapore. Beyond these narrative dichotomies, however, it is more difficult to find such opposing ideas in the music of the film. Even the *syair*-like opening verse of “*Di Mana Kan Ku Cari Ganti*” was arranged in a westernised style. While the use of a western-derived musical aesthetic can be attributed to the urban-modern setting of the film, I propose that such musical practices indicate the ambiguities and paradoxes of a modern period of nation-making that was being articulated by Malay artists and film-makers in the 1960s. Moreover, the cosmopolitan aesthetics, technologies and narratives about music in 1960s Malay film mediated the cultural tensions

and social dissonances of a rapidly modernising society with an ethical and conciliatory vision of a nation in the process of forging an identity.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I observed how P. Ramlee's social films of the 1960s that featured musically-oriented narratives were consonant with a modern vision of a Malay nation. Such conciliatory expressions of modernity were mediated through an aesthetic of classiness shaped by a history of modern musical technologies, instruments and styles reflective of the vibrant cosmopolitan environment of a rapidly urbanising Malay Peninsula. The urban milieu of Singapore was also conducive for Malay literary activists to spread class-conscious ethno-nationalist narratives through the wide-reaching medium of film. In such social narratives, female characters were integral in negotiating modern notions of progress and self-determination with traditional values of Malay communalism. Moreover, the musical intimations and practices of these films provided a conciliatory space for the mediation of binary relationships: poor men serenade rich women, a rich woman learns music from a poor man, a young woman uses music to usurp her controlling father, rich patrons consume the musical performances of poor musicians, a poor musician makes rich people realise their immorality. Further, I revealed that such dichotomous narratives were articulated as variegated relationships of power and gender.

My analysis of *Antara Dua Darjat* revealed that while rural communal values and traditional hierarchical notions of leadership were emphasised, multiple layers of authority, class and gender were reversed and made ambiguous in the intimate musical interactions of the film's protagonists. I observed in the film a rare portrayal of a woman in a non-singing role, playing an instrument to accompany a male singer. Despite the role of the female protagonist as a student to a male teacher, she displays agency in her confident musicality and her cunning deception in using musical lessons to spend time with her love interest, defying the imposed limitations of her class-conscious father. Thus, the metaphor of the 'inseparability of music (*irama*) and song (*lagu*)' employed throughout the film resonates

with the mutually dependent gendered and powered relationship between individuals of opposing classes in modern Malay society.

The film *Ibu Mertuaku* depicts a more ambivalent narrative of class but is insightful in its overt music-oriented theme. Beyond a modernist narrative of blindness, the film portrays musicians as representative of a marginalised working class. I observed how the protagonist's tenor saxophone became synonymous with the loss, recovery and renewal of his self. More than that, I argued that contrary to common interpretations of the narrative as a rejection of modern excesses and immorality, the tenor saxophone was symbolic of a consonant modernity. In line with this, I observed how western or cosmopolitan musical instruments and styles operated as signifiers of an embraced or assimilated modernity. The featured songs in the films all demonstrate a modern-western aesthetic in instrumentation and arrangement. The exception was the *syair*-like introductory verse of “*Di Mana Kan Ku Cari Ganti*”, which was at best referential in its representation of musical indigeneity as it was arranged in a western-hybrid-cosmopolitan aesthetic. My point is not to discount the local in this hybridised expression but to indicate the innateness of what are retrospectively understood as western/foreign/exogenous musical practices. Indeed, the ‘limited’ hybridity of the film's music indicates a long history of mediated stylistic differences in the pluralistic musical practices of the Malay Peninsula and Southeast Asia since before the 1900s (Tan 2013; Keppy 2013).

While the film has a limited amount of musical performances featuring women, I note the significant role of women as listeners, interpreters, disruptors and enablers of music. The two female leads are allegorically opposed: Sabariah embodies the superficial desire of urban immorality while Chombi personifies the compassionate affection of not-so-urban communal values. Unlike the agential role of the heroine, Zaleha, in *Antara Dua Darjat*, they are objectified as opposing archetypes of the film's Manichean themes. Nonetheless, I observed a convergence and conciliation of those themes in the perceived narrative dichotomies that are actually more nuanced. The sonic and musical content of the supposedly oppositional urban spaces of Penang and Singapore indicate a consonant modernity expressed in the film's narrative. Overall, my musical reading of *Ibu Mertuaku* differs from the common interpretation of the film as a contestation of modern decadence in

Malay society. I argued that interpreting musical discourses and practices in Malay social films reveals more positive responses to forms of acceptable modernity.

The fluid pluralities found in Malay film music in the 1960s indicate a trajectory of cosmopolitanism that had long existed in the cultural practices of the region. However, the mediation of such practices through the aesthetic technologies of international mass popular music distribution and consumption are also present in the western-derived styles, Latin American rhythms, and jazz instrumentation of the two films' musical aesthetic. While modern social immorality was contested in Malay film narratives, musical discourse and practice were expressions of an innate and local sense of modernity – a 'rooted cosmopolitanism' (Tan 2013, 460, 490-1; Anderson 2012). Music was an aesthetic space where modern westernisms were negotiated favourably and also naturalised as local cosmopolitan practices.

This chapter concerned a period that represented the zenith of the Singapore-based Malay film industry; revealing how the incorporation of supposedly exogenous musical practices into a local and emergent-nationalistic artistic expression was favourably mediated. The following chapter will discuss a later period in Malay language films in which the adoption of new musical styles and cultures from the west – particularly British-American rock & roll – came to represent a threat to established Malay-national conceptions of musical purity. This period from the mid-1960s to early-1970s marked an era in the Malay Peninsula of youth culture: long-haired men, mini-skirted women, Beatlemania and a surge of rock-guitar-bands. These youth challenged the older generation's musical aesthetic sensibilities and presented a cultural and moral threat to the conservative national authorities of the newly emergent states of Singapore and Malaysia. In the following chapter, I will observe the rise of Malay *pop yeh yeh* youth culture and its effects on the declining Malay film industry. This will be analysed in the context of ethno-nationalist state policy and ideology on what constituted 'acceptable' music and youth behaviour, the moral discourse amongst youth themselves, and the inclusion of youth music culture in Malay films.

CHAPTER SIX

Disquieting Denouement: Policing Malay ‘Youth’ Music Culture and the Twilight of the Malay Film Industry in Singapore (late-1960s to early 1970s)¹

In October 2012, I visited a modest exhibition on Malay youth music from the mid- to late-1960s in Singapore’s Esplanade Library. The minimalistic and silent exhibition created by the Malay Heritage Centre of Singapore featured five two-sided colour panels displaying photographs and historical information about the Malay rock & roll bands of the *pop yeh yeh* music era (Figure 6.1). It was part of a series of nostalgic Malay cultural exhibits sponsored by the Malay Heritage Centre² intended to shed light on a vibrant but often occluded period of cultural history in the Malay Peninsula. Much unlike the quiet atmosphere of the ‘musical’ exhibition, the Malay youth of the *pop yeh yeh* era expressed a culture that was apparently in need of silencing by the aggressive cultural policies implemented by the government authorities of Malaysia and Singapore. The following pages form a response to this renewed interest in *pop yeh yeh* and intends to give a voice to the contestatory discourses and issues that were articulated by Malay youth that featured prominently in Malay films of the mid-1960s.

The rise of Malay 'youth culture' and music in the Malay Peninsula coincided prominently with the the demise of the Malay studio film industry. In fact, the incorporation and representation of this musical culture in mid-1960s Malay films marked a shift in the reception of Malay music from films to the new youth-oriented record industry. Young film composers such as Kassim Masdor would find new employment in international record companies such as EMI that were interested in cultivating a local youth music (Kassim Masdor 2013). This transition from film-centred musical production and reception to records and rock bands also coincided with the increased promotion of separate Malaysian and Singaporean national cultures; boundaries of national identity were being

¹ This is a modified and expanded version of a chapter published in a book edited by Bart Barendregt (2014) titled, *Sonic Modernities in the Malay World: A History of Popular Music, Social Distinction and Novel Lifestyles (1930s - 2000s)*. The published chapter was titled ‘Disquieting Degeneracy: Policing Malaysian and Singaporean Popular Music Culture From the Mid-1960s to Early-1970s’. (Johan 2014, 136-161).

² Information about The Malay Heritage Centre’s ongoing exhibits can be found on their website: <<http://www.malayheritage.org.sg/exhibitions.htm>> (Accessed January 17, 2013)

enforced and the youth of this burgeoning musical culture found themselves on the margins of such boundaries.



Figure 6.1. The five-panel display on 1960s Malay youth music (photograph by author, with kind permission from the Singapore Esplanade Library, 2012)

This chapter seeks to provide some much-needed amplification of the study of Malaysian and Singaporean music in this era by observing the ways in which Malay youth of the mid-1960s to early-1970s were implicated in the cultural policies and conservative regimes of nation-making. Moreover, such youth negotiated their differences from the older generation in divergent ways: some actively and proudly fashioned themselves according to the subversive styles and sounds of the west while others voiced conservative concerns about such trends, effectively policing their peers with discourses of morality and tradition. While this chapter is not primarily concerned with government policy in relation to music, I discuss the ideas of two Malay film music icons: Zubir Said and P. Ramlee, whose ideas on Malay music culture inspired the implementation of the Malaysian National Culture Policy (NCP) that was drafted in 1971. Their reactionary comments on the erosion of Malay culture by youth-related lifestyles and musical dispositions provides an ideological frame of reference for the discourses of cultural nationalism that demonised *pop yeh yeh* youth.

I then proceed to discuss youth music culture in 1960s Singapore and Malaysia followed by a reading of the ‘yellow cultures’³ or subversive youth trends that caught the negative attention of Singaporean and Malaysian government authorities. The ‘beat music’ of English-language bands primarily based in Singapore in the 1960s emulated music from British rock bands such as The Shadows and The Beatles. In time, English songs were adapted into Malay, and eventually, by the mid-1960s, Malay youth started writing and performing original compositions in the styles of previously emulated western rock bands. A vibrant array of youth fashions went along with this music that included tight-fitting attire, sunglasses, mini-skirts for women and long hair for men. The Singaporean and Malaysian states were active in policing what were deemed degenerate ‘yellow cultures’, resulting in youth harassment and the banning of music performances. Some youth themselves were also active in the ‘policing’ of their peers as fan letters in the Malay music magazine *Bintang dan Lagu (Stars and Songs)* indicate.

I then examine how youth music was introduced in Malay films from the mid to late 1960s. Contrary to suggestions that Malay youth music ‘directly corresponded to the decline of the Malay film industry’ at the time (Lockard 1998, 226), I find that youth music featured prominently in Malay films and the two were mutually influential. Initially, such music was used parodically or inconsequentially. However, the inclusion of such music also signalled its immense popularity among youth and the need for Malay film producers to appeal to the new youth audience. My focus here is on how the film *Muda Mudi (The Youths, 1965, dir. M. Amin)*, which featured the ageing star Siput Sarawak, incorporated youth culture and music into its narrative – but from the perspective of an older generation coming to terms with such culture that was seen as radically different from theirs. In fact, the film does not vilify or demonise Malay youth and their music; rather, it offers a discourse of conciliation, in which the older generation encourage and advise youths to be cautious in their newfound success. As such, the film is allegorical to the symbiotic relationship that the film industry would have with the emerging mid-1960s Malay youth culture that diverged from the established Malay film music aesthetic of the mid-1950s to early-1960s.

³ Jones’ (2001) book, *Yellow Music* describes how the term ‘yellow’ was used in China during the Republican era to associate a degenerate and ‘pornographic’ quality to the popular music of Li Jinhui that blended ‘American jazz, Hollywood film music, and Chinese folk music’ (6).

Finally, to provide an insight into contemporary discourses on Malay youth, moral degeneracy, and music in the mid-1960s, I turn to the film *A Go Go '67* (1967) directed by Omar Rojik for the Shaw Brothers' Malay Film Productions. This film was made during the waning years of Malay film production in Singapore and indicates an attempt by the film industry to attract a youth audience whose consumption patterns were straying from Malay cinema while being drawn towards local electric-guitar-band performances and their numerous vinyl record releases. My research suggests that the once popular means of disseminating Malay music through film⁴ was being usurped by a renewed⁵ local record industry and its attendant *pop yeh yeh* culture. The transition from film music to 'guitar-band music' contextualises the reactionary comments of film-music icons such as P. Ramlee, whose once non-traditional cosmopolitan musical and cinematic practices in the 1950s were being replaced by louder sounds and less conservative fashions.⁶

Malaysian government policy in the 1970s operated within a framework of Malay ethno-nationalism that required clear delineations of what constituted 'pure' Malay culture. This led to the excessive removal or avoidance of elements that were regarded as 'foreign', 'un-Malay' and non-Islamic (Tan 1993, 177-8; also see Tan 1992; Tan 1989). State-enforced 'ideologies' of purity 'can give rise to the opinion that safeguarding - that is, "guarding safe" a tradition - straight jackets it into a petrified form, forbidding it to be subjected to any processes of innovation and change that would feature in living, vital cultural' practices (Grant 2012, 37). This is quite unlike the kinds of creation of tradition, as examined in Chapter Four, represented by Zubir Said's film music. The mid-1960s was a period in

⁴ In the 1950s, numerous singers for Malay films including P. Ramlee recorded film songs for record labels such as HMV, EMI, Columbia, Parlophone and Pathé (Ahmad Sarji 2011: 290-8) For a detailed account of the 78 RPM record industry in Malaya prior to World War II, see Tan (1996/97).

⁵ The record industry was 'renewed' through the proliferation of 'beat music' bands in the 1960s. More research is required regarding the record industry centred in Singapore from the 1950s to 1960s but Pereira (2011) informs me that there were numerous independent record labels emerging in Singapore in the mid-1960s that capitalised on the proliferation of local youth bands.

⁶ Kahn (2006) discusses the notion of 'other' Malays that fall outside the conventional sphere of traditional 'Malayness' and uses P. Ramlee's films as complex case-studies that expression of a hybrid Malay culture that was Westernised yet rooted to a conception of indigeneity that recurred as a narrative of an idyllic Malay village (*kampung*) life in contention with an urban modernity (126-31).

which national traditions were already 'established' and youth cultures featured prominently as a threat to these 'national' traditions.

In Malaysia and Singapore, there has been a marked disjuncture between development-oriented national agendas that are based on capitalist ideologies and the derogatively 'modern' young populace that are 'relentless' in the 'fashioning of... youthful selves through (the) consumption' of popular culture (Stivens 2012, 170). These 'self-fashioning' youths spark 'moral panics' (citing Young 1971 and Cohen 1972, 172) and 'social anxieties' in state authorities that respond by retaining and enforcing hegemonic state-sanctioned boundaries of modernity and morality (Stivens, 174). In line with this youth-state tension, the role of the Malaysian government in controlling the 'threat' of youth cultures has historically run parallel to their initiatives to regulate the performing arts:

By introducing various policies, guidelines and institutions in the 1970s and 1980s, the government has tried to centralize and control the performing arts. Those art forms which are in line with the national culture policy and performances which adhere to the stipulated guidelines have been promoted and encouraged. However, those which are considered "anti-Islamic", those which are alleged to stimulate "violence" and those which are generally "undesirable" have been banned or censored... Even the popular music industry, dominated by transnational companies and shows promoters, has been subjected to the same intervening institutions and restrictions. (Tan 1992, 303)

Tan's observations point to the pervasiveness of Malaysian state intervention in the arts and allude to the role of state policies in constraining youth music cultures. Criteria for inclusion and exclusion are often vague, thus subjecting a range of cultural practices to prosecution, censorship, or repression. Hence, the youth who participated in musically-oriented counter-cultures – those transmitted through a commoditised global market of cultural consumption – would be at the centre of the government's initiatives to perpetuate a hegemonic notion of national culture. Furthermore, tensions existed (and continue to exist) between the state and the recording and entertainment industries interested in marketing 'subversive' but highly attractive trends to local youths.

This chapter, in the historical context of a waning Malay film industry in the late 1960s, will reveal how young Malaysians and Singaporeans were actively shaping locally unique musical practices based on trends from the west that were at odds with state-defined notions of national culture. Conversely, it is apparent that youth agency was not complete given that the marketing initiatives of the entertainment and print industries mediated the

representations of ‘degenerate’ youth in conflict with the ‘repressive’ state. The Malay film industry also tried to rejuvenate its appeal to the broader public by featuring youth music in its films. By initially taking a detour away from Malay films, this chapter seeks to unravel these issues historically and discursively, with a focus on Malay youths whose bodies and cultural practices were at the centre of contestation between state-sanctioned moral policing and the consumption of globally commoditised musical and cultural trends. Such contestations were loudly articulated in the last few Malay films to be produced by Cathay Keris and Shaw Brothers' MFP. I argue that Malay youth cultural practices of the 1960s initiated such contestations to national cultural ideology in Malaysia and Singapore, providing a ‘template’ for the discursive and physical repression of future youth cultures in Malaysia.

The Ideas of Zubir Said & P. Ramlee: Precursors to National Culturalism

Some of the earliest ideas for a Malay national culture emanated from the writings of the film music icons, Zubir Said and P. Ramlee. Towards the mid-1960s, both composers became prominent critics of Westernisation in Malay music practices. Ironically, while both sought to infuse ‘Malayness’ into their musical creations, they adapted a diverse range of musical styles from the west and other Asian film-music systems such as Hindustani film songs.⁷ Despite their cosmopolitan musical backgrounds, the ideas that they later proposed about developing and preserving a national culture would become standardised in the discourse of Malaysian national cultural policies post-1971. In this section, I will

⁷ For an account of the diverse Malay and Western musical styles used by P. Ramlee see Ahmad Sarji (2011, 275) A more contentious observation by Yusnor Ef argues that despite the internalisation of foreign musical styles by Ramlee his music ultimately expresses ‘soulfully Malay’ qualities (2011, XIX). McGraw (2009) however, argues that Ramlee’s film music expressed a more heterogenous but uniquely Malaysian musical aesthetic.

As discussed in Chapter Three, Zubir Said, while working with the modern medium of film music and orchestration actively utilised and adapted ‘traditional’ Malay instruments and styles for his film scores. Peters (2012) analyses his film music stylistically as a ‘synthesis of musical systems in neo-traditional music’, while Rohana Zubir (2012) provides a detailed musical biography of her father emphasising his contribution to Singapore’s national music repertoire which included the country’s national anthem.

examine some of their ideas that set the tone for Malaysia's official National Culture Policy of 1971.

Recently, there has been renewed interest in Zubir Said resulting in a comprehensive biography (Rohana Zubir) and a series of events to commemorate his cultural contributions to Singapore: a musical tribute concert at the Esplanade concert hall (12th October 2012) and a ten-day film screening highlighting his film music (National Museum of Singapore, 10-20th October 2012). Such celebrations of Zubir Said as a Singaporean national icon, in retrospect, are paradoxical given the Malay-nationalist initiatives that he proposed for the development of Malay music and performing arts. Of course, his ideas were proposed during a period when Singapore and Malaysia were on a shared national trajectory past British colonial rule. In 1957, the Federation of Malaya was declared independent from British rule. Singapore, along with the Borneo states of Sabah and Sarawak joined the federation to form 'Malaysia' in 1963. In 1965, Singapore separated from Malaysia to form an autonomous 'island-state'. This complex history of national boundaries between Singapore and Malaysia are further complicated by the politics of ethnicity, whereby ethnic Malays form an increasingly marginalised minority in Singapore but are a ruling majority in Malaysia. The prominence in the discourse of Zubir Said's writings of ethno-nationalism centred on Malay culture are thus hard to reconcile with his retrospective formulation as a Singaporean icon.

At a presentation given in 1956/1957 on the use of the Malay language in music, Zubir Said observed a decline in the standards of Malay language compared to the 'glorious days of the Malay Sultanates (*zaman gemilang Kerajaan2 Melayu*)' stating that under courtly patronage, musicians and artists were highly valued, while 'Malay singing and songs occupied a good position in the field of arts (*nyanyian2 dan lagu2 Melayu mendapat kedudukan baik pula dalam bidang kesenian*)' (Zubir Said 1967, 20). In the context of modern Malay society, he further stated:

The result of changes in the organisation of society leads to changes in the development of Malay sung arts. Singers (artistes) and poets do not receive adequate patronage and born in society are artists that do not take responsibility in the value of their creations. These changes have brought detriment to the songs and language used in songs due to the intrusion of foreign elements. (Ibid)

To overcome this decline of local music culture, he proposed the following actions be taken by the state and the artistic community:

1. National elements need to be implanted as much as possible into Malay songs to preserve its uniqueness.
2. Foreign elements that are destructive must be eliminated and (foreign elements) that are beneficial should be accepted.
3. Songwriters and singers (artistes) must possess adequate knowledge about (the Malay) language (vocabulary) and language usage (grammar).
4. A (nationalised) system for teaching singing and writing should be implemented in schools.

Zubir Said's suggestions feature the primacy of language in preserving and effectively creating a shared national culture through the arts based on Malay ethnicity. The conscious inclusion of 'national' elements in 'Malay songs' would require an active if not artificial process of shaping a national consciousness through music. While defining a specifically Malay ethnicity is fraught with difficulties (see Mohamad and Aljunied 2011; Milner 2008; Barnard 2004), the emphasis on the Malay language as a unifier for a diverse range of peoples that inhabit the Malay Peninsula provides feasible grounds for a national identity. More importantly, this national identity would be forged through literature and music, and solidified by the active preservation of and systemisation of knowledge concerning the Malay language.

Another factor that contributed to this national cultural agenda was the selective exclusion of 'external' cultures. This was a process in which cultural boundaries needed to be clearly marked. However, in the post-colonial nation-states of Malaysia and Singapore, this was problematic due to a multicultural population. Zubir Said suggested the need to remove 'foreign elements' that were considered 'destructive' while retaining 'beneficial' ones. The ambiguity here lies in the subjectivity of what was considered 'foreign' and how 'good' and 'bad' influences on Malay cultural practices could be assessed. As further examples in this chapter will suggest, the nation-state would play a major role in creating criteria of inclusion and exclusion in the arts. Some of these criteria were also drawn from reactionary suggestions by cultural personalities such as P. Ramlee, who was coping poorly with the changing musical tastes of Malay youth.

As stated in Chapter Two, P. Ramlee, towards the end of his career in the late 1960s, would experience a decline in popularity due to an impoverished local film industry and the rapid spread of popular music styles from abroad that rendered his musical inclinations outdated and un-marketable. In a speech given at the National Culture Congress in Kuala Lumpur (1971), he expressed his frustrations by denouncing youth music cultures and upholding the need for advancing traditional Malaysian music. These frustrations were closely tied to his departure from Singapore in 1964 for the soon to be separate nation state of Malaysia, where he continued his film career at the newly set-up, under-funded, and inexperienced Merdeka Film Productions studio in Kuala Lumpur. He would make numerous films there until his death in 1973. Critics and historians lament that the ‘quality’ and reception of his Malaysian productions failed to meet the standards of his Singapore films (see Gray 2002)⁸. Times and tastes were changing and P. Ramlee in this period - despite his vibrant and diverse cosmopolitan musical influences (see McGraw 2009) - represented a bygone era of antiquated Malay culture that did not speak to the younger, ‘groovier’, ‘long-haired’, ‘marijuana-smoking’ and ‘mini-skirt-wearing’ Malaysian youth of the seventies.⁹

P. Ramlee in his presentation noted the decline of traditional music in Malaysia and proposed solutions for this ‘problem’. He lamented the encroachment of Hindustani music from India and music from the west that had

... rapidly influenced the souls of our (Malaysian) youths to the point that these youths are unaware of their long hair (ala the Beatles), dress in ‘Groovy’ styles that are unfamiliar, smoke *ganja* (marijuana) and other things. There are also youths that wear short ‘mini-skirts’ due to the influence of pop musicians. (P. Ramlee 1973, 205, my translation)

At the end of his presentation, P. Ramlee proposed eight points to address the decline of traditional music in Malaysia that stressed the importance of government intervention and responsibility in this matter:

⁸ Gray’s PhD thesis on Malaysian cinema identifies the nation-wide sentiment in Malaysia that its film output at the time was not successful (2002).

⁹ Discussed in detail in the following chapter, the documentary, *Biography: P. Ramlee* mentions a concert of the ‘Three Ramlees’ in the late 1960s, where P. Ramlee was ‘boo-ed’ by the young audience. Conversely, the Malay Heritage Centre Exhibition mentioned at the beginning of this chapter features a picture of P. Ramlee performing alongside the popular *pop yeh yeh* band, The Swallows (photograph sourced from EMI Music).

1. The government must act vigilantly to expand *asli* (indigenous)¹⁰ and traditional music extensively
2. Radio and television must play an important role in broadcasting as much traditional and *asli* music as possible.
3. A (government-sponsored) program must be implemented that has two simultaneous outlets for the training of *asli* and traditional Malaysian music.
4. All schools (including vernacular schools) must teach *asli* and traditional music as a subject in the curriculum.
5. Nightclubs, hotels, restaurants and any public places must play and perform *asli* and traditional music.
6. Music that is at odds with Malaysian traditions must be reduced.
7. The government must encourage the producers of *asli* and traditional music by providing commensurate endorsement and sponsorship for their musical works.
8. The government must sponsor *asli* and traditional music festivals to (positively) influence Malaysians. (P. Ramlee 1973, 206-207, my translation)

What is evident in these proposed ‘solutions’ is the constant emphasis and reliance on government assistance and intervention. Thus, Ramlee portrayed an uphill ‘battle’ against commercial popular music and saw government sponsorship as the only solution to maintaining a ‘declining’ indigenous culture. Furthermore, the youth that were increasingly overlooking his music for foreign popular music were at the centre of this problem. They were the generation succumbing to ‘negative’ Western culture, effectively forgetting their local cultures and values. The only solution he saw to this was active intervention by the state government. Thus, in considering Ramlee’s proposed ‘solutions’ I analyse discursively how Malaysian national consciousness was being entrusted solely to the machinery of the nation state. Where Malays once relied on their sovereign rulers to define and symbolize their culture, they now had to turn to the nation-state as an extension or replacement of that sovereignty in the modern world. At the end of the conference in which P. Ramlee presented his national cultural views about music, the National Cultural Policy of 1971 was drafted. This policy has remained the Malaysian government policy concerning culture and arts until the present day (Kementerian Penerangan Malaysia 2008).¹¹

¹⁰ The *asli* genre meaning ‘original’, ‘indigenous’ or ‘pure’ is both a specific Malay rhythm and a repertoire of song types. *Asli* music instrumentation includes regional instruments such as the rebana frame drum and gendang two-headed drum as well indigenised Western instruments such as the violin and accordion. See Matusky & Tan 2004 (330) for an example of the *asli* rhythmic pattern and (321, 329-330) for examples of *asli* repertoire.

¹¹ The website of the Ministry of Information Malaysia [*Kementerian Penerangan Malaysia*] lists the updated policy but states that three main principles of the policy are based on the initiatives set

In the remaining pages, I will explore how youth music cultures in mid-1960s to early-1970s Malaysia and Singapore have featured as the centre of contention in the debate about national culturalism. These youth cultures posed a counter-cultural threat to the two newly emerging countries and hence a wealth of reactionary as well as conciliatory discourses were expressed about youth freedom and degeneracy in conflict with conservative and locally rooted morality.

Youth and Popular Music in 1960s Singapore and Malaysia

The 1960s in Singapore and Malaysia was a vibrant and creative period for youth music culture (see Pereira 2011 and 2014). Youth music culture in 1960s Malaya began as emulative practices that would eventually become localised. Rock & roll bands from Britain and America were imitated in the form of cover bands. This was followed by the translation of popular English-language songs into local languages like Malay and later, original songs were written and performed in Malay, English and local Chinese dialects. While other languages were present in Malayan youth music, I will limit my observations in this section to English-language and Malay-language bands based in Singapore and Malaysia with a focus on the musical translatability of youth music and related youth cultural practices that were deemed degenerate by state authorities.

The 'beat music' of British bands such as The Beatles, Rolling Stones and The Shadows were major influences on the musical styles and band formats embraced by Singaporean and Malaysian youth in this era. Aside from a pervasive culture of emulating Western popular styles among English-language bands, there was also a growing community of Chinese and Malay-language bands that combined these new 'beat' styles and guitar-band ensemble formats with lyrics sung in local dialects. The Malay-language adaptations of British rock would be termed '*pop yeh yeh*' in reference to The Beatles' "She Loves You,

out by the National Culture Congress of 1971 [*Ketiga-tiga prinsip asas di atas adalah melambangkan penerimaan gagasan Kongres Kebudayaan Kebangsaan 1971*].

Yeah Yeah Yeah” (Lockard 1998, 224; also see Pereira 2011, 1; Matusky and Tan 2004, 407; Burhanuddin Bin Buang 2000/2001, 4).¹²

Alongside such loud and rhythmically-driven music, fashion statements such as mini-skirts for women and long-hair for men represented a vivid cosmopolitan counter-culture to the more conservative leaders and law-makers of both nations. The Singaporean and Malaysian nation-states were newly independent and desperately seeking to assert a distinct national cultural identity that was refined in modernity yet rooted in indigenous traditions. The ‘beat music’ youth cultures however, were seen as far from refined and far from local by the older generation of local artists and government officials. In fact, youth music culture of the 1960s represented everything the post-colonial Singaporean and Malaysian nation-building projects were against. In line with Jones’ (2001) reading of the ‘doubleness of yellow music’ of 1930s China, to the establishment Malayan youth music signified a degenerate or ‘pornographic’ cultural expression that was also modern and translatable across national boundaries (101-104). The articulation of *pop yeh yeh* culture by young Malaysians and Singaporeans represented a threatening sexual freedom along with a borderless cultural practice that could not be bound by the rigid confines of a national culture and its attendant traditional morality. In the following pages, I will examine a few examples of Malayan youth music cultures that posed a counter-cultural threat to the Singaporean and Malaysian states’ national cultural agenda in the late 1960s to early 1970s.

Disquieting Expressions

In the 1960s, the centre of production for guitar-band music for the entire Malay Peninsula was Singapore. International record labels such as Philips and Columbia-EMI had recording and distribution operations based in Singapore and were actively promoting and producing local talents. In the early 1960s, a wealth of local bands were recorded performing English songs by American and British artists. A major appeal of this emulative

¹² These references to term ‘*pop yeh yeh*’ also constitute the few studies mentioning or dedicated to the genre of music. An insightful Masters dissertation with interviews from band members and fans of the music is provided by Burhanuddin Bin Buang (2001/2000) and comprehensive biography of *pop yeh yeh* bands and singers can be found in Pereira (2014, 10-128)

industry was the accessibility of these local bands to local audiences at live shows. Siva Choy, a member of the duo called The Cyclones (Figure 6.2), relates the following:

...in the early '60s, television had not arrived. You heard (foreign) bands on the radio but couldn't see them. Occasionally, a movie might come into Singapore with bands and things. So what do you do? You look for anything that will substitute. So, suddenly a local band stands up and starts to play Rolling Stones. It was great. No videos, no cassettes. So we became substitutes. Everybody sounded like somebody else. The more you sounded like somebody else, the greater the hero that you became... As a result, people became extremely imitative. (Interview in Pereira 1999, 18)

One of the more successful English-language bands from the era, The Quests, modelled themselves after the The Shadows. They initially gained popularity by winning talent competitions in which they would play songs by The Shadows (Chua 2001, 33-38). In fact, there were many 'sound-a-like' band competitions in early 1960s Singapore: local bands such as The Stompers won the Cliff Richard and the Shadows contest, The Astronauts claimed the title of the 'Ventures of Singapore' and The Clifters were winners of the 'Rolling Stones of Singapore' competition (Pereira 2011, 2-3). There was also a 'Beatles versus Rolling Stones' competition that involved a finalist 'play off' between The Thunderbirds (who emulated the former) and Les Kafila (who mimicked the latter) – The Thunderbirds won the competition (Ibid, 3) (Figure 6.3). Other notable groups such as Naomi and The Boys gained successful popularity in the Malay Peninsula with their cover version of the song "Happy Happy Birthday Baby" by Margo Sylvia and Gilbert Lopez (Figure 6.4).



Figure 6.2. Siva and James Choy's first single released in 1965 (courtesy of Joseph C. Pereira)



Figure 6.3. The Thunderbirds' 1968 single (courtesy of Joseph C. Pereira)

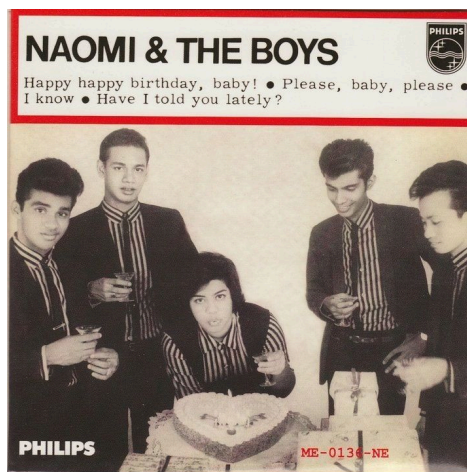


Figure 6.4. The debut Naomi & The Boys single released in 1964 (courtesy of Joseph C. Pereira)

The adaptation of popular chart-topping English songs to the Malay language initiated a local recording music industry that was emulative of the West. This emulative industry which set the aesthetic tone for local music practices would eventually be articulated in more uniquely local expressions. It is likely that the increase of recordings in Malay was due to the widely encouraged use of Malay as the official national language that coincided with the merger years – 1959 to 1965 – of Malaysia and Singapore (Burhanuddin Bin Buang, 24-25). For example, in 1967, under the TK label, Ismail Haron who sang with the Vigilantes recorded “Green Green Grass of Home” (Putman Jr.) as “*Senyuman Terakhir* (Last Smile)”, “La Bamba” (Valens) as “*Mari Menari* (Let’s Dance)”, “Hang On Sloopy” (Berns and Farrell) as “*Mari Sayang* (Come, Love)” and “You Better Move On” (Alexander) as “*Pulang Pada-ku* (Return to Me)” (Ismail Haron 2005; Malay Heritage Centre 2012; Pereira, 111). Ismail Haron based his recording career in the 1960s on performing, adapting and writing Malay versions of popular English songs. His other notable recordings were “*Enam Belas Lilin*” based on “16 Candles” (Dixon & Kent), “*Delailah*” from “Delilah” (Mason and Reed) performed by Tom Jones (Figure 6.5) and “*Jangan Marah Lili* (Don’t Be Angry, Lili)” adapted from “Mohair Sam” (Frazier) performed by Charlie Rich (Ismail Haron; Pereira, 112). Ismail Haron asserted that despite being labeled the ‘Tom Jones of Singapore’, he was more inclined to African-American performers such as James Brown, Lou Rawls, Nat King Cole, Aretha Franklin and Ella Fitzgerald; however, he was constrained to covering Caucasian artists due to the demands of recording companies (Ismail Haron 2005).



Figure 6.5. Ismail Haron(/Haron)’s 45 RPM single (courtesy of Joseph C. Pereira)

The mid-1960s also saw the growth of Malay bands in Singapore and Malaysia called *kugiran*- an abbreviation for *kumpulan gitar rancak* (upbeat guitar bands) (Matusky and Tan 2004, 407). Like the English-language cover bands these bands usually consisted of a core band fronted by a singer. Such singers were subject to change depending on the performance or recording project. Some popular singers and bands in the mid-1960s from Singapore were Rafeah Buang, Maria Bachok, Sanisah Huri (Figure 6.6), Siti Zaiton, Ahmad Daud, Jefridin and The Siglap Five (Figure 6.7), A. Ramlie and The Rythmn Boys, Kassim Selamat and The Swallows (Figure 6.8), The Terwellos (Figure 6.6), The Hooks and Les Kafilas. These bands were characterised by their original compositions and vernacular or *asli* (indigenous) approach to Malay singing complemented by overtly westernised musical style and instrumentation (Lockard 1998, 226; Ismail Haron 2005)¹³. A notable recording is the song “*La Aube*” recorded by Kassim Selamat and The Swallows sung in a Baweanese dialect. The song was even a popular hit in Germany, arguably making the group ‘the most internationally recognised Malay Pop band of their time’ (Malay Heritage Centre 2012).



Figure 6.6. Sanisah Huri and The Terwellos 1967 single from the film, *A Go Go '67* (courtesy of Joseph C. Pereira)

¹³ As discussed in Chapter One, the *asli* genre denoting ‘original’, ‘indigenous’ or ‘pure’ is both a specific Malay rhythm and a repertoire of song types. See Matusky & Tan (2004, 330) for an example of the *asli* rhythmic pattern and (321, 329-330) for examples of *asli* repertoire.



Figure 6.7. Jeffridin and The Siglap Five single, 1966 (courtesy of Joseph C. Pereira)



Figure 6.8. Kassim Slammat & The Swallows 1965 single (courtesy of Joseph C. Pereira)

Degenerate Practices

In 1960s Singapore and Malaysia, prominent and complementary to the music-makers were the youth audiences. These youth adopted fashions that were considered outrageous or provocative, listened to their favourite western or western-derived music on the radio, actively collected music records, increasingly preferred local TV programmes (over local films) featuring local bands and singers and congregated in musical spaces and events such as band competitions and concerts. The most accessible of these live events were the ‘tea dances’ that were aimed at young adults, and the most prominent fashion statements included short mini-skirts and form-fitting outfits for women, tight and slim trousers for men and, towards the end of the 1960s, long hair below the shoulders among young males.

The tea dances of 1960s Singapore were held on Saturday and Sunday afternoons for young patrons below the legal drinking age as no alcohol was served. Some venues in Singapore included the notable Golden Venus, a club located on Orchard Road, Celestial Room, The Palace, Springdale, The Prince's at Prince Hotel Garni and New World Cabaret (Pereira 2011, 6; Chua, 85-88). They were events where youth could have 'clean fun', enjoy live music and congregate in their trendy clothes.

Joseph C. Pereira, author of three books on Singapore band music in the 1960s (1999; 2011; 2014) is an avid fan, record collector and producer of numerous compilation albums of Singaporean beat music from the 1960s (Figure 6.9). During my research in Singapore for this chapter, I was fortunate to interview him at his home and view his vast collection of 45 RPM and 33 RPM records. Pereira is a key member of a modest but enthusiastic network of Singapore 1960s music fans and record collectors across Singapore and Malaysia. Aside from his personal vinyl collection he showed me a collection of albums from the 1960s that had been converted to CDs by another fan. In relation to this study, his insights and personal memories of growing up in the era provided me with an intimate perspective on *pop yeh yeh* culture. He shares his personal experience of attending a tea dance in 1969 at the age of fifteen:

... (The tea dance) was held in the afternoon from three to six and it was a basement club... I went with two friends. We paid the grand fee of one dollar which entitled us to a Coke... But the thing was that straight away, I told myself, "I'm out of my league"... (This was) because we were wearing short sleeve shirts and trousers- we looked like tourists! Then we look(ed) at the rest (of the people), and you know, because they were older teens or... (young) adults- these guys and gals- they looked damn cool, man! We looked like a bunch of tourists, wearing short sleeve shirts... Some were wearing fringe jackets, some were wearing corduroy, some were wearing Levi's corduroy (jeans), and tailored slacks... A wide range of fashions... (There were some who wore) sunglasses. All kinds of sunglasses... There were a lot of (young women wearing) mini-skirts. Of course, some of them wore pantsuits. (Pereira 2012)

It seems that appropriate fashion was a major consideration among youths at these tea dances. Pereira expressed much amazement at the attire of the patrons and emphasised how embarrassed he was to be out of place in his clothing ('we looked like tourists!'). Pereira also described to me the set-up of the club, which included a 'bandstand', 'dancing stage' and 'tables and chairs where people sit and watch' the performances (Ibid). Most of the

dancing was done by male-female couples on dates, while a majority of the audience which was male would sit and observe the bands performing (Ibid).



Figure 6.9. Joseph C. Pereira and his music collection (photo by author, 2012)

Unfortunately, this was the first and last tea dance that he would attend as tea dances were banned by the Singapore government on 1st January 1970, just a few months after Pereira and his friends patronised the Golden Venus at Orchard Road (Pereira 2012; 2014, 273; also see Tan 2011). According to Pereira, tea dances towards the end of the 1960s were notorious for ending up in fights, so the government viewed tea dances as a breeding ground for ‘juvenile delinquency’ (Pereira 2012; 2014, 273). In fact, state antagonism towards youth culture in the late 1960s to early 1970s was a major factor in the decline of such musical events, as the Singaporean and Malaysian government campaign

in the 1950s to create a Malayan culture and reject "yellow culture" or what were seen as *degenerate* external cultural influences began to have an impact. As local music was regarded as being heavily influenced by the West and associated with a culture of drug use and disorderliness, this led to the banning of, among other things, tea dances and other events featuring live music. (Tan 2010, my emphasis)

Indeed, in the late sixties to early seventies, The Straits Times newspaper in Singapore abounds with articles on youth degeneracy in terms of ‘yellow culture’, ‘flower people’ (*The Straits Times*, January 13, 1968) and the general paranoia about the ‘hippie’

movement and associated music cultures (*The Straits Times*, May 18, 1970; September 20, 1970). This included the banning of the American film, *Woodstock: Three Days of Peace, Music and Love* (*The Straits Times*, December 29, 1970). This concern came to a head around another issue of youth ‘degeneracy’ in the late 1960s to early 1970s: long-haired males.

The rise of long-haired male youth was considered such a problem that Singaporean government offices instituted a policy of serving ‘males with long hair... last’ (Malay Heritage Centre 2012; Chua 2001: 56-57). In Malaysia, Johor state-backed scholarship holders were banned from having long hair alongside restrictions from participating in demonstrations and marrying without the consent of the scholarship committee (*The Straits Times*, November 17, 1975). What constituted ‘long hair’ for males? According to an illustrated Singapore government poster titled ‘Males with long hair will be attended to last’, long-hair criteria for males included ‘hair falling across the forehead and touching eyebrows’, ‘hair covering the ears’ and ‘hair reaching below an ordinary shirt collar’ (Malay Heritage Centre, citing Singapore National Library Archives). Pereira (2012) informs us, from a personal experience he had with his friends that police officers in 1970s Singapore would randomly harass and find fault with any young males who sported long hair. These examples indicate that it was the bodies of youth that the state sought to control. Unfamiliar and unconventional appearances were somehow linked to degeneracy and moral decadence ultimately at odds with the state vision of promoting a subservient national culture among youths.

This ‘policing’ of the body was internalised among youths themselves. In the mid to late 1960s Malaysian and Singaporean women were liberating their bodies through ‘provocative’ or revealing styles of dress. The issue of young Malay women in mini-skirts was a frequent topic of fan letters in the Singaporean-based, Malay-language music magazine, *Bintang dan Lagu* (*Stars and Songs*). A letter from someone who may be a young woman¹⁴ named N. Hanis denounces the wearing of mini-skirts as a provocatively

¹⁴ It is difficult to verify the gender of the letter writer as there is a possibility that the writer may be using an alias, a male writing as a woman, or even one of the magazine editors intending to generate

revealing Western form of dress with the sole intention of attracting male attention (N. Hanis 1967, 51). The writer asks why women should copy the fashions from abroad while ignoring local and more modest fashions (Ibid):

Mini-skirts are a type of clothing that exposes (a woman's) calves to the public. Is this what is called progress? Progress can be achieved without having to wear mini-skirts. And, by wearing *baju kurong* (traditional Malay female dress) we are able to attract males; we don't need to wear miniskirts for this... If we really want to wear short (revealing) clothes, wear underwear, isn't that even shorter (more revealing)? (Ibid)

The writer adds that local society is to blame for encouraging this indecent form of dress by holding 'mini-skirt pageants'¹⁵ and falling victim to the disagreeable influences of the west (Ibid).

This statement is unique in multiple ways. Firstly, the critique of mini-skirts was voiced by someone who may be surmised to be a Malay woman, based on the name provided by the letter writer. She advocated for a style of dress among her female peers that embodied both traditional modesty sartorially and a progressive and modern outlook intellectually. Secondly, the writer raised some interesting issues about feminine sexual objectification: why should women expose their legs just to attract men and why should they be paraded in beauty pageants? Thirdly, the issue of western cultural hegemony was raised, whereby western fashion was threatening the survival of Malay national dress and cultural values:

Why must we copy the clothes that come from other countries, like Western countries (?) Aren't there enough clothes in our own country? While Western countries have never ever wanted to use our clothes, why then must we favour clothes that come from the West that are not suitable for us. (Ibid)

The question is whether to view this letter as a conservative statement or a post-colonial feminist one. Ironically, it seems to present both possibilities for interpretation, but I interpret this writer as an autonomous female voice that is paradoxically bound by the cultural restraints of patriarchal Malay culture. What complicates a reading of this writer's position is that her notion of 'modesty' is a personal internalisation of patriarchal Malay

interest in the magazine. For the purpose of this analysis, I will deduce this writer's identity from the content of their letter. What is important is to ascertain how magazine readers in the mid-1960s would have interpreted or reacted to such letters.

¹⁵ 'Ratu Mini-skirt'

cultural values. With regard to the culture of wearing mini-skirts, N. Hanis employs a discourse similar to conservative critiques of youth culture such as the ones stated by P. Ramlee, and subsequently implemented government policies that attempted to promote traditional, non-radical-Western values.

In later issues of the same magazine, conservative views by another woman (again, ascertained through the name provided) towards the mini-skirt trend are expressed. A letter expresses antagonism towards mini-skirts in a very satirical manner:

For me miniskirts are like jackfruit covers. The top is wrapped tightly, while the calves and thighs are shown to the general public. I feel that instead of wearing miniskirts it is better not to wear anything at all; that is even more attractive for men. (A. Anis Sabirin 1967, 51)

Another, more neutral letter, this time by a male writer observes how new male and female fashions are far from different in their tightness and attendant attitudes:

While young women are stylish with their miniskirts that reveal parts of their thighs, young males show off their shirts and trousers that are tight or 'fancy', as these young adults like to say. No matter what clothes they wear, no one can tell them otherwise because they will reply with an answer that is unsettling (rude or inappropriate). (A. Zainy Nawawi 1967, 48)

Both of the letters quoted above are indicative of a general uneasiness among more conservative female and male youth towards these new fashions. It is certain that their stance is conservative in relation to the content of the music magazine to which they write. In my general overview of *Bintang dan Lagu* issues from 1966-1967, I saw numerous pictures of female artists in mini-skirts and other form-fitting attire in line with the youth fashions of the mid to late 1960s. These letters perhaps only revealed a minority opinion about youth dressing styles and their assumed morality. Furthermore, it is possible that these letters were contrived by magazine editors to entice readers. Regardless, it is interesting to note that there was a debate over the issue in a music-oriented publication targeted at youths. Beyond the music, bands and singers that were prominently featured in the magazine, the discourse of mini-skirts and fashion directly involved the fans of and participants in Malaysia and Singapore's 1960s music culture.

The debate over mini-skirts in *Bintang dan Lagu* ended¹⁶ on a more liberal note with an article titled “*Miniskirt, Apa Salahnya Gadis2 Melayu Memakai Miniskirt? (Miniskirts, What is the Harm in Malay Women Wearing Miniskirts?)*” (November 1967, 4-5). The article summarised previous fan letters for and against mini-skirts and made an attempt to investigate the issue. The writer(s)¹⁷ of the article ‘investigated’ by visiting the predominantly Malay Geylang Serai district in Singapore to see the extent of mini-skirt-wearing among young Malay females. They ascertained that ‘the situation’ wasn’t as bad as previous fan letters had depicted as the amount of women wearing unreasonably short skirts were ‘very small’ (Ibid, 5). The article concludes by noting that young Malay women are ‘still capable of looking after themselves and adapting to the times’¹⁸ (Ibid).

Despite conservative reactions towards youth fashions that were seen as detrimental to local culture, values and morals, there remained a discourse that sought to reconcile such youth culture as reasonable or even progressive and adaptive to modern times. I argue that a cosmopolitan agency was present in the debates and discourses among the youth of 1960s Malaysia and Singapore. This was a cosmopolitan agency that differed from the aspiring nationalism expressed by the previous generation. The notion of ‘youth’ culture featured prominently and presented a discursive and embodied space of contestation. This agency was articulated in different ways with divergent opinions about morality and the role of youth in the emerging nations of Malaysia and Singapore. Conservative or reactionary voices proclaimed a moralistic positionality by using modern tropes of national culturalism to safeguard traditional values. Arguments in favour of youth cultures sought to reposition the moral compass towards ideas of progress, modernity and adaptability to changing times. Thus, agency exists in both views and such opinions were articulated in cosmopolitan mediums that provided a new space for these oppositional ideas to interact. While the recording industry created music for counter-cultural youths to consume, print

¹⁶ The last available copies of the *Bintang dan Lagu* magazine at the British Library St. Pancras, London are the issues from 1967; thus, ‘ending’ the mini-skirt debate until more research is done to retrieve later copies. There is also a possibility that this magazine ceased publication after 1967. As archived copies of this particular magazine are rare, more research is required regarding the production history of this publication.

¹⁷ No writers are named.

¹⁸ ‘... *maseh lagi pandai menjaga diri dan menyesuaikan diri mereka dengan pengedaran zaman*’ (November 1967, 5)

media¹⁹ provided a discursive space for youths to expose and express the disjuncture between such counter-cultures and traditional values, national identity and modernity.

The Malay film industry, waning in popularity towards the end of the 1960s, provided a further space for the articulation of this counter-cultural discourse of youth culture. In the following section, I discuss how one Malay film tried to reconcile older values with the trendy youth music and culture of late 1960s Malaysia and Singapore. The film in its attempt to draw a young audience provided a narrative that tried to challenge conservative stereotypes of Malay youth degeneracy by portraying such youths as morally-capable individuals.

Youth Music in Malay Film

It is suggested that the popularity of *pop yeh yeh* bands coincided with the decline of the musically-oriented Malay film industry (Lockard 1998, 226). It is difficult to ascertain whether *pop yeh yeh* directly affected the ‘decline’ of Malay cinema but there were many instances of *pop yeh yeh* or rock & roll music included in Malay films from the mid-1960s. Contrary to Lockard’s view, I suggest that the popularity of *pop yeh yeh* music actually waned *alongside* the Malay film studio systems’ demise (Burhanuddin Bin Buang 2000/2001, 11-12). Thus, I would further suggest that *pop yeh yeh* and Malay films had more of a symbiotic relationship than the contestatory one suggested by the conservative reactions to youth culture voiced by Malay film music icons such as P. Ramlee. By the early 1970s there was, as indicated above, increased policing of youth cultures and fewer avenues for performing, especially in Singapore. Also, the ‘craze’ for local guitar groups (*kugirans*) had subsided as ‘local youths’ gravitated towards ‘foreign artists who were much more radical’ such as Led Zeppelin, Deep Purple, Black Sabbath and Jimi Hendrix

¹⁹ For a thorough discussion on the cosmopolitanism and Malay nationalist activism in print media see Barnard & Van der Putten (2008). As I have discussed their study in Chapter Two, Barnard & Van der Putten believe that it was the cosmopolitan intellectual environment of Singapore in the 1950s that led to significant creative and political advances in the Malay arts and literature. A cosmopolitan conception of Malayness was being formed and the imperative for the creation of a modern ‘Malaysian’ state was being articulated with utmost agency, ‘in the Malay language’ (148).

(Ibid, 12). However, many of the singers from *pop yeh yeh* bands would successfully go on to record commercial albums past the 1970s (Ibid).

Pop yeh yeh and youth culture, while treated dismissively by the state, significantly permeated mid-1960s Malay films, even though they tended to include such music as either frivolous, parodic or secondary to the films' main narrative. It was perhaps a cautious way for film producers to retain the viewership of the older generation while simultaneously appealing to the younger generation of film audiences, whose musical tastes were radically diverging from the musical styles common to mid-1950s to early-1960s Malay films. Suggesting a shift in the musical tastes of Malay youth in the mid-1960s, the keyboardist, Shah Sarip from the Rhythmn Boys remarked: 'At that time, people didn't want to hear traditional music anymore. Everybody wanted to hear *pop yeh yeh* songs. Even at wedding functions, *pop yeh yeh* bands dominated' (in Burhanuddin Bin Buang, 22).²⁰ Whether the cosmopolitan music of Malay films prior to the mid-1960s was considered 'traditional' is unclear, but the reactionary comments from P. Ramlee are indicative. On the contrary, some of the earliest inclusions of rock & roll music can be found in Ramlee's films.

One of the earliest musical scenes featuring a rock & roll-style guitar song happens to be one of P. Ramlee's most famous songs.²¹ Aptly titled, "*Bunyi Gitar* (Sound of the Guitar)", the song was featured in the comedic film, *Tiga Abdul* (*The Three Abduls*, 1964, dir. P. Ramlee), Ramlee's last film produced in Singapore before his move to Kuala Lumpur. The film is set in a fictional Turkish-like nation, where men wear fez hats, reminiscent of the pre-Ataturk era. As one of the three Abdul brothers who have amassed a wealthy inheritance, Ramlee's character, Abdul Wahub, owns a musical instruments store, which forms a suitable setting for his performance of "*Bunyi Gitar*". The manner in which the song is presented in the film is as if Ramlee is introducing the Malay film audience to this 'new' genre of music (**Example 6.1**). A group of musicians - two electric guitarists and a drummer - are trying out musical instruments in his store. Abdul Wahub walks up to them

²⁰ This oral interview was conducted by Burhanuddin Bin Buang on January 28, 2001.

²¹ In the following chapter, I discuss the ironic use of this song in a documentary about P. Ramlee. The song has also been reinterpreted by numerous Malaysian artists past the 1980s. The song has been performed by Malaysian divas Sheila Majid, Siti Nurhaliza and the rock band, Blues Band among others. More recently, the song was 'covered' by the Malaysian bands Subculture for the *Indiepretasi* P. Ramlee tribute album and Kyoto Protocol for the Versus 2 band competition broadcast on TV9. It is arguably, out of the Malaysian film music canon, the song that culturally references the *pop yeh yeh* era.

and ask if he can assist them, to which one of the guitarists (Kassim Masdor) offers that Abdul Wahub can join their band. Abdul Wahub then asks each of the musicians what parts and instruments they play and they proceed to demonstrate by taking turns to play three bars of their parts unaccompanied: rhythm guitar followed by ‘bass’²² guitar followed by drum set. Abdul Wahub then determines that they need a lead guitar to complete the band, picks up an electric guitar on a display stand and proceeds to play the opening guitar riff of the song. During the instrumental interlude following Abdul Wahub’s singing, a group of customers dance a choreographed ‘twist’ dance that could have been considered unruly by a conservative Malay audience; this was quite unlike the traditional or cabaret ball-room style dancing screened in earlier films. Thus, Abdul Wahub’s store becomes a vibrant cosmopolitan space for the introduction of rock & roll to a Malay film audience. I will posit that it was deemed possible to present this new style of music because the film was a comedy. As such, older or more musically conservative audience members would have been able to accept the song as a parody of the ‘wild’ youth culture that pervaded the Malay Peninsula in the mid-1960s. One other reason why P. Ramlee composed a song in this style could have been due to his need to demonstrate his musical skills in adapting to a new genre. In a magazine article titled, “*Nasihah P. Ramlee (P. Ramlee’s Advice)*” 1967, he expressed his concerns about the young guitar-band or ‘pop’ musicians that were rapidly gaining musical success but did not have the formal musical knowledge that his generation had to acquire:

...One matter that is disappointing is that, based on what I know, many pop singers and musicians cannot read musical notes. For me, this is a weakness that needs to be fixed... Because, if it is not (addressed)... I worry that the future of pop singers cannot be brought to the centre or to the side (as in, lacking direction), like a ship sailing with a ruined sail. (In Noor As Ahmad 1967, 31)

Despite P. Ramlee’s tongue-in-cheek performance of the song, the inclusion of this style of music also reflects the immense popularity of the genre in 1964; thus, “*Bunyi Gitar*” had the dual function of being a cynical musical take on youth music while also appealing to the younger and ‘hipper’ generation of Malay viewers.

²² Here, as was popular with many early *pop yeh yeh* bands, the ‘bass’ guitar part was a running bass line played on an electric six-string guitar.

The lyrics for the song are indicative of the stereotypically carefree, party-going, love-seeking and laidback attitude of mid-1960s Malay youths. As noted by Zam Zam, a popular singer from that period, *pop yeh yeh* lyrics

... were mostly about love, love relationships and partying because those were the concerns of the youth at that time. Since, (sic) *pop yeh yeh* was a music that catered for the young people of that time, of course the lyrics must be something that touch on their liking and activities. (In Burhanuddin Bin Buang, 22)²³

Indeed such inclinations towards ‘love’, ‘love relationships’ and ‘partying’ were prominent in the lyrics of the song (Appendix A.7).

Pop yeh yeh culture and Malay films were mutually influential. Malay film music and narratives played an active role in shaping *pop yeh yeh* artists and Malay youth culture and music were prominently featured in Malay films. Pereira (2014) notes how the *pop yeh yeh* band from Singapore, The Swallows, initially backed the singer Ahmad Daud who managed to get them to appear in a Shaw Brothers’ MFP film, *Sayang Si Buta (Love the Blind One)*, 1965, dir. Omar Rojik) (13). Within the same year, they recorded a second song fronted by Ahmad Daud called “*Dendang Pontianak (Vampire Song)*” for the film *Pusaka Pontianak (Legacy of the Vampire)*, 1965, dir. Ramon A. Estella) (Pereira, Ibid). The Swallows then collaborated with a singer named Kasim Bin Rahmat who took on the stage name, ‘Kassim Selamat’, in reference to the ‘Kassim Selamat’ character of Ramlee’s *Ibu Mertuaku (My Mother-in-law)*, 1962) analysed in Chapter Four. Thus, aside from providing music for films, the younger generation of musicians also appropriated references from Malay films; indicative of a mutually influential intertextual discourse between film music and youth culture. Conversely, Malay films from the mid-1960s also drew considerably from Malay youth music. The opening scene of Ramlee’s *Anak Bapak (Father’s Son)*, 1968) features an upbeat *pop yeh yeh* song for its title credits, with Saloma singing and dancing to the song (**Example 6.2**). The film also includes musical scenes in a nightclub featuring an unnamed and uncredited *pop yeh yeh* band. Here, the film doesn’t parody or critique this

²³ This oral interview was conducted by Burhanuddin Bin Buang on December 6, 2000.

style of music like Ramlee's earlier films. The band and style of music is diegetic to the nightclub environment (and musical aesthetic) of late-1960s Malaysia²⁴.

However, none of the examples mentioned above represent the integration of *pop yeh yeh* and youth culture themes directly into the narrative of Malay films. One Malay film that attempted to incorporate *pop yeh yeh* music and articulate the issues of Malay youth culture was *Muda Mudi* (*The Youth*, 1965, dir. M. Amin) produced by Cathay-Keris and starring Siput Sarawak. Siput Sarawak was one of the most prominent female Malay film stars from the early 1950s. *Muda Mudi* however, places her in the reflexive role of an ageing film star named Dayang, a single mother who is coming to terms with her age and her waning popularity in the Malay film scene. Dayang's daughter, Rohana (Roseyatimah), is an ambitious singer in a *pop yeh yeh* band²⁵. The film presents the theme of youth culture from the perspective of the older generation. Dayang struggles to accept that she is past her prime for acting in leading roles as a young heroine and she is aggressive and confrontational with her producers. She is especially spiteful to a young actress that is quickly surpassing her. At the same time, while proud of her daughter, she also wants her daughter to follow in her footsteps of becoming an actress; however, Rohana is adamant about being a singer which results in much conflict between them.

The film is replete with musical scenes that explicitly promote the *pop yeh yeh* style of music. The opening title credits feature an upbeat rock & roll song with Siput Sarawak dancing an a-go-go (**Example 6.3**). At the onset of the film, Rohana is shown singing a *pop yeh yeh*-styled song by the beach with her friends. She is accompanied by electric guitarists who are not plugged in to any form of amplification. Regardless, they perform the obligatory guitar-dance-movements typical of a *pop yeh yeh* band (**Example 6.4**). This scene is a stereotypical portrayal of young carefree youths playing music and having fun. At the end of the song, one of the youths, while reading a film magazine announces with disappointment that Dayang is still being casted in a new film and remarks disrespectfully that she is too old to be taking on lead roles. He is unaware that Rohana, who just sang for

²⁴ *Anak Bapak* was one Ramlee's films made in the Malaysian film studios of Shaw Brothers' called Merdeka Studios in Kuala Lumpur. By this time, the Singapore film studios had shut down.

²⁵ This film, in retrospect is revelatory as Siput Sarawak's real-life daughter, Anita Sarawak was a hugely popular and successful Malaysian singer since the early-1970s (see Muhammad 2010, 316)

him, is Dayang's daughter. In another poignant musical scene, Dayang attends her daughter's performance at a nightclub and is invited to sing. Towards the middle of her song, the young, dancing audience start to jeer her off the stage, strongly disapproving of her performance (**Example 6.5**). In another scene, Dayang is dancing the twist enthusiastically at her daughter's 19th birthday party, but eventually becomes exhausted and almost faints, unable to keep up with the other dancing youngsters in the party. Thus, the musical culture of Malay youths serve as glaring reminders to Dayang of her age and her declining fame. This film in retrospect, through its theme of ageing and narrative focus on the ageing star, can be read as an allegory of the Malay film industry at the time; an older generation of entertainers that were trying to make sense of the radically different youth cultures that were emerging in the mid-1960s.

In fact, the film's portrayal of adults against youth was quite conciliatory. Interestingly, the film featured music by the popular British band, The Tornados – credited in the opening titles – and included a copious amount of *pop yeh yeh* songs. It is unclear whether The Tornados' instrumental music was used as a backing track for newly composed vocal parts sung in Malay, or if it was a 'fake' band that took on the name The Tornados. Regardless, the British instrumental band was highly influential on the beat music scene in the Malay Peninsula and a lot of *pop yeh yeh* bands modelled their style (Pereira 2011, 1). The pervasiveness of such music in a Malay film was quite daring for the mid-1960s but like Ramlee's *Tiga Abdul*, the film had to appeal to the older generation by narrating from the older generation's perspective. At the same time, the incorporation of a *pop yeh yeh* or youth theme also reflects the significance of youth culture in the mid-1960s, which implored film producers to find ways to appeal to this new demographic's musical taste.

The major narrative discourse of the film however, centres on the plight of the ageing actress and tries to generate a significant amount of sympathy for the older generation. The youth in the film are portrayed as carefree and fickle-minded without much thought for the future. Dayang advises Jaafar (Tony Kassim) regarding his shaky relationship with her daughter: 'Youngsters like you are always short-sighted. Quick to be hurt, while matters of love are not taken seriously. But, Jaafar, if a love is pure, it will not change.'²⁶ Thus, youth

²⁶ 'Pemuda-pemuda seperti engkau selalu mempunyai fikiran yang singkat. Lelas tersinggung. Berkasih-kasihan pun dipermainkan. Tapi Jaafar, kalau cinta suci, tetap tidak berubah.'

are in need of the wise advice of the older generation. However, the youth aren't vilified or in need of being suppressed; they just require guidance. Dayang, for example, encourages Rohana's career in music, attending her nightclub performances while giving her advice about not giving in to quickly-gained fame. Rohana excitedly shows off her debut 45 RPM but Dayang cautions her:

Ana, you are new to this world. A debut single or record has no meaning. Today, everyone likes your voice. Tomorrow, people won't listen to you anymore. I want you to be successful and I know your singing is widely appreciated. However, I like to give you advice. You can accept it or not... Ana, I have experienced everything.

Thus, the youth here are portrayed as 'new to the world' and lacking in the experience of the older generation. Yet, Dayang is encouraging in her advice to her daughter, while she initially tries to steer Rohana away from singing towards acting, she eventually realises the error of her ways and accepts Rohana's decision to be a professional singer. *Muda Mudi*, while narrating from the perspective of the older generation of film stars and producers, provides a cautionary but encouraging message to Malay youth. However, its 'top-down' narrative perspective still leaves much to be desired for the agency of youth and their cultural practices. Hence, in the following section, I turn to a film about Malay youth culture and music that more overtly articulated the tensions and contestations between the older generation and youth from the youths' perspective.

A Go Go '67 (1967)

The film, *A Go Go '67*, directed by Omar Rojik, contains a loose plot about a young woman and man who are members of a *kugiran* (upbeat guitar band) and more importantly, features *pop yeh yeh* performances of twelve groups and four dance groups. The opening credit sequence is reminiscent of *Muda Mudi's* but is portrayed more artistically, presenting go-go dancers as silhouettes behind screen panels (**Example 6.6**). While the musical performances are the main highlights of the film, the narrative that ties the numerous musical performances together contains discourses about *pop yeh yeh* youth culture clashing with conservative Malay values. As a case study of the clash between youth culture and state ideology in 1960s Malaysia and Singapore, I discuss here such contestatory discourses about youth culture present in the film, *A Go Go '67*. Interestingly,

the film provides a moral compromise that favours the youth, while critiquing stereotypical conservative views that abhor youth culture.

The film's storyline evolves around a young woman named Fauziah (Nor Azizah) who, against her conservative and well-heeled father's wishes, sings in a *pop yeh yeh* band. Her boyfriend, Johari (Aziz Jaafar), is the leader of the band who sings and plays the keyboard. Fauziah's father (Ahmad Nisfu), is extremely antagonistic towards Malay youth culture to the point that he abruptly intervenes in one of Fauziah's band rehearsals by kicking a drum kit and proceeds to scold her and her bandmates: 'If you want to be Satan, go and be Satan. Don't bring my daughter to be Satan with you! What is all this *yeh yeh yeh*?'.²⁷

Despite his disapproval, Fauziah makes long 'speeches' about how youth aren't as bad as her father believes. She admonishes her father about his misconceptions about youth:

Not all youth are immoral and delinquent, father. Also, not all people who are religious are good, father. I am an adult. I know right from wrong. You know father, a lot of them (youths) do not have permanent jobs. So, by directing their interest towards music, they are able to fill the emptiness of their lives and avoid criminal activities... Father, do you like hearing of our youths stealing, thieving, extorting because of the emptiness in their lives?

Her father doesn't agree as he views such youths as lost beyond 'repair'. He then laments how the west with their civilised ways and innovations have failed to control their 'wild youth movements (*angkatan liar*)'. In order to keep her from her social and musical activities, Fauziah's father arranges her to be married to her cousin.

Later in the film, Fauziah's father makes a comment about the misfortunes of the world, and mentions the need to do charity work. His wife chides him by saying that his plans for charity never materialise. He then says that if he collects considerable donations he will receive a medal for his contributions to society and the government and follows up by denouncing the youth for their aimless ways, noting that they are never concerned about the welfare of the poor.

Upon overhearing these remarks, Fauziah decides to organise a charity concert for orphans. She gives Johari five hundred dollars to organise the event and recruit bands to participate. Johari asks why she is suddenly planning this event. Fauziah then makes another speech-like proclamation:

²⁷ "Ingat! Kalau kau nak jadi syaitan, pergi jadi syaitan. Jangan bawa anak aku jadi syaitan bersama! Apa ni, 'yeh yeh yeh' ini apa?"

My father always accuses that youth like us are the trash of society that are absolutely useless. I want you (Johari) to prove to society, especially my father, that we can be used for a good cause as long as people know how to make use of us.

In the next scene, Fauziah's house is prepared for the marriage but Fauziah is nowhere to be found as she is attending the charity concert. More performances from *kugiran* bands ensue. She returns from the concert and says to her father that she has accomplished her duties and is ready to be married according to her father's wishes. Unfortunately, her engagement was called off as her potential in-laws were tired of waiting for her return. Fauziah didn't even intentionally avoid the wedding as she wasn't informed when the wedding was going to be held! Her father is ashamed about the whole escapade and angrily tells Fauziah to leave his sight.

Shortly after, a group of reporters come into the now gloomy house looking for Fauziah. They glowingly inform her parents that Fauziah and Johari just organised a very successful charity event and are to be commended for their contributions to society. As the reporters congratulate her on her success, she mentions that the *true* organiser of the event was her father. In the end Fauziah's parents are seen apologising to Johari and all is well.

A Go Go '67 provides an informative perspective on the discourses about youth and music in contention with national culturalism in late 1960s Singapore and Malaysia. The film was shot in Singapore during the last years of the Shaw Brothers Malay Film Productions division; marking the end of an era of Malay film production in Singapore. Fittingly, the film is an attempt by the industry to appeal to the very youth culture that was assumed to be a major factor in the Malay film industry's 'demise'. As such, the narrative tries to portray a conciliatory stance by portraying the youth-protagonists as decent human beings, contrary to many of the statements made by established cultural icons. The film paints a stereotypical archetype of reactionary conservatism in the figure of Fauziah's father, replete with statements about the immorality of youth, their uselessness to society and their devious, delinquent and devilish tendencies. Interestingly, the film's altruistic protagonist, Fauziah, becomes a staunch advocate for youth culture, proving to her father that youth are morally grounded people with the capacity to care for others and use their art for good causes. Fauziah's character is thus a noble and self-sacrificing archetype who both

participates in youth culture as well as upholds 'traditional' moral values. In fact, she ends up displaying greater moral initiative than her conservative and opportunistic father.

Ironically, the film's altruistic narrative also asserts moral expectations on youth and in effect, patronises their moral inclinations. Despite this attempt at reconciliation, youth music remained predominantly commercial and government initiatives continued to repress youth culture as indicated in the consequent banning of youth-music activities and venues (Pereira 2012; Tan 1989/1990; 1992). The film, while being a commercial production that targeted a youth demographic provides an important document of the discourses and disjunctures that circulated around the vibrant musical culture of Malay youth in the late 1960s. Past the one-dimensional characters, moralistic condescension and far-from-subversive narrative, *A Go Go '67* presents viewers with an idea of the music and lifestyles of the Malay youth of the *pop yeh yeh* era albeit through the mediating gaze of a declining local commercial film industry desperately seeking a youth audience.

The production of *A Go Go '67* while indicative of the demise of the Malay film studio industry from a musical perspective also mirrored the rise of the Malay popular music record industry that would be more pervasive than Malay films from the late 1960s to late 1970s. The musical director of the film, Kassim Masdor, was the musical protégé of P. Ramlee who officially worked at MFP as a continuity clerk from the mid-1950s. By the mid-1960s, aside from appearing in numerous films as an on-screen musician and contributing his own musical skills as a guitarist, accordionist, pianist and song-writer, Masdor was a part-time music producer and talent-scout for EMI-Singapore's Malay music division. His increasing musical success in the record industry led to some considerable tension between him and the MFP studio manager, Kwek Chip Jian, who saw his relationship with EMI as a conflict of interest. This was a complicated situation because Kassim Masdor was composing songs for MFP films and also releasing them as promotional records for their attendant films on EMI. In my interview with him, he relayed the following about the contestation he experienced over the ownership of his film songs for MFP:

When I wrote songs for film, I would use them on the films as well as record them for EMI. So, such recorded songs would be promotional for the film. So, one day, the manager of Malay Film Productions, (Kwek Chip Jian); he stopped me... He (tried) to stop me from

recording (my film songs) for EMI. He called me and said, 'from today onward, your songs cannot be recorded for EMI'. I said, 'why?'. To which he replied, 'because we pay you, already... (So,) you (should) pay me (back for your EMI recordings)'. (In actuality,) you (MFP) borrowed my songs for the films... (Mr. Kwek then responded,) 'you (should) pay me, that means the song(s)... belong to us (MFP)'. The reason ... (Mr. Kwek) said this was because he was jealous as my songs were already making money, as well, right?... No such thing... (I replied,) 'You must remember Mr. Kwek, I work in Malay Film Productions. I work with you not as a composer, you must remember that... I am working with you as a continuity clerk,' ... 'If the lawyer (from EMI) comes to see you don't blame me'. 'Why (would a) lawyer (come to see me)?' (, responded Mr. Kwek). I answered, 'because whatever song I write belongs to EMI. I signed the (song-writing) contract with EMI' ... As such, the film songs of ... Yusof B. and Osman Ahmad - ... they were actually working in Jalan Ampas (MFP) as composers (by contract) and their songs belonged to Malay Film Productions. Myself and P. Ramlee – P. Ramlee was hired as an actor. I was a continuity clerk. Both of our songs were free (to use in whatever way we wanted). They could be recorded anywhere. They (MFP) have no right to stop (the recording and distribution of) my songs. (Kassim Masdor 2013)²⁸

Kassim Masdor's recalled exchange between himself and the Shaw Brothers' MFP Studio Manager, Kwek Chip Jian, indicates the anxieties expressed by the Malay film industry over the increasing shift of musical ownership and authorship towards individual agents not tied to film companies' exclusive composer contracts in the early to mid-1960s. The incident above occurred sometime during the mid-1960s, when Kassim Masdor was quickly rising as a Malay song-writer for radio programs, records and film – a career that he pursued in parallel to his full-time job as a continuity clerk at MFP. However, the supposed 'jealousy' or contention over music ownership by Malay film studio executives clearly indicates that there was a contestation between the transmission of Malay popular songs via film versus records. Even though film songs were initially released on records to promote their attendant films, it is apparent that these songs on records outshone and possibly even generated more revenue than the films. Hence, as indicated by the growing symbiotic relationship between youth popular music and Malay films past the mid-1960s discussed above, Malay film studios eventually became more adamant about adapting to,

²⁸ In this interview, Kassim Masdor refers to himself as 'Uncle'. It is common in Malay, Malaysian and Singaporean culture for older, non-relatives, to refer to themselves as 'Uncle' or 'Auntie' as a form of respect and endearment. In my interview with Kassim Masdor, his use of the term 'Uncle' when referring to himself indicated his seniority over me but also conveyed a sense of informality and open-ness and familiarity with me. I was also quite surprised with his open-ness with me, as my interview with him was also my first meeting with him. Unfortunately, this interview would also be my last meeting with him, as he passed away on the 21st of January 2014.

and more so, claiming some form of ownership on the new musical practices in the Malay world that were quickly overshadowing the popularity of Malay films.

The film *A Go Go '67* was the culmination of this symbiotic but contestatory relationship between recording industry and film industry. After the closing of the MFP Jalan Ampas Studio in 1967, Kassim Masdor would move on to a successful career as a full-time manager for EMI's Malay music division. He related to me how the film's conception was closely tied to his experience as a popular music producer outside of the film industry:

When I worked (in MFP), I was also a part-time producer for EMI... as a talent-scout... I recorded artists for EMI and made songs for EMI... In time, they (EMI) took a liking to me... So, one day, Malay Film Productions wanted to make a film, *A Go Go '67*... So, the musical directors for the film were Yusof B. and myself. So we published an advertisement in the newspaper... to call all the *kugirans* to come to (MFP) for an audition... Whoever was eligible, good, would appear... (in the film)... From there, I wrote many songs and from there, I found many talents. For example, Sanisah Huri was not yet a singer. She was one of the dancers from the Terwellos band... So, I... (as) a talent scout... I saw her... (she was) cute, pretty... So I featured her... she could not sing. I made her sing in the film, *A Go Go '67*... From there, she (started) singing, and I brought her to EMI. Straight to EMI. Pass.

Thus, *A Go Go '67* also launched the careers of the musicians and bands featured in the film, in particular Sanisah Huri, Zaiton and the band The Terwellos. It also importantly marked the last attempt of the Malay film studio industry in Singapore to appeal to a changing audience demographic by adapting to the widely successful local music industry that was centred on youth culture. I was informed that the film received an 'encouraging reception (*sambutan yang menggalakkan*)' and made a considerable profit for MFP, but was not as successful as P. Ramlee's mid-1950s to early 1960s films (Kassim Masdor 2013). However, while appealing to youth, the agency of youth was also somewhat limited if not altogether illusory. Most of the songs in the film were actually written by Kassim Masdor and Yusof B. and iconic musical talents from the *pop yeh yeh* era such as Sanisah Huri, would go on to be successful recording artists beyond the *pop yeh yeh* 'trend' of the mid-1960s to early-1970s. Kassim Masdor, paradoxically, signifies the enduring musical legacy of the Malay film studio system. Unlike P. Ramlee, he was able to adapt the musical skills that he learnt from the Malay film industry to the rising Malay record industry. Instead of becoming reactionary towards the youth music of the 1960s he actively

embraced it and in fact authored many Malay popular songs from that ‘youth’ era of the mid to late-1960s, further developing Malay popular music past the 1970s. He would continue to collect royalties from his compositions for EMI until his death in 2014 as the longest living film composer from Singapore’s Malay film industry.²⁹

Conclusion

Youth music cultures in Malaysia and Singapore have always been a locus of contention for nation-making policy and its conservative power brokers. While studies on Malay youth and music have provided pertinent examples of this contention with the government (Stivens 2012; Yusof 2010; Tan 2006; Ibrahim 1995; Tan 1993; Tan 1992; Tan 1989/1990; Tan 1989), it was the music cultures of the 1960s in the Malay Peninsula that ignited the history of contestation between the emerging Singaporean and Malaysian state with youth cultural practices. The 1960s was a transitional period politically for Malaysia and Singapore. As such, state-makers from both countries were desperate to create a local-traditional cultural imaginary for their emerging nation-states. *Pop yeh yeh*, with its culturally ‘rootless’ orientation, was antithetical to the state vision, and was a hindrance to the nation-making project. The music of *pop yeh yeh* was unmistakably western in influence and Malaysian and Singaporean youth were aligning themselves furthermore to the more radical and subversive subcultures of the west. These youth in their cultural practices incited ‘moral panic’ (Stivens citing [Young 1971; Cohen 1972]) among the conservative ruling elite, which resulted in the formation and implementation of policies and interventions to limit their activities and spaces of expression. Much like the Malaysian ‘black metal crackdowns’ in the early 2000s, ‘the construction of Malay cultural identities as embodied in the body politics of urbanized Malay youths’ led to state actions to control

²⁹ There was an ominous moment at the end of my interview with Kassim Masdor, as he indicated this point while he was giving me a copy of the book, *7 Magnificent Composers (7 Tokoh Muzik)* (Mohd. Raman Daud 2002), that featured the ‘great’ Singaporean-based Malay film composers from the 1950s to 1960s: Zubir Said, Osman Ahmad, Yusof B., Ahmad Jaafar, Wandly Yazid, P. Ramlee and Kassim Masdor. When he gave me the book, he pointed out that of all the seven composers featured in the book, he was the only one still alive (at the time).

and repress what was deemed as deviant cultural practices' (Yusof 2010, 180). Of course, in the case of commercially-based music cultures there are ever present ironies with regards to ethnocratic-state hegemony and capitalist logics of global cultural consumption. Stivens (2012) in her recent study of Malaysian youth culture points out the following:

There are... contradictory links between, on the one hand, the social disciplining imposed by the state and religious moral projects, to produce the hoped-for new, responsible, self-fashioning young citizen-subjects required by the new order discourses – male and female – and on the other, the relentless fashioning of selves by young people through their massive engagement in the new consumption ordained by the enthusiastic embrace of capitalist development. (190)

While not as 'transgressive' or subversive as the more recent heavy metal scene (Stivens 2012, 182, citing [Tan 2002]), *pop yeh yeh* culture can at least be seen as counter-cultural in its convivial embrace of 'the new' through processes of 'self-fashioning' that while initially emulative of external trends, became uniquely local in its expression of Malaysian and Singaporean youth aspirations. These youth had music that was enjoyed in Europe (Kassim Slammat and the Swallows), they adapted foreign songs to Malay and infused new meanings into them (Ismail Haron), they sparked new interest in a declining film industry, and more importantly, they danced the a-go-go in stylish abandon and let their hair down freely – much to the misunderstanding and disgruntlement of the Malaysian and Singaporean state authorities. All these musical practices of 'self-fashioning' intersected in complex ways: cosmopolitan expressions of agency were articulated, yet the looming presence of larger market forces such as the print, recording and the film industries were instrumental in the dissemination of such cultural practices and lifestyles.

As evidenced in the films discussed in this chapter, this period of counter-cultural youth culture featured prominently in Malay film music. For some films, youth music was parodied and included in films as inconsequential to the narrative. In other films such as *Muda Mudi*, Malay youth and *pop yeh yeh* music featured prominently in the narrative but more than that were presented as an antithesis to its overarching theme about ageing. Other films such as *A Go Go '67*, portrayed a youth perspective on youth music and the moral policing of youth. However, it simultaneously conveyed an idealistic and patronising message that youth should uphold consensus moral values and use their music to do good. Regardless, it still offered a significant critique of conservative sentiments towards youth

culture, sentiments that mirrored the stringent cultural policies of the Malaysian and Singaporean states in the late 1960s and early 1970s. What is evident in the inclusion of youth culture and music in mid to late-1960s Malay film was the sheer popularity of such youth music and dance at the time. Malay film producers were desperately trying to appeal to the younger generation that was turning away from local films and heading out to *pop yeh yeh* concerts and tea dances, and spending more of their money on the latest 45 RPM records instead of cinema tickets. Moreover, younger film music composers such as Kassim Masdor made a natural transition out of the film industry, upon the closure of the Singapore film studios, into the more lucrative local popular music industry. Hence, this period of the mid to early 1970s represents a half-decade denouement to the Malay film studio industry; an unravelling of the musical styles and aesthetics and distribution that saw the industry thrive from the mid-1950s to mid-1960s.

The disquieting musical expressions of Malay youth did not necessarily cause the Malay film industry's demise, rather it reflected a period during which a state vision of national culture was being cemented, conservatively, in the face of uncertain social, economic and political changes globally. The state enforced national cultural policies on Malay youth that imposed a racial-traditional conception of morality with attendant behavioural expectations. It was, thus, the disquieting loudness of 'degenerate' Malay youth practices in the mid-1960s to early-1970s that unsettled the Singaporean and Malaysian nation-making project of cultivating a culturally refined and obedient citizenry. The looming presence of the global post-colonial music and culture industries of the west still exists to challenge the presumed self-fashioning agency of musical cultures around the world (Stokes 2004). Such post-colonial transnational market and ideological forces continue to complicate the tensions between youth practices and state policies in Malaysia and Singapore albeit with different cultural manifestations.

This chapter, as suggested in its title, marks the loud but sustained musical 'bang' that coincided with the end the Malay studio film industry. It was however, a more prolonged and nuanced 'end' that involved the conciliation of new musical and cultural aesthetics with the older cosmopolitan styles and narrative conventions of Malay film. The music of Malay film from the 1950s to 1960s, particularly the music of P. Ramlee, would gain

renewed interest from the 1980s onwards; resulting in many new performances and recordings of the songs from such films. In fact, Malay film music from this postwar and independence era would be instrumental in promoting an ethno-nationalist-aesthetic canon of Malaysian (not necessarily Singaporean) music. In the following chapter, I examine how the film music personalities, Zubir Said and P. Ramlee, are remembered politically in present-day Singapore and Malaysia and are consequently mobilised as icons of national culture. Finally, I analyse how the music of P. Ramlee was interpreted by young, Malaysian 'indie' musicians in a compilation album released in 2010. I aim to show that while the music of 1950s to 1960s Malay film articulated the nation-making aesthetic of the independence era, such sounds of independence continue to be re-articulated and reinterpreted by Malaysians and Singaporeans seeking agency in a national-cultural paradigm that marginalises them.

CHAPTER SEVEN

'Indie-pretations' of Zubir Said and P. Ramlee: Remembering and Re-articulating Malay Film Music Icons in Contemporary Singapore and Malaysia (1980s to 2000s)

If there is a song that any Malaysian could attribute to P. Ramlee, it would undoubtedly be “*Getaran Jiwa* (Reverberating Soul)”. The song, composed by Ramlee with lyrics by S. Sudarmaji, was first performed in the film, *Antara Dua Darjat* (1960) which I discussed in Chapter Four. Numerous renditions of the song have emerged since Ramlee’s passing, from lush instrumental orchestrations to upbeat rock renditions to hip-hop remixes. From my experience as a jazz saxophonist performing for weddings and corporate functions in Kuala Lumpur from 2006 to 2011, “*Getaran Jiwa*” is undoubtedly the standard or even compulsory Malay song for a predominantly English- (or sometimes Mandarin-) language set-list of popular songs. Most professional musicians playing live popular music or jazz would almost always play “*Getaran Jiwa*” if requested to perform a Malay or Malaysian song amidst a largely English-language popular music repertoire. Beyond this song, Ramlee’s film music generally has seen and continues to inspire new arrangements or interpretations, whether they performed for live settings, national events, television and radio programmes, and commercial albums. For many Malaysian artists, singing or performing renditions of Ramlee’s film songs is a ‘rite of passage’ that affords them national recognition. Notable cases of such career-shaping tribute performances include Sheila Majid’s *Legenda* tribute album (1990), Siti Nurhaliza’s numerous renditions and familiarity with his songs, and the winner of the 2004 Malaysian Idol contest, Jaclyn Victor’s, grand finale performance of Ramlee’s “*Tunggu Sekejap* (Wait For Awhile)”.¹

In this chapter, I examine three cases of how Malay film music from the independence era of the 1950s to 1960s has been adapted to contemporary contexts that simultaneously perpetuate and contest a ‘cultural regime’ of Malay-national identity

¹ Jaclyn Victor was the first winner of the *Malaysian Idol* series imported from the United Kingdom that was broadcast nationally on Malaysia’s TV3 and 8TV channels. After her performance of “*Tunggu Sekejap*”, Roslan Aziz, one of the three judges of the contest (who also produced Sheila Majid’s *Legenda* (1990) album) said, ‘Jaclyn, in all the many songs that you have sung, this is the song that I like the most. I have never heard anyone else sing Tan Sri P. Ramlee’s song, “*Tunggu Sekejap*”, this way. Ladies and gentlemen, I present to you another star that can be called a “super singer” (*dalam banyak-banyak lagu yang Jaclyn menyanyi, inilah lagu yang saya paling gemari sekali. Saya tak pernah dengar lagi orang menyanyi lagu Tan Sri P. Ramlee, “Tunggu Sekejap”, begini. Para hadirin, seorang lagi bintang yang bergelar “super-singer”*)’ (*Malaysian Idol Grand Finale*, 9th October 2004).

(see Guilbault 2007). In all these cases, I argue that cultures of remembering film music icons and their music have formed part of perpetuating a Malay regional culture in Malaysia and Singapore. In such cultures of remembering, Malay film music icons are interpreted in different ways depending on the national context (Malaysia or Singapore), the agents involved (state institutions or individuals) as well as the spaces and media utilised (museums, documentary film, film festivals, concerts and compilation albums). First, I observe how Zubir Said was remembered as a Malay-nationalist icon in a recent tribute concert for him that was held alongside the *MAJULAH! Film Music of Zubir Said* film festival organised by the National Museum of Singapore in 2012. Next, I cross the border to Malaysia, examining discourses of remembering P. Ramlee as a Malay(sian) national icon in the P. Ramlee Memorial Museum and the documentary by Shuhaimi Baba, *P. Ramlee: A Biography* aired on History Channel Asia in 2010. Finally, I analyse the conception and reception of the compilation album, *P. Ramlee... Di Mana Kan Ku Cari Ganti: Satu Indiepretasi (P. Ramlee... Where Could I Find A Replacement: An Indie-pretation, 2010)*². It is the notion of 'Indie-pretation' that frames this chapter, particularly how the historically contextualised themes of ethno-nationalism in Malay film music discussed earlier have been simultaneously reified and contested in contemporary interpretations of such history. The term 'indie' abbreviated from 'independent' is used to denote the do-it-yourself (DIY) aesthetic of rock bands since the 1990s and has traceable roots to punk music in the 1970s.³ However, I appropriate this term here to signify in addition the ideas of national 'independence' articulated in 1950s and 1960s film music that have been iconised in the image and music of P. Ramlee and, to a lesser extent, Zubir Said, to denote a unifying national culture. Since Ramlee's death, this notion of national independence has been constantly re-enacted and also subverted by the Malaysian and Singaporean state as well as Malaysian popular music artists. Thus, this chapter seeks to unravel how the intertextual meaning of 'independence' both ideologically and in practice is remembered and re-articulated in the national discourse about the enduring icons of Malay film music. Here, I examine how the cosmopolitan articulations of nation-making found in the Malay film music of the 1950s and 1960s are recycled, re-consumed and re-interpreted by contemporary Singaporean and Malaysian citizens.

² The title of the compilation is an *double entendre* homage to Ramlee's famous film song; "*Di Mana Kan Ku Cari Ganti* (Where Could I Find a Replacement)" performed in the film *Ibu Mertuaku* (*My Mother-in-law*, 1962) that I discussed in detail in Chapter Three.

³ See Hesmondhalgh (1999) for a background of the 'institutional politics and aesthetics' of the 'indie' category and Hibbett (2006) for a detailed study of the commercial and contestatory category of 'indie rock' in predominantly western popular music.

Solving the National Culture ‘Problem’

In understanding the mobilisation of P. Ramlee and Zubir Said as national music icons in Malaysia and Singapore⁴, I first need to outline the contemporary debates around national cultural policy for music in both countries. This approach is in response to the dearth of comparative studies on the two neighbouring states, especially with regards to music. Due to the politically intertwined histories of colonialism, culture and state formation in both nations, and the extensive ongoing cultural and commercial interactions between the two, I believe it is imperative to examine the convergences and divergences of national culture in both with regards to Malay ethnicity. Malay ethnicity is hegemonic in Malaysia, while marginal in Singapore. However, both states share an autocratic approach to governance and hence, employ homogenising and reductive discourses of national culture. While this thesis excludes an examination of Indonesia’s cultural policies with regards to Malay culture, Zubir Said’s Indonesian identity and his transnational articulation of Malay culture should also be borne in mind. The intention here is to draw attention to the homogenising conception of Singaporean and Malaysian national culture concomitant with postcolonial nation-making that effectively erased the pluralistic and cosmopolitan history of musical practices in the Malay Peninsula. In doing so, I hope to provide a detailed background for this chapter’s case studies on how Zubir Said and Ramlee are represented, re-presented and remembered as authors and icons of Singaporean and Malaysian national culture.⁵

Refining and Defining Tradition

In Malaysia, a discourse of ‘refinement’ is particularly evident in the canonisation of a national music culture. This discourse of refinement indicates the postcolonial worldview and cosmopolitan articulations of Malaysian proponents of the arts who

⁴ The notion of the ‘bio-icon’ as a technology that articulates social concerns is discussed insightfully in Ghosh’s (2013) monograph, *Global Icons: Apertures to the Popular*. In this study she notes how the images and related representative ideology of iconic individuals such as Phoolan Devi, Mother Theresa and Arundhati Roy are mobilised by disenfranchised groups to further their own social needs in complex, discursive, representational and material ways.

⁵ In line with Foucault’s (1991) notion of the role of authorship, I view the music and ideas of Zubir Said and Ramlee as ‘initiators of discursive practices’; however, the cultural policies that were modelled on their conceptions of national music demonstrate how such initial discursive frameworks - of Malayness and Malay nationalism in music – have been subject to systematisation and subversion over time.

sought the creation of a respectable national culture on western terms. Such a discourse has resulted in the promotion of certain artforms over others. The terms of refinement also encompass an ethnically-defined space of inclusion and exclusion. While ‘Malay-Muslim’ artforms underwent nationalist projects of refinement, other artforms were aggressively omitted from the national culture canon.

What then, can be said of Malay film music? P. Ramlee and his music, despite his cosmopolitan orientation and the multiple hybridities of his musical style, was absorbed, appropriated and propagated as Malaysian national music culture. I argue here that it was Ramlee’s iconicity rather than his music that afforded him such a prominent status in Malaysia’s national culture. His music as I have shown throughout this thesis was rootedly cosmopolitan (Tan 2013), equally incorporating local and foreign musical practices.

Two prominent studies on the impact of the Malaysian National Cultural Policy (NCP, 1971) on local musical practices in the 1990s resulted in diverging analyses. Mohd Anis Md Nor’s (1993) monograph on *zapin* dance offers a subdued critique of national arts discourse in comparison with Tan Sooi Beng’s (1993) monograph on *bangsawan* (Malay opera) that employs a more overt critical analysis of state intervention and cultural control. As a ‘launchpad’ for their analyses, both studies cite the three concluding points of the National Culture Congress (*Kongress Kebudayaan Kebangsaan*) held on 16th-20th August, 1971, at the University of Malaya, Kuala Lumpur⁶:

- i. Malaysian National Culture must be based on the indigenous culture(s) of the citizens of this region
- ii. Cultural elements of other cultures that are appropriate and reasonable may be accepted as an element of national culture
- iii. Islam is an important element in the shaping of this national culture. (Asas Kebudayaan Kebangsaan 1973, vii)

With the added provision that ‘appropriate (*sesuai*)’ and ‘reasonable (*wajar*)’ cultural elements must be understood within the provision of the first and third points (Ibid), this contentious policy has been subject to divergent interpretations and outright critique depending on the cultural practices that are being contested or promoted. Tan’s and Mohd Anis Md. Nor’s studies clearly indicate the differing impacts of the NCP on

⁶ My translation of this is closer to Tan’s (1993) in the use of ‘elements’ for ‘*unsur-unsur*’ and ‘reasonable’ for ‘*wajar*’, and is based on the same printed source, whereas Md. Nor cites ‘The National Culture Kongress (*Kongress Kebudayaan Kebangsaan*: 91, supra note 16) but does not mention any specific document as a source.

different cultural practices local to the Malay Peninsula. In this section of the chapter, I continue the Malaysian music research ‘tradition’ by comparing the two studies on the NCP and music to situate my own reading of Malay film music and their icons in contemporary Malaysia. I also include for the first time in this comparative overview some of the viewpoints of the papers presented for the music seminar of the National Culture Congress to better trace the discourse on Malaysian music that contributed to the drafting of the NCP.⁷

Despite its hybrid-cosmopolitan origins, and informal and participatory contexts of performance, the *zapin* dance since 1966 has been institutionalised with ease in its adaptation to this national culture framework (Md Nor 1993, 82-90):

Not only is contemporary *zapin* construed as a choreographed dance tradition by most Malaysians, it is also considered a *dignified* dance tradition. In contrast to the glittering era of *bangsawan* and cabarets in the 1930s, and the glorious years of the Malay movies in the 1950s and 1960s, *zapin* today, in the early 1990s, is associated with the *fine artistry* of Malay-Arab syncretic culture. *Zapin* is highly regarded as the *last bastion* of an Arab-derived dance tradition that has contributed to the *enrichment* of Malay performance traditions. (87-88, my emphases)

Md. Nor indicates how *zapin* has been transformed in cultural status over time by conforming to government policy that accords greater aesthetic value to certain performative arts over others; particularly, this is seen in the privileged positioning of ‘*zapin* today’ compared to its use in previous performance contexts such as 1930s ‘*bangsawan* and cabarets’ and Malay films from the independence era. While the author alludes to these nationalist discourses about *zapin* he does not problematise them in detail. In my view, the author indicates a discourse of ‘high art’ that accords a greater value to ‘*zapin* today’ compared to other Malay or local artforms. For example, he notes a conception of *zapin* as synonymous with ‘fine artistry’ whose corollary is that *bangsawan* and cabaret music fall outside the bounds of such ‘fine artistry’. This is evidence that the criteria for what constitutes such ‘fine artistry’ is based on the three ‘pillars’ of the Malaysian NCP cited above. Further, he notes how the art form is perceived as ‘the *last bastion* of an Arab-derived dance tradition that has contributed to the *enrichment* of Malay performance traditions’. Thus, I suggest Md. Nor’s observations imply that the NCP projects the notion of a threat to ‘Malay performance

⁷ In the previous chapter, I discussed P. Ramlee’s contribution to the seminar, his paper, *Cara-Cara Meningkatkan Mutu dan Memperkayakan Muzik Jenis Asli dan Tradisional Malaysia Demi Kepentingan Negara (Ways to Uplift Quality and Enrich Indigenous and Traditional Music of Malaysia for the Benefit of the Country)*.

traditions' onto un-Islamic foreign elements; *zapin*, in its Islamic-Arabic-Malay hybridity, forms the ideal 'bastion' of Malaysian art that can 'contribute to the enrichment' of national culture as envisioned in the Malay-Islamic criteria of the NCP. Yet despite the 'low' cultural status associated with Malay film and its music and dance noted in Md Nor's work, the position of 'high' art has, paradoxically, been accorded to P. Ramlee's film music. Currently, Ramlee's music, if not his musical iconicity, even occupies a more omnipresent national culture status than *zapin*.

The discursive conception of *zapin* as a high art form mirrors the tone of papers presented at the National Culture Congress in 1973 that discussed the need to improve local music by adapting to western-music 'values'. Ariff Ahmad (1973), in his call for increased adaptation of local music to 'serious (*berat*)' or western-classical music standards, lamented the inability of 'Malay society' to appreciate such intellectual forms of music:

Malay society, especially, finds it quite difficult to accept serious styles of music because there is no understanding of serious styles of music. Indigenous types of music that have form and structure in Malay society are primitive and only emphasise rhythms. Because of this, it cannot be denied that if Malay society is required to appreciate these serious musical arts, their own musical concepts need to be added with Western concepts. (210)

Much like the cases above, this sense of refining Malay cultural practices is something that Md Nor's analysis of *zapin* brought to the surface, explaining its advantageous position with regards to the NCP. While it is ironic that such a western-centric view contributed to the drafting of a firmly ethno-centric cultural policy, this was not the only presentation to give western music a privileged position in articulating a respectable national culture. In the same seminar, Saiful Bahari (1973) suggested correcting the tuning of traditional instruments from Kelantan –specifically the '*seruling, rebab*' and '*serunai*' because he heard them in relation to each other as 'excessively contrasting' in tuning 'to the point that it disturbed his ears while listening'⁸ (220). Further, he suggested the establishment of a national symphony orchestra that 'aside from playing national music, must be tasked to perform Western classical repertoire' (Ibid).⁹ Nonetheless, Ahmad's and Bahari's intention was to promote a notion of high art in Malay culture and their suggestions were to 'classicise' or to refine Malay musical practices and tastes with western 'concepts'.

⁸ 'Menurut pendengaran saya alat-alat muzik Kelantan di antara satu dengan lainnya sangat contrast hingga agak mengganggu pendengaran telinga'

⁹ '... selain memainkan muzik-muzik kebangsaannya sendiri ianya harus sanggup pula memainkan lagu-lagu klasik-Barat'

Attempts to 'westernise' local music in many parts of the world were part of a more widespread process of postcolonial nation-making, as the refinements of the west were also seen as a means to reclaim national cultures from a colonial past. Weidman (2006) observes how the use of the western violin since the 1800s in South Indian classical music presents

... a complex set of mimetic relations between instrument and voice, India and West, colonizer and colonized. The mimetic capacity of the violin guarantees the authenticity of the Karnatic voice, as a colonial instrument is used to ward off – and ultimately redeem Indian music from – the effects of colonialism (59)

Much in the same way that the violin was being utilised in South India, national policy makers in Malaysia envisioned the elevation of the status of local musics through western technologies or frameworks of progress. However, alongside this complex postcolonial mimesis, was a need to homogenise a national culture within the frames of Malay and Islamic culture. Guilbaut (2007) outlines a similar situation in Trinidad & Tobago in which the black community occupied the 'privileged space' in the performance and production of calypso music that was, 'in the wake of independence,... emblematic of the nation-state' – however, this 'exclusive domain' for black Trinidadians effectively marginalised diasporic minorities such as the large South Asian community (40).

Much like the cases mentioned above, the NCP in Malaysia was instrumental in shaping 'exclusive domains' of musical practices that privileged a homogenous conception of Malayness – an ethnocentric articulation of national cultural identity. Nagata (2011) observes that 'ethnocratic'¹⁰ tropes have 'politically enclosed... Malay citizens', allowing the ruling United Malay National Organisation (UMNO)¹¹ to 'manufacture a Malay political majority and dominance to which it jealously guards access' (27). So, even within Malay society, a bounded conception of cultural identity is imposed; something that is disjunctive to both the diverse ethnic communities of Malaysia and the pluralistic history of Malay culture. It is out of this conception of ethno-culturalism that Ramlee's musical iconicity grew – despite his cosmopolitan-hybrid-plurality. It was, somewhat ironically, very easily suited to the national culture

¹⁰ See Geoffrey Wade (2009, cited in [Nagata 2011, 33, supra note 70]). The notion of 'ethnocracy' instead of 'ethnocentricity' implies an institutionalised form of ethnic-group dominance. In the case of Malaysia's 'democracy', the racialisation of politics is very much ingrained into the constitution and electoral system.

¹¹ UMNO is an ethnically Malay party that has led the governing coalition, the National Front (BN) in ruling Malaysia since independence from the British in 1957.

project; he was a Malay personality who composed music exclusively in the Malay language for an exclusively Malay vernacular film industry¹².

In understanding the process of governmentality in musical practices, I turn to Tan's (1993) study that relates how the implementation of the NCP led to the consequent institutionalisation, systematisation and control of *bangsawan* theatre (177-178). She observes the shift towards homogenisation in government-sanctioned culture in the form of increased attention and promotion of performance arts that are more compatible with the first and third points of the policy, such as *wayang kulit*, *gamelan* and *nasyid*¹³, that construct 'national culture' as 'based on the cultures of the people indigenous to the region' while emphasizing 'Islam' as 'an important element' (176-177).

Indirectly, the policy suggests that the cultural practices of non-Malay and non-Muslim communities, such as the substantial Chinese and Indian minorities, do not count as 'national culture' in Malaysia.¹⁴ To further illustrate this, Tan observes a process of 'Malayization' in government-sponsored productions of *bangsawan* that downplay or ignore altogether the copious non-Malay and non-Muslim elements that were formerly a part of its rich and plural cultural practice (178-187). Tan concludes that *bangsawan* in its government-sponsored form is 'no longer able to attract non-Malay audiences or performers' or 'Malays of the younger generation' who 'find it difficult to identify with this (new) type of *bangsawan* which has distinctly failed to adapt to the times in terms of themes, music, dances, and setting, and which does not emphasize variety' (186).

Thus, Tan's study demonstrates how interventionist initiatives by the Malaysian government have failed to invigorate a declining art form. Moreover, it is the adherence to strict ethnocentric agendas that have directly led to the art's declining appeal to the Malaysian public. In light of the ethics of intervention in preserving endangered musical

¹² However, this is further problematised by his patrilineal Acehnese roots. Beyond his father's Acehnese origins, Ramlee's affinity with Aceh is scarcely discussed. Moreover, he was born and raised in the highly cosmopolitan and ethnically-diverse Straits Settlement of Penang.

¹³ It is important to note that a considerable amount of research has proliferated on the rise of modern *nasyid* music (Islamic religious music sung by all-male or all-female vocal groups) and its place in articulating a post-1990s Malay-Muslim modernity through popular music culture (Tan 2002; Sarkissian 2005; Barendregt 2006a; 2006b; 2011; 2012). Not surprisingly, *nasyid* music has thrived in the Malay-Muslim market, fitting comfortably into the vision of the nation's cultural policy. But it has also made an impact beyond the nation among international Muslim audiences from Indonesia to the United Kingdom.

¹⁴ This is especially contentious in my view, because point three automatically excludes non-Muslims who may be 'indigenous to the region' (point one). Of course, the definition 'indigenous' is ambiguous but the inclusion of specifically Malay cultural practice as 'indigenous' is reinforced by the 'Islamic culture' provision, in that Islam is the exclusive religion of Malays in Malaysia.

cultures, Grant (2010) suggests that the needs and welfare of the related artistic community should be the focus instead of ‘overarching policy, systemic or governmental demands, or the interests of academics or others in positions of power’ (42). As Tan’s research has shown, the NCP has had little effect on the surviving practitioners of *bangsawan* theatre, most of whom at the time of study were living in poverty and struggling to make ends meet (187). Similarly, the neglect of cultural practitioners by the state can also be seen in Ramlee’s life. Until his death in 1973, he struggled financially after moving from Singapore to Malaysia in 1964.

Tan’s study demonstrates the failings of an ethnocentric agenda in its inability to accept Malay cultural practices as culturally heterogeneous. In providing an insight into the cultural ‘purification’ of Malay culture through the aggressive removal of elements that regarded as ‘foreign’ and un-Islamic, Tan sheds light on how pluralistic and cosmopolitan musical practices such as 1950s and 1960s Malay film music may be appropriated to promote a homogenous national culture agenda by state institutions. While *bangsawan* in the 1990s was performed in the institutionalised context of government universities, Ramlee’s film music was performed and recorded in both state and commercial contexts. In both manifestations, his music and persona were used to symbolise or evoke a national cultural aesthetic.

Ironically, the authoritarian ethnocentricity of cultural policy in suppressing pluralism and creativity also results in counter-hegemonic or alternative conceptions and practices of Malay culture. In line with this, Nagata contends that the emergence of ‘*Melayu Baru* [New Malays]... who think outside the ideological box and are engaged in alternative artistic and civil society movements, ensure the constant production of new images of Malayness’ and Malaysian-ness ‘as a challenge to the state vision’ (28). The *Indiepretasi* album discussed in this chapter provides a salient case of how a canonised conception of national culture in the form of the musical works of Ramlee can be musically subverted by a new generation of Malaysians. Despite the renewed imagining of Malayness that the album offers, however, it nonetheless perpetuates an ethnocentric and commercial agenda; a Malay musical icon (P. Ramlee) forms the foundation of re-imagining national culture in the commodified context of indie-rock music.

The case of national culture and music in Singapore is markedly different despite the two neighbouring nations’ shared history of colonialism and independence. Studies on national culture, music and the performing arts in Singapore focus more on the hegemonic control of the autocratic ruling party, the Peoples Action Party (PAP)

through state-sponsored arts initiatives. Kong's (1994) study of Singaporean popular music in government-endorsed music campaigns in Singapore is particularly useful in understanding how music was mobilised to propagate a hegemonic state vision of ideal citizenry based on 'core Asian values' (457) such as 'community over self; upholding the family as the basic building block of society; resolving major issues through consensus instead of contention; and stressing racial and religious tolerance and harmony' (450). However, Kong also observes how state-sponsored musical initiatives are contested in parodic musical productions; thus, popular music is also mobilised by non-state actors to challenge autocratic state values.

While Kong's study notes how the state has been 'harnessing music' for Singaporean nation-making since 'the first days of independence' (457), it falls short of providing a history of nationalistic song-making during the nation's independence era. Moreover, a history of nationalist songs in Singapore would also have to problematise issues of ethnicity and Malay ethnic-nationalism in particular – an issue that is not discussed in Kong's study. My interest lies in how the notion of race and ethno-nationalism intertwines with nationalist music produced in the shared independence era of Singapore and Malaysia; particularly how Malay composers and their songs from that era are remembered in contemporary Singapore. How do the once ethno-nationalist ideals of such composers, such as Zubir Said, fit with Singapore's multi-ethnic, albeit distinctly Asian, vision of citizenship? Further, how is this contested by contemporary Singaporean Malays who are an ethnic minority in the island-state?

These questions will be answered in the following section, in which I examine how Zubir Said's music and iconicity is remembered by the Singaporean-Malay community. While Kong's study provides an insight into how nationalist songs and their sentiments are challenged through musical parody, my study in the following section will consider how nationalist music is re-appropriated by a politically marginalised group. Singaporean nationalism here is not scrutinised; rather it is the authorship of that national (musical) narrative that is contested and reclaimed by the Singaporean-Malay community through the musical works of Zubir Said.

Remembering Icons, Interpreting Independence

Malay film composers, P. Ramlee and Zubir Said, are memorialised as icons of national identity in museums and institutionalised events and spaces. This is however problematised by the precarious position that the two individuals occupy in relation to the complex and controversial political, economic and racial histories of Singapore and Malaysia. In Malaysia, Ramlee died a tragic death unable to thrive in the uncertain economic and political conditions of the 1970s; yet, he is acknowledged posthumously as a national icon. Despite being a markedly cosmopolitan individual in his lifetime, Ramlee's image, films and music have come to be represented as unquestionable markers of Malay ethno-nationalist pride. By contrast, Zubir Said, despite his Malay-nationalist inclinations,¹⁵ remained in Singapore as an ethnic minority in the Chinese-majority state.¹⁶ However, his penning of the state's national anthem, "*Majulah Singapura* (Onwards Singapore)", uniquely positions him as a nation-maker and Singaporean music icon. It is Zubir Said's contribution of a national anthem in the Malay language that remains one of the few reminders of Singapore's position in the Malay World – few non-Malay Singaporeans, especially of the post-independence generations, understand the meaning of their national song. In the following pages, I will unravel the parallel paths that these two Malay film music icons have occupied in both countries, at times converging and diverging but ultimately appropriated by state projects to perpetuate a vision of national culture.

Remembering Zubir Said Beyond the Causeway

In October 2012, I attended a film festival entitled, *MAJULAH (Onward)! The Film Music of Zubir Said* (henceforth referred to as *MAJULAH!*) that was organised by the Cinémathèque film division of the National Museum of Singapore. It seemed as though 2012 was an especially significant year for remembering the famous Singaporean film scorer and composer of the state's national anthem, "*Majulah Singapura* (Onward Singapore)". That same year, Zubir Said's daughter, Dr. Rohana Zubir, released a comprehensive and personal biography of her father, *Zubir Said: The Composer of*

¹⁵ I have indicated in Chapters Three and Six, Zubir Said's ethno-nationalist views on music.

¹⁶ Zubir Said's daughter mentions how dedicated he was to the country, refusing to live with her in Kuala Lumpur saying that he 'wanted to die in Singapore' (*The Straits Times*, March 10, 1990).

Majulah Singapura, published by the Institute of Southeast Asian Studies (ISEAS) in Singapore. Rohana Zubir launched her book on 1st October in ISEAS with introductory speeches by the Chairman of the institute, Prof. Wang Gung Wu, and film-song lyricist and film-maker, Yusnor Ef (see Lim 2012). Following that, she launched her book in Kuala Lumpur on 21st October, which was notably attended by the then Malaysian Minister of Information, Communication and Culture, Dr. Rais Yatim, the Singapore High Commissioner to Malaysia, Ong Keng Yong and the former Prime Minister of Malaysia, Abdullah Badawi (*Sinar Harian*, October 21, 2012).

While I was not able to attend these exclusive events, I was fortunate to attend a tribute concert for Zubir Said on 12th October at Singapore's Esplanade Theatres on the Bay Concert Hall (hereafter referred to as Esplanade), titled, *Star of the Heart – Remembering Zubir Said*¹⁷. I argue that all these events converging in 2012 indicate an increased mobilisation of Zubir Said as a Singaporean national icon. Moreover, I indicate how his iconicity moves beyond the causeway that divides/connects Singapore's island state from/to the Malaysian Peninsula,¹⁸ to Malaysia, making him a 'bi-national' cultural icon. His cultural iconicity is contested, promoted and remembered through different notions of Malay ethnicity, Singaporean nationalism and the divergent political positions regarding such issues in both nations.

There were no notable events in his home country of Indonesia to memorialise him (he was born and raised in Bukit Tinggi, Sumatra), highlighting further the potency of Zubir Said as a Malay-nationalist icon in Malaysia and Singapore. While the reach of his iconic status is limited in Malaysia (quite unlike P. Ramlee), it is important to note that his Singaporean-born daughter, the author of his recent biography, is a Malaysian citizen and is also decorated with the national honorific title, 'Puan Seri'¹⁹. Her book was, in contrast, sponsored and published by ISEAS, a Singapore-based institute. Furthermore, the title of the biography explicitly positions Zubir Said as the composer

¹⁷ The Malay title of the event was, *Bintang Hati – Malam Kenangan Zubir Said*.

¹⁸ This is officially known as the Johor-Singapore Causeway, built in 1923, currently linking the Woodlands Customs and Immigration Quarantine (CIQ) Complex Checkpoint (connecting to Singapore's Bukit Timah Expressway) to Johor Bahru's Sultan Iskandar Building in Malaysia. A second bridge, known as the Tuas Second Link, completed in 1998, connects Singapore's Ayer Rajah Expressway to Malaysia's Second Link Expressway. The term 'across the causeway' is commonly used among Singaporeans and Malaysians to describe each other's relative locations and has manifested beyond geographic meanings; ie. nationality, ideology, politics and racial hegemony.

¹⁹ Dr. Rohana Zubir retired in 1992 as an Associate Professor and Deputy Dean at the University of Malaysia, Kuala Lumpur. Her honorific title, 'Puan Sri', was conferred to her late husband, Tan Sri Dato' Dr. Hj Abdul Hamid Hj Abdul Rahman, who was also the Vice Chancellor of the National University of Malaysia (*Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia*) from 1984-1993.

of Singapore's national anthem, thus, highlighting his role as a national cultural icon for his adopted country. I view these recent modes of remembering Zubir Said as articulating a 'causeway' to a complex and entangled national, cultural and musical history. At the Malaysian book launch, both the Malaysian Minister and the Singaporean High Commissioner concurred on the need to actively cooperate in exchanging the historical resources of their shared national history (*Sinar Harian*, *ibid*). Beyond these diplomatic niceties, however, greater tensions are apparent, particularly in Singapore, with regard to the mobilisation of Zubir Said as an ethno-national icon.

The tribute concert at the Esplanade, for example, was performed to a packed concert hall and predominantly Malay audience, thus articulating a very 'Malay-centric' yet Singaporean-nationalist atmosphere. In this event, Zubir Said was the galvanising icon for the besieged Malay minority's cultural stake in Singapore, a country in which Malay is an official national language²⁰ but whose majority of non-Malay citizens hardly speak or understand it (Rahim 2009, 1-2, citing *The Straits Times*, August 19, 2006). This appropriation of Zubir Said as an ethno-national icon is clearly expressed by the concert's artistic director:

Tonight we celebrate one of the heroes of our race, culture and country. Zubir Said was an artist who carved the soul of the nation with his steadfast talent and upholding tradition through his art. Aside from being the composer of patriotic songs and folk songs, he also wrote many for classic Malay films. Tonight we are proud to present his compositions from that time. These songs have been arranged in a way so as to tell the story of the life of Pak Zubir himself, all with the hope that as we all learn more about him, we will love and cherish keenly, Zubir Said, the pioneer Singapore artist. (Zizi Azah Abdul Majid 2012, 8)

Discernable here from this introductory message contained in the concert's programme notes is an ethnic-minority voice that mobilises Zubir Said's iconic status as a hero of 'our race, culture and country'. It is telling that the possessive 'our' is used as well, which assumes an exclusive racial demographic of the concert's attendees. Indeed, the concert was definitely more a Malay ethno-national event than a multi-ethnic national event for Singapore; simultaneously occupying but also sanctioned by an official national space (the Esplanade), while also presenting a microcosm of a generalised Malay musical culture on its stage. As such, the 'our' in the artistic director's statement also indicates a political position of authorship in presenting a display of Malayness to the rest of non-Malay Singapore. Hence, I contend that the concert articulates the complex polarisation of Singapore's multi-ethnic society while

²⁰ Singapore other three official languages are Tamil, Mandarin and English.

also amplifying the underlying sense of displacement felt by its Malay-minority population. The musical contributions of Zubir Said, a Malay-national icon, are projected as the pride and joy of the Singaporean-Malay community serving as a reminder of Singapore's precarious geographic position in a surrounding 'Malay' region.

In my ethnographic observation of the concert, the contestatory relations of power between the state and the concert's participants were initially subtle, but became more apparent towards the end of the performance. I believe that my position as a Malaysian-Malay researcher (studying in the U.K. no less), afforded me a unique perspective to observe the disjunctures of Singaporean Malayness and nationalism in the concert. At the end of the concert, all of the concert performers were invited on stage, along with their most honoured guest, Dr. Rohana Zubir, to sing the national anthem, "*Majulah Singapura*". Everyone rose dutifully and sang the anthem loudly and clearly (except myself as I was unfamiliar with the words) and at the end of the song, amidst the sustained and thunderous applause, I heard a young Malay man a few seats behind me jokingly say, '*Hidup Melayu! Hidup UMNO!* (Long live the Malays! Long live UMNO!)'²¹. During the singing of the anthem, while observing Rohana Zubir on stage, I reflected on the possible precariousness of her position as a Malaysian citizen, singing the national anthem of Singapore that was composed by her formerly Indonesian father. Thus, all my initial awareness of the cultural fluidity and political tensions of Malayness intertwined with the fixities of Singaporean, Malaysian and Indonesian citizenship coalesced in this paradoxical moment of a national anthem's performance.

In light of these reflections, I argue that these disjunctures gesture towards the paradoxes of Malay nation-making found in the ideas and music of Zubir Said that continue to reverberate from the mid-1950s to the present day. A sense of Malay ethno-national identity is explicitly galvanised around musical practices yet the performance of such practices in different national spaces reveals the complexities and contestatory nature of ethnicised notions of citizenship. As such, remembering Zubir Said historically – as opposed to nationalistically or aesthetically – through his music in films provides a clearer insight into the source of the national-cultural tensions experienced by Malays in Singapore today.

By contrast, the more overtly state-sanctioned event for remembering Zubir Said in the National Museum's film festival, *MAJULAH!*, attempts to subdue the racialised

²¹ UMNO is the abbreviation for United Malays National Organisation, the leading party of Malaysia's ruling coalition the *Barisan Nasional* (National Front, BN).

tensions apparent in the tribute concert by perpetuating a less ethno-centric and more 'inclusive' nationalist discourse (see Figure 7.1):

Zubir Said's life epitomises the story of the many thousands of Singaporeans who originated elsewhere but found roots in Singapore and gave this country unreservedly their life-time's work, heart and soul... Zubir Said... gave generations of Singaporeans – and our neighbours in the archipelago – his talent for music-making... Zubir Said's music should help us recall the time in which we were energised by a singular hope and sense of purpose for the nascent country that was being born. That the anthem is written in Malay by a composer from Bukit Tinggi reminds us of Singapore's place in the Malay world, but also of the inclusive multicultural basis on which our society is built. This society asked not where one had come from, but what one had come to give (and what one would bear). (Lee 2012, 12-13)

I suggest that the foreword to the booklet for *MAJULAH!* by Lee Chor Lin, the National Museum's Director at the time, implies a more racially 'inclusive' vision of Zubir Said as a national icon that conveniently ignores his explicit historical role in the propagation of Malay-nationalist ideas. Lee acknowledges Zubir Said's Malayness that 'reminds us of Singapore's place in the Malay world', but stresses in a somewhat overcompensatory manner the inclusivity of Singapore's 'multicultural' society. Thus, this nationalised, as opposed to ethnicised, promotion of Zubir Said's iconicity effectively washes over any possibility for ethnic sentiment in claiming a stake to Singapore's nation-making. Singapore in its inception is envisioned as a diverse cosmopolis in which anyone from any background could contribute to the national project, provided they contributed significantly. Markedly, Zubir Said's affiliation to the regional Malay-nationalist ideas of the 1950s is downplayed to promote a vision of a cosmopolitan nation-state comprised of dedicated citizens from different backgrounds ('a composer from Bukit Tinggi'). The *MAJULAH!* film festival thus articulated Zubir Said's cosmopolitan history and music but also neutralised his role in envisioning a Malay nationalism in his music (as I discussed in Chapter Three).



Figure 7.1. The MAJULAH! Billboard placed on the exterior of Singapore's National Museum (photograph by author, 2012)

I was informed by the Assistant Manager of Cinémathèque that the festival on Zubir Said's film music was part of a general 'mandate from the top... in terms of cultural policy' that was seeing an increased emphasis on 'local content' in 2012 (Low 2012). Low Zu Boon informed me of a shift towards more local cultural content in government organisations that occurred 'quite recently... post (2011) general elections'.²² However, even prior to the elections, Cinémathèque was apparently keen on exploring local content but did not have the support to do so:

...we were looking at... how to explore... to do a programme... of local film heritage and music... (as) a big part of it and... a way to sort of anchor in this whole selection of films... and, yeah I guess many people can sort of associate with... icons within our history so Zubir Said is ...known, but not really known... It's almost like ... I don't know if you would call him a nationalistic figure. In a certain way (he is a national icon) because he composed the national anthem so I guess, we are a bit excited to... go beyond that racial stereotype... We (Cinémathèque) always felt there was not enough research done (on Zubir Said), so it's our way of contributing... In a way we are continuing what has been done before.²³ (Low 2012)

I also asked Low how the festival might relate to instilling national pride and if there were any intentions to do so by the National Heritage Board (NHB), the government body that manages the National Museum:

²² The 2011 general elections in Singapore saw a marked reduced majority of votes for the ruling People's Action Party (PAP). Some of the cultural issues that contributed to discontent towards the ruling party included the increase of immigrants and a sense of deteriorating local culture.

²³ In reference to books such as *Zubir Said: His Songs* (Chua & Daipi 1990).

... (national pride) could be derived (from the festival content), definitely. Whether it was something we want to convey, I'm not too sure... But I guess we are (conveying that sentiment as) it's a national culture situation. It's kind of geared that way... It is their (NHB's) mission to do this but... that's not the reason why we did this programme... I guess it's a close fit so it's kind of well received, as well... (Low 2012)

Thus, the festival was indeed a convenient 'fit' to the more artistic and historical intentions of the organisers, considering that the NHB's official mission statement is 'to preserve and celebrate our shared heritage' by 'safeguarding and promoting the heritage of our diverse communities, for the purpose of education, nation-building and cultural understanding' (National Heritage Board 2012-2013).

The above mentioned events of remembering Zubir Said in Singapore indicate the paradoxes and disjunctures of his iconicity in a national and ethno-national context. Such events articulate Zubir Said's cosmopolitan life and his musical contributions to national culture, especially in Singapore. However, as I have indicated in previous chapters, Said was also a staunch advocate for Malay nationalism in music. As such, his complex position 'in between' the nationalistic boundaries of Malaysia, Singapore and Indonesia have naturally manifested in contestatory discourses or conflicting mobilisations of his iconicity across the causeway. For Malays in Singapore, Zubir Said's music, and in particular his composition of the national anthem, are a pertinent reminder to the majority of the Malay minority's presence and relevance in a Singapore that has over the years, distanced itself from a Malay national identity. Conversely, across the causeway, Zubir Said is remembered as an important contributor to a shared Malay musical heritage between Malaysia and Singapore. Since the 2011 General Elections in Singapore, there has been a greater emphasis on 'local' content in the state's cultural institutions. Thus, as the *MAJULAH!* film festival has shown, greater attention has been paid to Zubir Said beyond his commonly-remembered role as the composer of the national anthem. However, in line with Singaporean state policy, such events actively downplay his role as a Malay nationalist, instead choosing to represent him as a paragon of Singapore's inclusive and multicultural citizenry; an idealised vision of the island-state that ignores its tumultuous political past and precarious relationship to the surrounding Malay World and its own Malay-minority citizens.

Irreplaceable: Remembering P. Ramlee

In the historical national-cultural narrative of Malaysia the death of de-facto statesman and film-music icon, P. Ramlee, in 1973, is remembered as having stirred the

national cultural consciousness from a stupor of decadent, long-haired and sexually depraved pop-rock bands and artists who were shunning local musical practices.²⁴ This grand narrative of P. Ramlee's resurgence upon his death is somewhat misconstrued as his pre-eminence as a nationalistic icon would only be truly 'cemented' in 1986 with the establishment of the *Pustaka Peringatan P. Ramlee* (P. Ramlee Memorial Museum) by the National Archive Board of Malaysia (*Arkib Negara*). The 'memorial' functions as a museum for the late artist and his third and last wife, Salmah Ismail, better known by her stage and screen name, Saloma. The museum in its exhibition of memorabilia presents a grand narrative that cast Ramlee and Saloma as virtually undisputed in their artistic greatness as national film and music icons. At the same time, beyond the odd diorama displays of film sets both life-sized and miniaturised alongside Saloma and P. Ramlee attire rentals (I am informed that the clothes available for guests to wear and take photos on site are the actual possessions of the two deceased personalities), there is a sense of 'homeliness' that lends an intimacy to the museum. This is mainly because the museum is located in and built out of the interior of the actual home that was rented by Ramlee and Saloma when they moved from Singapore to Malaysia in 1964 (Figure 7.2). The National Archives Board bought the house from its original owners in 1986. Amidst the renovated space of the house to accommodate the museum displays, there is a small section that approximates the couple's original study room replete with, among other items, Ramlee's typewriter and piano – two iconic objects that symbolise the convergence of his auteurship and musicality (Figure 7.3). However, despite the display of personal effects, Ramlee and Saloma are ultimately objectified and idealised by this exhibition of personal possessions that outlived them: Saloma's sunglasses collection, Ramlee's film trophies and his record and gramophone player. These objects are now material artefacts that form assemblages of a national-cultural narrative based on the undeniable artistic preeminence of P. Ramlee as a film-maker, musician and patriot. Thus, memorials such as the one observed indicate how the authority of the state permeates the cultural authority of P. Ramlee's works and words as an unchallenged benchmark for greatness in the Malaysian arts. I further contend that such memorials articulate how the musical-filmic-cultural iconicity of Ramlee is mobilised and appropriated by the Malaysian nation-state to perpetuate an ethno-national discourse of Malay artistic greatness through the grand-narrative of Ramlee's tumultuous life that paralleled the history of the Malaysian nation-in-making. The appropriation of Ramlee

²⁴ In the previous chapter, I discuss Ramlee's admonishing views on early-1970s Malay youths and their rock & roll music and fashions.

as a national icon was also due to his artistic career that was synchronous to Malaysia's (and Singapore's) era of independence.



Figure 7.2. The P. Ramlee Memorial Museum (photograph by author, 2013)



Figure 7.3. P. Ramlee's piano and typewriter on display (photograph by author, 2013)

It was, however, Ramlee's death, or rather the remembrance of his death, that sparked the Malaysian national-cultural narrative. By the 1970s, the state was already in place but there was a sense of its national identity eroding and falling sway to cultural influences from the west. This sentiment also parallels the New Economic Policy

(NEP)²⁵ implemented in 1971, a controversial affirmative-action policy to give Malaysian-Malays a larger stake in the nation's wealth, in response to the increasing economic disparity between Malay and Chinese communities²⁶. Concomitant with this economic policy was the need to cement a stronger Malay presence in local cultural practices such as music, which led among other things to the NCP. As such, the reactionary discourses and subsequent implementation of policies aimed at raising the presence of Malay culture also resulted in defensive and reactionary views regarding non-Malay cultures; particularly, the popular music of the west that was ardently being consumed by local youths. In the previous chapter, I focused primarily on discourses about the musical tastes of youth during the late 1960s to early 1970s as a reflection of how state authorities were weary of counter-cultural movements that signalled a general challenge to the ruling status quo that was cautiously seeking to reaffirm its position. Ramlee's statement on traditional music in 1971 in reaction to such youth music indicated, in my view, a general decline in interest for his style of music.

Examined in this chapter is how this tension between Ramlee's supposed traditional and preservationist stance on local music against the encroachment of foreign music cultures is fully mobilised in the construction of Ramlee as a Malay-nationalist icon. I argue that Ramlee's strong reactionary position towards foreign music made him instrumental as an icon for Malaysia's Malay-majority state to rally around in championing a distinctly Malay national culture. Moreover, it is the public narrative of his life as a Malaysian citizen (and not as a Singaporean resident, where he made his most prolific films and music) that is utilised to relay his national cultural iconicity. Thus, I find it useful here to illustrate the narrative of Ramlee's nationalist iconicity through a reading of the recent documentary titled *P. Ramlee: A Biography* that aired regionally in 2010 on the network TV station History Channel Asia, produced by Malaysian director Shuhaimi Baba. In my view, this documentary is a particularly explicit national-cultural text in its presentation of Ramlee as a national icon, and hence relays the potency of the state-centred narrative that has emanated from the period of Ramlee's death in the 1970s to present-day Malaysia.

²⁵ *Dasar Ekonomi Baru*.

²⁶ Not much has been analysed in light of the impact of the NEP on music and popular culture in Malaysia. Music scholars like Tan (1993; 1992) and Md Nor (1993) discussed above, instead, consider music in Malaysia in light of the NCP. Gomez and Saravanamuttu (2012) recently edited a significantly comprehensive, multidisciplinary volume on the the impact of the NEP in Malaysia; however, it does not contain any studies on popular culture, music or the arts. Tellingly, the development of music and and popular culture in the context of the NEP is a greatly under-researched area that needs to be explored further beyond the scope this thesis.

The effectiveness of this national narrative as demonstrated in the documentary lies in the emotional framing of Ramlee's biography. The documentary conveys Ramlee's life story melodramatically as one that ends in tragedy. Then, it plays on generating the emotional response of '*kesihan*', meaning to feel an immense sense of pity and empathy with someone. The documentary's script depicts the death of Ramlee as soliciting a sense of 'guilt' that 'begins to prick the nation's collective conscience' resulting in 'regret coming in large doses' that lead to a 'clamour for his songs and movies and frenzied calls to have him honoured and remembered'. The film's script and narration plays on this emotion to considerable effect, drawing on interview footage of subjects who include Ramlee's family members, close friends and colleagues, interspersed with historical photographs and scenes from his films, and backgrounded by an instrumental score that uses the melodies of Ramlee's well-known film songs. Most of the emotional weight of the film is centred on the years leading up to his death, emphasising how Ramlee died 'broke and broken'. The film's narrative is best summarised by the opening lines of narration:

Conquering every medium of the entertainment spectrum, P. Ramlee had an infinite charm laced with a healthy dose of humour, warmth and humility that endeared him to many. But his phenomenal rise from stagehand to screen sensation had ill-prepared him for the downward spiral to rejection and obscurity... But after death, his popularity soared to incredible heights.

These lines capture the general public perception in Malaysia and Singapore of P. Ramlee's life that sets up the nationalist narrative to ensue. The film then explores Ramlee's history from his childhood and schooling in Penang to his rise to filmic and musical stardom in Singapore during the 1950s and 1960s. Following that, the documentary takes a tragic turn, outlining the struggles and hardships faced by Ramlee upon his move from Singapore to Kuala Lumpur in 1964. Aside from the complex relationship he had with his oldest and only biological son, Nasir, the narrative highlights how unappreciated he was in Malaysia for the thirteen years he lived in Kuala Lumpur leading up to his death. The film explicitly attributes his decline in popularity to the onslaught of 1960s popular music culture from the west:

It was the era of the 'Swinging Sixties' and the world(-wide) invasion of rock, soul, pop, reggae and blues music. The Bee Gees, The Rolling Stones, The Beatles and The Supremes all became household names displacing P. Ramlee's brand of music and singing style. And while local pop singers struggled to compete with the new musical craze, P. Ramlee remained true to his music. The consequences were disastrous.

Ironically, the narration above is backgrounded by the original recording of Ramlee's song, "*Bunyi Gitar* (Sound of the Guitar)" from the film, *Tiga Abdul* (*The Three Abduls*, 1964, dir. P. Ramlee). The intertextual implications of this scene in the documentary are manifold. As noted in Chapter Six, the song "*Bunyi Gitar*" was included in one of the last films that Ramlee made in the Shaw Brothers' film studio in Singapore. My view is that the song was made as a parody to the rising popularity of guitar-band music in the mid-1960s, a style that Ramlee was apparently opposed to by his 1971 presentation at the National Culture Congress in Kuala Lumpur. Further, Ramlee's song is used in the documentary to musically denote the era that led to his musical 'demise'. Moreover, the use of the song significantly contradicts the statement that Ramlee 'remained true to his music', while the film hardly attempts to demonstrate the kind of music that he was making in the late 1960s to early 1970s. I have argued throughout this thesis that Ramlee's music in all periods of his film career was cosmopolitan and diverse utilising a plethora of styles both local and foreign. It is thus, in my opinion, difficult to specify what cultural style or aesthetic could be considered 'true to his music'.

Interestingly, this passage of narration is remarkably similar to the arguments fielded in the paper that Ramlee presented in 1971. As such, this moment in the documentary is particularly explicit in its appropriation of Ramlee's views on the role of western pop music culture in eroding local music in the 1970s. Ramlee's reactionary views on music are then easily appropriated to perpetuate a nationalist narrative based on racial purity or Malay homogeneity in Malaysian music. The viewer is made to empathise with the rejection of Ramlee's music in an era of wayward Malay youth that had no love for their own culture. A desire to deepen this sense of *kesihan* for Ramlee is evident in an interview featured in the documentary of Ramli Kecik, Ramlee's friend and personal assistant, who relates how Ramlee was openly rejected by young Malaysian music fans in 1971 (also see *Berita Harian*, March 10, 1971):

P. Ramlee has been "booed" on stage. At the Malaysian Institute of Language and Literature (Kuala Lumpur). It was the "Night of Three Ramlees": P. Ramlee, A. Ramlie and L. Ramli. I was the cameraman. So, when P. Ramlee came out to sing, everyone "booed". I noticed... (in) pop (concerts) held in stadiums that had singers from Singapore and Malaysia, when Malaysian singers come out, people had to "boo". So, at the time, (Malaysian) people did not like local singers.

Ramli Kecik's observations of the general rejection of local artists actually points to a general sentiment among local music fans that favoured Singaporean artists over Malaysian artists. The Singaporean, A. Ramlie, was a particularly popular *pop yeh yeh*

singer at the time. L. Ramlie, while Malaysian, was also a *pop yeh yeh* singer and thus, P. Ramlee, by contrast to the other two ‘Ramlees’ was associated with an older era of music. Ramli Kecik’s anecdote, while generating a shocking sense of *kesihan* from the retrospective position of Ramlee’s current elevated musical status in the national narrative, conveniently frames the documentary’s positioning of Ramlee as an advocate for local traditional music. Discursively, *pop yeh yeh* youth music despite being local is cast as foreign, external and deviant, grouped with the other impure musical ‘invaders’ from the west. In the documentary’s revisionist narrative, Ramlee is portrayed as a champion for national music that was not appreciated by the rebellious and wayward Malay youth of the 1970s.

Following the infamous “booing” incident, the film shows footage of an interview of Ramlee in the early 1970s, in which he talks about the importance of preserving traditional music:

Songs (or musical styles) such as *joget*, *orkes-orkes combo* (Malay Orchestras)... *asli* songs, *ghazal* and... *dondang sayang* have never been put on competitions or presented. If these songs are not encouraged, hence in less than ten or twenty years to come these songs will be fully forgotten and music from the West... will be representative of our music.

Here, Ramlee is cast as a visionary sage that few paid attention to in his lifetime, foretelling the erosion of local musical cultures amidst the onslaught of foreign and decadent music. In my view, the juxtaposition of his public rejection (youths “booing”) against his ‘wise’ and ominous statement is meant to draw on the viewer’s pity for him and perhaps even arouse anger towards the rowdy youth that did not appreciate him while he was still alive. The icon’s credibility is thus cemented further in this narrative of rejection and struggle; a potent reminder of why Ramlee’s vision on cultural preservation in music needs to be championed. Here, the melodramatic narrative for preserving national culture is set and overtly articulated.

Following this, the emotional climax of the film is best depicted in the interview of Aziz Sattar, Ramlee’s acting colleague.²⁷ Sattar remained in Singapore when Ramlee left for Kuala Lumpur. Sattar relates in the documentary the sad state of P. Ramlee when he went to visit him in Kuala Lumpur before his death. In this scene, his outburst

²⁷ Aziz Sattar was Ramlee’s co-star in the famous quadrilogy of comedic films produced in Shaw Brothers’ MFP studio in Singapore (all of the films were directed by P. Ramlee): *Bujang Lapok (Ne’er Do Well Bachelors 1957)*; *Pendekar Bujang Lapok (Ne’er Do Well Bachelor Warriors, 1959)*; *Ali Baba Bujang Lapok (Ali Baba Ne’er Do Well Bachelors, 1960)*; *Seniman Bujang Lapok (Ne’er Do Well Bachelor Actors, 1961)*.

of tears is the most emotional moment of all the interviews in the documentary (I indicate his moments of crying in italicised parentheses):

His life was burdensome. (I felt much) pity (for him). The last time I went to his home in Kuala Lumpur. I saw (*tears welling up in his eyes, and looking down*), he was eating rice with (fried) egg (*amidst holding back sobs*). His name was big. People (used to) know who P. Ramlee was. But his life was burdensome...

Thus, Aziz Sattar's interview encapsulates the tragic final year of Ramlee as somehow being reduced to the humble but demeaning act of eating plain rice with fried egg, implying the lowest level of poverty for a man that was once the wealthiest and most popular Malay entertainer in the region. The sincerity of Aziz Sattar's monologue was put into question in my interview with Ahmad Nawab, who was a close friend of Ramlee and composed music for his films made in Kuala Lumpur:

... (In the) Shuhaimi Baba (documentary) there are... many things that are not that perfect. She interviewed me, too... (In) that interview, I was not very satisfied because there are (certain) people... especially Aziz (Sattar); I don't want to defame him. He said a story that was not right. He (tells) stories. So, when you seek him (for information), he wants to make a name of himself. It is like he wants to occupy a position whereby everything that you want to know about P. Ramlee, 'you must come to me'. Ah, it's like that. People like him. However, there are other people that are knowledgeable about P. Ramlee that they (the film-makers) do not... go to meet (and interview). And then, (the people) they (do) meet; they create a story. Today (the story is) different. Tomorrow (the story is) different. If (they were) not (fabricating stories) they would say the same story. They only know P. Ramlee at Jalan Ampas (Shaw Brothers' studio in Singapore). When P. Ramlee came to Kuala Lumpur (after 1964) they were not around anymore. (Ahmad Nawab Khan 2012)

While Ahmad Nawab was also interviewed for the documentary, it is evident that he was not satisfied with the way that the documentary framed Ramlee's life, highlighting the testimonies of certain individuals over others. Though contentious, Ahmad Nawab implies that certain colleagues of Ramlee who only worked with him in the studio in the capacity of actors (as opposed to musicians) were not privy to his private life outside of the studio. Thus, Ahmad Nawab feels that these studio colleagues do not have the authority or credibility to speak of him on such personal terms. Ahmad Nawab, a musician and film composer, who had known Ramlee since his primary school days in Penang also related to me that Ramlee was closer with his musician friends in comparison with his 'studio' or actor friends. What is important to note is Ahmad Nawab's suspicion of Aziz Sattar as an actor, his positioning of himself as an authority on P. Ramlee and also being able to solicit a suspiciously melodramatic 'performance' on camera. Of course, it is impossible to ascertain the validity of Aziz Sattar's emotions

and credibility but it is significant how conveniently his melodramatic moment fits into the tragic narrative of the documentary. I must admit that in my initial viewing of the documentary, I too, was deeply moved by Aziz Sattar's tears and the documentary in general. These emotional responses are instrumental in rallying a sense of anguish and sadness concerning the tragedy of Ramlee's last days while instilling a sense of national pride in the need to champion Ramlee's views on local music.

Later in the film, footage from the same interview of Ramlee cited earlier highlights his views on instilling local music amongst local youths:

If we do not cultivate traditional and *asli* music into the chests of our children, our young children... one day other musics will occupy that space because the inside of their chests are empty. There is nothing. The same goes for when we teach our children to learn religion. However far s/he goes, s/he will rarely change religion because the religion that is taught by her/his parents are kept in the chest. It is the same (with) music... so that other musics cannot fill their soul.

Ramlee's statement here indicates his passion for local music, even comparing it to religious identity. The presentation of Ramlee's statement on how local traditional music can be likened to a connection with the soul also functions to evoke a nationalistic sentiment among the documentary's Malaysian viewers. The film seeks to solicit empathy with Ramlee's passion for local music and covertly relate it to a strong nationalistic sentiment. National culture is discursively and emotively linked to faith and the soul; designating to local traditional music an untouchable and unquestionable position of purity. Ramlee by extension is the embodiment of that cultural 'purity', the national-musical image of irreplaceability that cannot be overtaken by outside forces. Thus, the melodramatic act of remembering Ramlee in this documentary evokes a nationalistic sentiment of wanting to preserve national cultural practices that are at risk of being forgotten. Far from the cautionary warnings expressed in this documentary, Ramlee's actual omnipresent iconic status as a bastion of Malaysian national culture make it impossible to forget him.

These melodramatic remembrances of Ramlee signal the mythical status of his personal narrative that parallels the making of the nation. I find that the ease with which Ramlee's biography was appropriated is best articulated by Ghosh (2013):

Myths are comfortable; they reassure. They encourage passive consumption in habitual encounters that cause little discomfort. But when we come across icons that attract a great deal of affective intensity of the sort... (found) in... mass media biographs..., we might assume that the message communicated through the iconic sign is highly contested. (48)

Thus, as easily as such a potent nationalist icon like Ramlee can take on the status of myth and reinforce a nation's identity it can conversely challenge such a rigid conception of nationhood. Ghosh suggests that it is the 'affective intensity' of such 'bio-icons' like Ramlee that lead to such contestations. I have demonstrated thus far how such an affective narrative of remembering Ramlee has galvanised a sense of national pride in his music. However, how has his musical iconicity been used to do the opposite – to challenge the hegemonic status of national culture? Earlier in this chapter I observed how Zubir Said's iconicity is mobilised to articulate minority politics in Singapore. In the following section I will examine how Ramlee's iconicity is mobilised for a non-conformist approach to music-making in Malaysia. Thus, I will explore in the final section of this chapter, how the act of remembering a Malay film music icon can be counter-hegemonic in the context of contemporary Malaysia.

Indie-pretation

Amidst the sea of recorded and live interpretations of Ramlee's film music, I have in this chapter chosen to highlight one particular recent compilation; *P. Ramlee... Di Mana Kan Ku Cari Ganti: Satu Indiepretasi (P. Ramlee... Where Could I Find a Replacement: An Indiepretation*, henceforth 'Indiepretasi'). Songs from the *Indiepretasi* project were broadcast on local radio stations and released on the internet as digital downloads for mobile phone ringtones in 2010, a year that also included the screening of a P. Ramlee 'festival' of films on local television network, Astro, in Malaysia (*The Star*, October 22, 2010). The *Indiepretasi* project, unlike many state-sanctioned events and memorials – such as the P. Ramlee memorial museum discussed above – involved the collective contributions of young, local, 'indie' (independent) solo artists and bands playing a diverse range of musical genres.

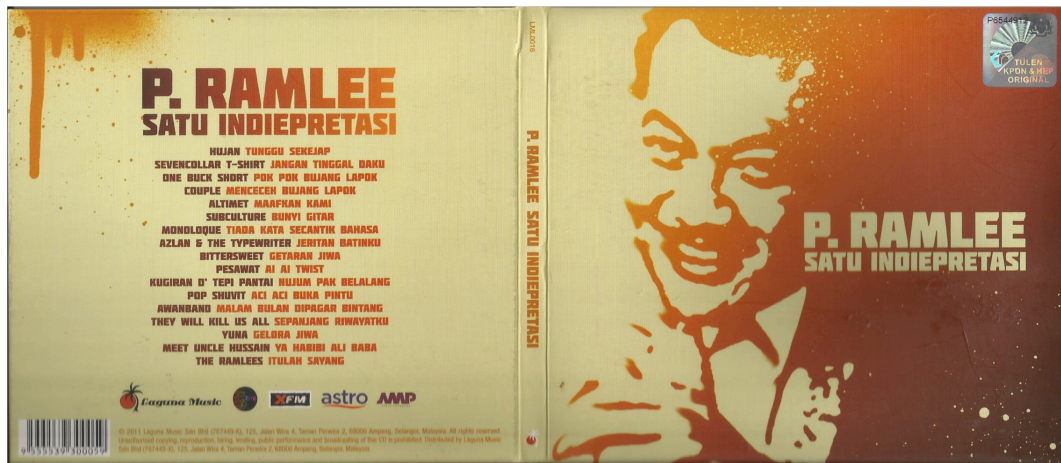


Figure 7.4. Album Sleeve of the *Indiepretasi* Compact Disc Album²⁸

In my view, the contributors to this album and their styles of music resonate with the spirit of the *pop yeh yeh* music that I discussed in Chapter Six. However, as much as *Indiepretasi* was counter-cultural in relation to the Malaysian state's vision of national culture, it also received considerable public interest due to the sensational prospect of 're-interpreting' the music of a popular national icon. It was the large generational divide between the musical era being interpreted and the interpreters that lended the compilation its novelty. In my understanding of the compilation, national culture was used as a platform or launchpad to promote the music of artists that do not consider themselves part of the 'mainstream' of Malaysia's popular music industry.²⁹ The *Indiepretasi* compilation involved a diverse mix of young Malaysian singers and bands who performed a variety of musical styles; half of the artists on the album predominantly sing their original material in English. Furthermore, the styles of music

²⁸ For the 'physical' release of the Compact Disc, the compilation's title was abbreviated to *P. Ramlee: Satu Indiepretasi* (*P. Ramlee: An Indie-pretation*).

²⁹ The singers that I mentioned above such as Sheila Majid, Siti Nurhaliza and Jaclyn Victor can be considered to be a part of Malaysia's 'mainstream' popular music industry. These are artists and musicians that are signed to and distributed by major labels such as Universal and EMI. Indie Malaysian artists by comparison are not related to major international labels and usually distribute their music through independent labels such as Laguna Records in Malaysia as well as via digital means through the internet. The term 'mainstream' is arguable however, as some artists from the indie scene such as Yuna and Zee Avi are now recording artists whose music are distributed by major labels on an international scale. For an overview of Zee Avi and Yuna's rise from being local 'indie' artists to international recording artists see <<http://www.themalaysianinsider.com/showbiz/article/malaysias-female-pop-stars-break-out-with-social-media/>> (Accessed June 5th 2014).

A recent online newspaper article summarises Zee Avi's career in lieu of her 2014 album release: <<http://www.thestar.com.my/Lifestyle/Entertainment/Music/2014/02/25/Dreamtime-with-Zee-Avis-lullaby-album/>> (Accessed June 5th 2014).

Yuna's career in the United States is highlighted in the following interview: <<http://www.radioaustralia.net.au/international/radio/program/asia-pacific/malaysian-singersongwriter-sensation-yuna-blazes-us-trail/1189557>> (Accessed June 5th 2014).

in which they interpret Ramlee's songs are in stark contrast to the Malay film song styles of the 1950s to 1960s. Much like the similarly labeled scene in Indonesia, Malaysia's indie artists mirror 'the approach of some Western pop traditions with a similar rebellious image', in which genres such as 'punk, metal and ska music have... enjoyed enormous popularity among the youth' since the 1990s (Barendregt & Van Zanten 2002, 82).

The contributors to this compilation are also of the same age as the youth that widely rejected Ramlee's music in the 1970s. Thus, the compilation presents the paradox that Ramlee, who officially shunned the 'foreign' youth music of the late-1960s and early-1970s, is now being represented in musical styles that are, on the surface, not 'indigenous' or 'traditional' to Malaysia. In my view, it is contentious to consider music that sounds 'foreign' as not local; for such music regardless of its exogenous aesthetics is a product of its very local social environment. However, it is possible to discern such locally-produced western-sounding music as part of a complex web of intercultural, global and neo-liberal market relationships, in which the modes of production and distribution as well as musical aesthetic styles (such as rock and hip-hop) are seemingly being transmitted, hegemonically, 'downwards' from the Northern-Western 'core' to the Southern-Eastern 'fringes' (see Stokes 2004). With regards to the 'indie' music being produced in *Indiepretasi*, I am interested in the re-fashioning of Ramlee's national-cultural iconicity through musical practices that its interpreters ultimately consider personal to their own musical identities. Throughout this thesis, I have emphasised the cosmopolitan aesthetics of autonomy and self-determination in Malay film music and its historical context of nation-making in the Malay Peninsula. Thus, the theme of this chapter is to link those nation-making ideals to new contexts of 'independence' as articulated in this 'indie-spirited' cultural product.

The *Indiepretasi* compilation was initially conceived to be loosely related to Astro's P. Ramlee Film Festival in 2010. The satellite television network also runs and owns nationally-broadcast radio stations; one of which was X Fresh FM (XFM), a station that played entirely local musical content. At the helm of the compilation was XFM's manager at the time, Adly Shairi Ramli.³⁰ He related to me in an interview the almost impromptu manner in which the compilation was conceived:

³⁰ XFM originally aired on Astro Radio as Varia. In 2009 it assumed the name XFM as an abbreviation of X Fresh FM. In 2012 XFM was no longer broadcast on public radio airwaves

So, one day we (XFM) had a meeting with the Astro top (level) management and staff... they came to (the) radio (department) and said, 'ok, so how can radio be part of this whole (P. Ramlee) campaign?'. So, jokingly, I told them, 'why don't we do a compilation? Get all these new (indie) bands to re-interpret all his (Ramlee's) songs?' It was a joke. Because at that point I didn't actually... (think) that Astro would buy that idea. For me, because I always have this thing where people don't really look up to all these indie bands and stuff. So, (surprisingly), they (Astro) said 'yeah'... So it started off with... if I'm not mistaken... ten artists. They said, 'okay, we (will) give you money to record ten artists'. So, (at the) time... the basis of the project is very simple. I want interpretation. I do not want covers. Solely because, for me, the essence of music back then, you need to truly digest it, you know, and then like, interpret it yourself. Whereas, (in) a cover version you just... take the melody and stuff and do your cover version. Those are two different things. So, that was the brief given to bands via (a) BBM (Blackberry Messenger) chat group... So all the communication was via (the) BBM chat group; so, it started from ten bands and then, it became twelve, became fourteen, fifteen, and the last call was eighteen bands... (Adly Shairi Ramli 2013)

While the project was seemingly sponsored in a corporate manner, the actual production of the compilation exhibited a collective effort between all the artists and bands involved, who received no pay except for a percentage of the digital sales of their songs as ringtones and the minimal budget for recording their songs:

Astro gave us, I think around 36,000 (Malaysian Ringgit)³¹ to record... because at that time nobody knew it was going to be that big... So, at that time, bands were doing it for free. So, our deal – what I told the bands, I put it this way, 'I'm going to give you studio time. Studio time with Kamar Seni Studios... I think (it was) twelve hours per band... If they don't want to record with Kamar Seni I'll give them... 3000 Ringgit to record wherever they want to record because the cost for each band is 3000 Ringgit to record³²... So, I think all of the bands recorded at Kamar Seni studio. Some that had their own recording facilities recorded the songs themselves... and... the deal with the band is they do it for free and because we don't have money to actually print the CD, we thought, 'okay, how are we going to do this'. We have the songs, we have the outlet to play it, which is the radio but we don't have the place where people can actually purchase the music. So... this problem became like... (an) opportunity;... we have no money to print CD(s), (so) let's release the compilation as the country('s) first ever... digital only compilation... To be honest it's not really because of innovation, it's more because of budget (constraints) but it worked to our benefit. (Ibid)

Thus, in a faint echo of the budgetary constraints that produced Zubir Said's unique sound, a limited recording budget led to what could be considered an innovative product in Malaysia – in fact a historical moment in Malaysia's popular music industry as

and was only available for online streaming on <http://dengar.xfm.com.my/> (Accessed 30th May 2014).

³¹ At the time of writing, one Pound Sterling is valued at five Malaysian Ringgit.

³² It is not ascertained whether the total budget for the compilation was 36,000 (12 bands) or 54,000 Ringgit (18 bands). The confusion for Ramli could have been due to the initial budget for ten bands, which would have been 30,000 but the number of bands rose to 18 making it 54,000. Also, the interviewee may not have remembered the exact figure because the project was completed three years prior to the interview.

Indiepretasi was the ‘first ever... digital only compilation’ (Adly Shairi Ramli 2013). In addition, there was a Do-It-Yourself (DIY) attitude in the enthusiastic and personal means by which the compilation was promoted prior to its release, mainly through the use of internet-based social media networks. Ramli relates that the individual bands and artists would ‘update’ their fans and their compilation mates on the progress of their recordings via the social network website Twitter. Fans were also interacting directly with the artists as the project was being produced:

... asking, ‘which band is involved?’,... ‘which band is doing what song?’. So, the whole curiosity sparked, like it was quite, *giler, kan* (crazy, right)? So it was quite, the buzz... the buzz on Twitter was insane... until the compilation was released. And then, okay, a few months after that, Jeremy (Little) from Laguna Records said, ‘eh, why don’t we, we produce a CD (Compact Disc) for you?’.... So that’s how... it... (got to be released as a CD (album)). (Ibid)

The ‘buzz’ generated in the digital sphere resulted in a physical release of the compilation to Compact Disc. Upon completion, the songs from the compilation were broadcast on radio and sold as downloadable ringtones for mobile phones. Shairi also emphasised the popularity of the compilation in the availability of illegal recordings of its songs on YouTube; suggesting that the songs were so hotly anticipated that fans would record the songs off the radio broadcasts to be circulated immediately (and freely) on the internet.

I argue that the success of this compilation was due to the combination of the collective support of the bands’ and artists’ individual fan-bases and the sensational prospect of re-interpreting P. Ramlee’s music. The music of P. Ramlee was quite distant from the younger generation of Malaysians’ musical awareness and tastes but the active participation of young musicians to re-interpret the nationalist-associated music of Ramlee provided the artists with the self-determining means to reclaim a rigidly promoted national cultural icon in a DIY manner. Ramlee’s iconicity was thus mobilised to instill a sense of ‘homegrown’ or local identity to the music of these indie musicians and it was done in a way that was not overtly nationalistic in its tenor. However, I also contend that Ramlee, as cultural icon, was conveniently appropriated – whether consciously or not – by the *Indiepretasi* artists to promote themselves as legitimate and their music as genuinely Malaysian, and so to appeal to a broader local audience. Adly Shairi Ramli (2013) mentions the surprisingly broad reception of the compilation that

... cross(ed) over... not only to the Malay market because I met quite a number of... (for example,) my Chinese friends; my bosses who... (are) not Malay who came to me and said, 'good job with the compilation... My son who... never listen(s) to Malay music... bought the compilation and (as a result)... you introduced... (him) to P. Ramlee...', which is over(whelming), for me... I never expected such a (broad reception)... It started as something fun... (and became)... something... big.

Alongside the broad appeal and opportune self-promotion, the compilation also presented its contributors with a more intimate musical understanding of Ramlee's repertoire demystifying misconceptions of simplicity in music from his era while actually bridging the musical aesthetics of the past with the present:

It was exciting as a whole because... for the bands themselves... most of them would come and tell me, 'eh, I didn't know that P. Ramlee's music is actually that complex'. You know, the simplest song is actually very complex. A good example would be Hujan's (version of) "*Tunggu Sekejap*"... At the first listen you'd say it's very simple, straightforward, '(rhythmically) *ta ta tatata*'. When you actually break down the music,... (P. Ramlee's) original music, there's actually layers of complexity in terms of arrangement, what goes where and stuff and stuff, *kan* (right)?... I believe most of the bands who were involved had a good learning experience from the P. Ramlee (compilation).

Thus, for a Malaysian indie-music habitus of taste that often looks 'outwards' (predominantly to the west, or neighbouring Indonesia) for musical inspiration, *Indiepretasi* provided its contributors the opportunity to look 'inwards' to the local repertoire of the Malay Peninsula's independence era. Music from the Malaysian indie scene is often regarded as 'not being "Malaysian" enough', in comparison to the commercial Malay-language repertoire that circulates in local mass-media (Mahfix 2012, 52). This led Alif Omar Mahfix to question the 'accusatory baggage' that is often linked to non-mainstream Malaysian artists:

Just ask any indie musicians out there about the kind of criticism they'd usually face from the mainstream – the Malay mainstream in particular – and there'd be a high probability that they'll tell you they were accused of not being 'Malaysian' enough. This creates a perpetual identity crisis – bands either forcefully incorporate traditional elements into their music or start singing in their native tongue. Some more successfully than others, some should have sung in their own language in the first place, but most importantly, it gets us questioning; can't local music stand on its own without having to sound 'Malaysian'? (Ibid)

Mahfix's article, 'Pop Malaysiana: Soul Searching of the Music Kind', in *JUICE Magazine*, a local monthly featuring international and local music,³³ sought the opinion

³³ The editor of *JUICE* magazine, Ben Liew, relates to me that the magazine started out featuring the electronic dance music (EDM) scene in Malaysia, focusing on small to large scale

of local indie musicians about what it meant to be Malaysian in their music. The article was published in the August 2012 issue of the magazine in anticipation of Malaysia's Independence (*Merdeka*) Day on 31st August. Mahfix's interviews of individual artists garnered a range of responses; most argued against traditionalist 'tokenism' in expressing Malaysian-ness in their music, while one of the interviewees expressed a more militant view on instilling local culture in music. The band-leader and guitarist LoQue, from the band MonoloQue, expressed the following on Malaysian music in the article:

Have some sense of originality my fellow Malaysians, stop aping the west too much... Not many bands are (using local traditional music)... right now. You can't say a band that sounds 99% like Kings of Leon or Gotye to be the new Malaysian sound without any traditional influences even though it's a band from Malaysia, right? That's plagiarism [laughs]... Malaysians... especially Malays... are carbon copying the West and forgetting their roots. Perhaps 50 years from now Malaysian bands will sound Malaysian because they sound like Elvis instead of P. Ramlee. (63)³⁴

While some of LoQue's statements were tongue-in-cheek, he alludes to his own personal views on actively incorporating aspects of the traditional into his rock-influenced music. Ironically, his critical stand on 'plagiarism' and mimicking the west mirrors the outline of the Malaysian National Cultural Policy. However, his views expressed in Mahfix's article are the most nationalistically chauvinist of the five local artists interviewed. Others, such as the rapper, Altimet (who is also on *Indiepretasi*), expresses a more nuanced and flexible view on Malaysian-ness in music³⁵:

I just try to make good music, that perception (of being fake in performing western musical genres) is shallow minded and the remedy for that perception is similarly shallow minded.... (P)ut some gamelan in your song and suddenly you're not "copying the west" anymore? No it's deeper than that... (The use of local dialects and colloquialisms in Malaysian hip hop are) one of the steps in the evolution... (of the music)... It comes back to my belief that hip hop is folk music. If you make music for your folks, it should be in a language that's accessible to them... Is the inang uniquely ours? It's rooted in India. Zapin, the Arabs brought it here. Joget, the Portuguese... but they've all been transformed into something different once they're here... These

parties held in local dance clubs. The demise of Malaysian music magazines such as *Tone* or periodicals that featured local 'indie' music such as *KLue* allowed for the musical void of reportage on local indie music (beyond EDM) to be taken on by *JUICE* (Personal Communication, 2012).

³⁴ MonoloQue contributed a rendition (or rather, 'indie-pretation') of Ramlee's "*Tiada Kata Secantik Bahasa* (No Words as Beautiful as Language)" in the *Indiepretasi* compilation.

³⁵ Altimet's contribution was the only hip-hop rendition in the compilation. His backing track or 'beat' was sampled from the chorus of the P. Ramlee Song "Maafkan Kami (Forgive Us)" to which he raps original verses.

transformations don't happen overnight, maybe the new modern genre for us is in gestation. (61)

Altimet provides a more flexible outlook on musical identity in Malaysian music; one that is informed of the fluid cosmopolitan past of the region's musical practices while also accommodating for the subjectivity of what it means to be 'local' in music. He grounds this sense of localness in likening hip hop, a seemingly global (or western) style of music to 'folk music'. Thus, he suggests that new western-sounding music that is locally produced and includes local content in 'a language that's accessible' can be considered 'folk' music for Malaysian 'folks'. He also highlights the 'transformations' of musical cultures over time emphasising a processual state of identity-making in local musical practices; a 'new modern genre...in gestation'. This is a view that can also be applied in observing cultural identity-making in 1950s to 1960s Malaysian film music. As I have stated throughout this thesis, Malay film music had always been fluidly cosmopolitan in its influences while also rooted in local practices. Unlike LoQue, who seems to be on a quest to salvage or safeguard 'tradition' in his music, Altimet is more aware of the changing contexts of local-ness in music.

One factor that escapes Altimet's view, however, is the impact of colonialism and the globalised industry of production and distribution on local music. In what ways is indie-music and hip-hop a product of a globalised and commercialised taste industry? While 'global' or 'cosmopolitan' music cultures can be understood and experienced as both unique to their spaces of production and consumption, such observations must be considered alongside critical analyses of postcolonial, global capitalist or neo-liberal industries of culture – ie. the western-based popular music industry – that dictate the fields of taste or genres of music that are reproduced in 'local' contexts (see Meintjes 1990; Turino 2000; Fairley 2001; Stokes 2004). Thus, Altimet's view of a constantly transforming local industry overlooks the postcolonial cultural politics and economics of global musical industries of production, distribution and consumption that drive local consumers and music industries.

Another view expressed in Mahfix's article by the bandleader of Citizens of Ice Cream, Phang, perhaps consolidates the more sobering reality of identity politics and globalisation. He opines that Malaysia is

...a post-colonial society in denial, too immature for the information age explosion and so obsessed with our hollow idea of 'identities' that we forgot how to just experience, learn, enjoy, respect and celebrate with each other... Why do we constantly need to draw lines and say 'this is Malaysian, that is not very Malaysian'? The fact is, it's always been

there without the need to shout it out, without the need to define the obvious... [I]t's kinda like the half-arsed slogans we hear all the time; constantly crying it out loud makes it hollow... [I]f traditional influences rock your socks, go ahead and do it, if not don't force it. Just be who you are... If you're Malaysian, that's an identity you can't shake off and you can't deny, and if you're honest about it, it will always be there... The Malaysian identity in music, if anything, is when we stop thinking and bickering about a Malaysian identity and just play... this identity politics discourse in local music is really getting old.

The lived reality suggested by Phang involves local musicians simply producing and performing music that they are drawn to, without being overtly concerned with cultural identity. However, from Phang's comments it is evident that there is a marked tension between musicians and consumers who seek a clearly defined Malaysian identity and musicians and consumers who are not concerned with it at all. What I believe he is trying to emphasise is that Malaysian-ness in music will be ultimately expressed by any Malaysian individual making music of any kind or genre. It is the socio-cultural experience of being a Malaysian that feeds into the musical expressions across genres and aesthetic intentions. Indeed, many Malaysian musicians are weary of the incessant 'identity politics discourse' that 'is really getting old'. Ironically, Phang cannot seem to escape it either, as he actively positions himself against such discourses of localness.

Based on the comments cited above, I contend that remembering and re-interpreting Malay film music from a tumultuous era of independence and nation-making through to the contemporary, globalised and commodified contexts of 'indie' music highlights how processes of identity-formation found in the past are being reiterated in the practices of the present. National policies on culture in Malaysia form the framework for musical contestation in current musical practices by a new generation of Malaysian artists. A parallel contestation for autonomous identity was evident in the creative output of Malay film writers, directors and composers who had to legitimise their art in the face of colonial rule and ideology. However, I have also noted how rigid notions of national identity can also be perpetuated by certain artists who position themselves as anti-hegemonic to the west. Similarly, there are local musicians who ideologically resist the rigid definitions and discourses of identity politics. Ultimately, some Malaysian artists generally accept that the history of musical practices are fluid and fall outside the purview of rigid classification; they consider their honest musical contributions on the experience of being Malaysian in Malaysian spaces of production, performance and consumption as ample evidence of the genuine Malaysian-ness of their music.

Indiepretasi is unique in its convivial embrace of a diverse range of artists to articulate

the music of an overtly Malaysian icon; such a 'messy' plurality is perhaps *the* most accurate representation of Malaysian music culture.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have argued that the film music of the Malay Peninsula from the 1950s to 1960s continues to form a major part of the present-day discourse on nationalism in both Singapore and Malaysia. Malay film music, through its most enduring icons, P. Ramlee and Zubir Said, provides a discursive and musical space for Singaporean and Malaysian citizens to embrace their national identity and also challenge rigid or autocratic boundaries of citizenship. As such, the theme of this chapter has been 'indie-pretation' or how independence (eg. the Malay film music of the independence era) is interpreted in the context of contemporary nation-states. I have argued throughout my thesis that Malay film music was integral to nation-making in the 1950s and 1960s and in this chapter I demonstrated how pervasive such music and its icons are in political, social and musical acts of remembering in both Malaysia and Singapore.

The government-implemented policies of national culture in Malaysia and Singapore since the 1970s sought to delineate the boundaries of what would constitute 'national music' through a discourse of refinement that in effect, defined such traditions of music. The music of Malay film music icons such as Ramlee and Zubir Said became emblematic of such national music. They were both representative of Malay musical nationalism in a period of active nation-making. Conversely, the omnipresence of Malay film music icons such as Ramlee and Zubir Said also complicates the notion of a shared nationhood beyond borders. While Ramlee was generously remembered and re-and de-contextualised by the younger generation of Malaysians, Zubir Said is remembered as an unsung hero, whose national presence is mostly limited to the Malay community of Singapore. However, despite state-sponsored projects to remember Zubir Said that ignore his explicit Malay-nationalist position in the 1950s, the Malay-minority community of Singapore have alternatively mobilised his iconicity to claim legitimacy and a larger cultural stake in the authoritarian nation-state.

Across the border, Ramlee's iconicity is mobilised in divergent ways. Despite his eclectic and cosmopolitan life and music, the nation-state of Malaysia promotes his iconicity to instill a rigid notion of Malay artistry and national culture. The narrative of

his *irreplaceability* (fittingly, the theme of one of his most famous songs) is articulated in state-sponsored institutions like the P. Ramlee Memorial Museum and documentary films that dramatise his life as a tragedy. As such, the trope of '*kesihan* (pity)' that is linked to his life-narrative is employed as an allegory of under-appreciated local traditions and state-sanctioned national cultures that are in need of safeguarding from decadent outsider-cultures. Conversely, the *Indiepretasi* compilation, collectively produced by various 'indie' musicians, challenged a rigid notion of national culture by embracing Ramlee's iconic status as a national music icon through unorthodox interpretations of his songs. The *Indiepretasi* compilation represents one of many enduring and complex acts of remembrance that demonstrate the relevance of Malay film music from the independence era to nation-making in the past and the present.

There has yet to be an 'indie-pretation' compilation of Zubir Said's film music involving Malaysian, Singaporean and Indonesian artists. Until then, the once cosmopolitan and transnational articulations of Malay film music remain confined to bounded national spaces of remembrance; Zubir Said to Singapore and Ramlee to Malaysia. As such, beyond understanding the politics of cosmopolitan nation-making in Malay film music, I have suggested how contemporary cultures of musical remembrance are closely intertwined in the national spaces of Malaysia and Singapore that are too often imagined as separate.

CONCLUSION

While growing up in mid-1980s to late-1990s Penang, Malaysia, I was never interested in learning ‘traditional’ Malay or Malaysian music. The lure of playing the saxophone and jazz enveloped me throughout my early teens, and grunge-rock and heavy metal would soon intermingle with my musical interests in my later teen years. For my undergraduate studies, I went to Toronto, Canada, in the early 2000s, and was adamant in pursuing my passion for being a professional saxophonist, majoring in jazz performance. Then, while in university, my interest in jazz would intermingle with a burgeoning interest in electronic music and hip-hop. Upon returning to Malaysia after six years studying abroad, I taught and performed western popular music that included jazz, rock and R&B. In my years as a professional musician in Kuala Lumpur, I played a plethora of popular music repertoire, predominantly from the western, English-speaking world. On the rare occasions that I would be asked to perform something ‘Malaysian’, I would inevitably play P. Ramlee’s “*Getaran Jiwa (Reverberating Soul)*”, largely because it was one of the only Malay songs I knew. I understood it to be a ‘jazzy’, ‘bossa-nova-ish’ type of song composed by the most famous of Malaysian musicians. I remembered watching his movies on national television, growing up as child, much earlier than when I had played my first saxophone. Despite my cosmopolitan upbringing and extremely western musical interests, Ramlee’s music and films had nonetheless, somehow, worked their way into my identity as a Malaysian.

This realisation became my initial impetus for the research in this thesis, as I felt that I had spent most of my musical life looking ‘outwards’ as it were, but ignoring what was part of ‘my own’ culture. Of course, upon further research, I came to realise that American jazz, rock and hip-hop are as much a part of my identity as the film music of P. Ramlee. Furthermore, I began to notice that Malay musicians such as Ramlee had very cosmopolitan backgrounds and musical interests themselves. A major difference from my upbringing was that they did not have the same opportunity to travel and learn music abroad¹ but more

¹ P. Ramlee at the peak of his career would travel to countries in Asia such as Hong Kong and Japan for Asian Film Festivals. P. Ramlee and Saloma also shot a scene in the Shaw Brothers’ Mandarin film, *Love Parade* (1961, dir. Ching Doe), in which the couple performed the popular Indonesian *keroncong* song, “*Bengawan Solo*” (comp. Gesang Martohartano, 1940). Zubir Said travelled

importantly, they were creating music to call their own during an exciting yet ambiguous period of postcolonial nation-making. When Ramlee and Zubir Said started their musical careers, there was no clearly-defined Singaporean or Malaysian nation to speak of, though the project of postcolonial autonomy through nation-making was the predominant sentiment throughout Southeast Asia at the time². As cosmopolitan artistes, Ramlee and Zubir Said were at the helm of a process they hardly understood themselves but certainly had the unique opportunity to shape definitively through their music and films, and, indeed, they did so by drawing from the rich 'local' and foreign' pluralistic musical practices that enveloped their world.

This thesis has argued that the film music of vernacular Malay films from the 1950s to 1960s expresses a cosmopolitan aesthetic agency of nation-making that articulates the postcolonial contestations and paradoxes of ethno-nationalism. I have argued that Malay film music was indeed constitutive of a homogenous national identity, but it was also inherently hybrid, pluralistic and subversive. This was uncovered through an intertextual analysis of film music from that period that explains the enduring impact of such music, musical discourses and musical icons on understandings and practices of national culture in contemporary Malaysia and Singapore.

Despite the enduring and wide-ranging social impact of Malay film music from the period studied on present-day articulations and practices of nationalism in the Malay Peninsula, this thesis is the first in-depth study on the subject and has sought to address this troubling lacunae in scholarship on music, culture and nationalism in the Malay world. The musical practices of the Malay world were already inherently hybrid and cosmopolitan prior to European colonialism, and the colonial process further intensified its pluralistic interactions and development. Towards the end of British colonialism in the mid twentieth century, the aspiration for national independence was visibly and sonically present in the widely popular medium of film. The rise of a vernacular film industry in the Malay Peninsula coincided with the rise of popular culture and the capitalistic production and consumption of popular entertainment. However, such avenues for popular entertainment in

frequently throughout Indonesia and the Malay Peninsula. However, for a remarkable account of the Filipino jazz pianist, Borromeo Lou, who spent six years performing in the United States in the early 1900s, see Keppy (2013, 450).

² For an insightful edited volume on the films produced in the Commonwealth nations at the twilight of British colonial rule, see Grieveson and MacCabe's (2011), *Film and the End of Empire*.

Southeast Asia and the Malay World were also a means for articulating a postcolonial politics of self-determination and autonomy from colonial rule (see Tan 2013; Keppy 2013).

Film was a particularly effective medium for expressing new ideas of postcolonial independence to a mass and widely illiterate audience and the inclusion of locally-produced music in this medium amplified a message, initially aspirational but later constitutive, of national autonomy. As national independence was achieved, music in film had to actively constitute an aesthetic of nationhood through representations of tradition in modernity. As such, it was the cosmopolitan aesthetics of Malay film music that relayed this aspiration for a modern and postcolonial nationhood. These musical aesthetic 'frameworks' developed in the 1950s and 1960s would form the musical benchmark for a Malay ethno-national culture in present-day Singapore and Malaysia. The formation of the two nations are closely intertwined, and the ethnomusicological history of film music in the Malay Peninsula provided in this thesis has illuminated this relationship even further. The films analysed in this thesis were limited to the ones made in Singapore from the 1950s and 1960s; however, the music and personalities associated with such films are iconic to Malaysian national culture. The Singaporean state is only recently starting to associate its Malay film and musical past with its national identity; yet, the Singaporean-Malay community have always referred to these artistic outputs as some of the most important cultural contributions to their nation. To better understand these complex articulations of nation-hood across the Singaporean and Malaysian border, I have analysed the films from the Singapore-based Malay film industry of the 1950s to 1960s from a historically ethnomusicological perspective.

The second chapter of the thesis provided a theoretical framework for analysing aesthetic agency in the musically cosmopolitan music of Malay films. By providing a cosmopolitan history of the musical practices in 1950s to 1960s Malay film, I argued that Malayness is inherently cosmopolitan. However, paradoxes emerge upon closer examination of the enduring and contestatory impact of icons such as P. Ramlee on Malaysian and Singaporean national culture. In Chapter Three, I provided an intertextual analysis of Malay film music in *Hang Tuah* (1956) and *Sergeant Hassan* (1958) that

revealed the divergent articulations of reinventing a pre-colonial past and projecting a post-colonial future. *Sergeant Hassan* positively portrays colonial rule via the use of a western leitmotif of decolonisation in defending the new Malayan nation against its enemy, the Communists. While the film *Sergeant Hassan* was set during the Japanese occupation of Malaya during World War Two, its overtly pro-British and Malay-nationalist sentiments are allegorical to the tumultuous state of emergency and communist insurgency that was occurring in the Malay Peninsula during the mid-1950s. I argued that the use of a western-sounding monothematic theme score, featuring P. Ramlee's song, "*Tunggu Sekejap* (Wait for Awhile)" expressed a sentiment of passive decolonisation thereby projecting an ambivalent future for Malay independence. Conversely, *Hang Tuah* melodramatically portrayed pre-colonial Malay feudalistic excess as the justification for resisting dominant powers such as European colonialism. The film was set in the pre-colonial Melakan Sultanate but contained music that was deceptively ahistorical but evocative of a Malay folk music tradition. As such, I argued that the music of this film represented a reinvention of the pre-colonial past that was largely tied to the cosmopolitan environment and commercial goals of the Malay film industry. However, my analysis revealed that the music of the film greatly amplified the anti-colonial subtext of the film, particularly through the theme of sacrifice musically embodied in the film's 'sacrificial maiden'³, Melur (Saadiah), and the song, "*Berkorban Apa Saja* (To Sacrifice Anything At All)". Ironically, this more subversive narrative of resistance was articulated a year prior to Malaysian independence in 1957, while *Sergeant Hassan*'s more colonial-friendly message of decolonisation was expressed a year after. The Malay films of the mid-1950s reflect the cosmopolitan, commercial and late-colonial context of capitalist production in the Singaporean studio film industry. However, such films also provided a platform of aesthetic agency for Malay musical producers to articulate subtexts of Malay nationalism in their film music. Looking beyond the social-structural limitations of late-colonialism and a profit-driven film industry, I unravelled these articulations of aesthetic agency through an intertextual musical analysis of the two films; revealing a politics of decolonisation and resistance that could not be overtly expressed on the visual surface of the silver screen. The

³ My use of this term is borrowed from Marrubio's (2006) *Killing the Indian Maiden: Images of Native American Women in Film*.

narrative of resistance, passive or active, in Malay films would solidify into more self-deterministic modes of musical expression in the early 1960s.

The early 1960s saw a rise in politically radical Malay films set in pre-colonial times. I demonstrated in Chapter Four how the film music of Zubir Said in *Dang Anom* (1962), released during this vibrant period and in line with the radical ideology of cosmopolitan Malay nationalists, subversively sounded a postcolonial critique of unequal power relations between lustful men and victimised women, autocratic rulers and subjects aspiring for freedom, British paternalism and Malay nationalism, colonialism and independence. The socially-conscious pre-colonial film provided Zubir Said with a platform to creatively construct a *traditionalised* musical aesthetic that was constitutive of Malay nationhood. This was a paradoxical process that involved the incorporation of musically ‘traditional’ elements with modern-western forms and structures that were suited to the medium of film. However, in tandem with the cosmopolitan milieu of the Malay film industry in Singapore, this process of actively fashioning a musical tradition highlights the aesthetic agency of Zubir Said’s film music. As one of the first film composers for the postwar Malay film industry who was also a vocal Malay nationalist, Zubir Said initiated a musical aesthetic discourse of a traditionalised Malay nationalism that resonated throughout Malay films of the early 1960s. In contrast to this traditionalised musical aesthetic during the same period were the musical mediations of modernity present in P. Ramlee’s social films.

In Chapter Five, my analyses of Ramlee’s early-1960s social films unravelled the musical mediations of Malay modernity through technologies of *classiness* and narratives of *class*. These films, unlike the pre-colonial ‘historical’ films mentioned earlier, were set in contemporary and urban contexts, featuring western-cosmopolitan musical technologies in the form of instruments, modes of production, reproduction, distribution and reception (such as the microphone, recording studio, nightclubs, records and radio) as part of a favourable – i.e. ‘classy’ – aesthetic of Malay modernity. An analysis of the interactive relationship between music, musicians and social class in *Antara Dua Darjat* (*Between Two Classes*, 1960) illuminated a narrative that challenged the antiquated and divisive structures of inequality in Malay society. In the film, the intimate musical interactions between a working class musician-hero and an upper class heroine articulate a social narrative of mutual dependence between the classes of 1960s Malay society. The theme of

a mutually dependent gendered and powered relationship is expressed in the lyrics of the film's feature song, "*Getaran Jiwa* (Reverberating Soul)" that employs a musical metaphor in its lyrics about the inseparability of music (*irama*) and song (*lagu*). Following that, my musical reading of *Ibu Mertuaku* (*My Mother-in-law*, 1962) challenged existing interpretations of the film as a cautionary tale about the excesses of modern immorality in Malay society. Such interpretations do not consider how musical discourses, practices and aesthetics in Malay social films actually portray an embodied cosmopolitan modernity. Music was an integral aesthetic space in which modernity and supposedly exogenous practices and affectations were embraced as a rooted-cosmopolitan Malay culture. Malay social films in the early 1960s articulated the ethical aspirations of a modern Malay nation-in-the-making and the musical technologies, discourses and aesthetics in these films mediated and reconciled an acceptable modernity for a newly independent Malay society.

If the early-1960s represented a conciliatory embrace of modern Malay (musical) identity on the silver-screen, the mid-1960s to early-1970s were far more contestatory. At the centre of these contestations over musical aesthetics and national culture was the new 'youth' music culture of the rock & roll era. In Chapter Six I examined the Singaporean and Malaysian state authorities' concern about the counter-cultural 'degeneracy' they discerned in the vibrant and youthful *pop yeh yeh* and 'beat' culture of the Malay Peninsula. As such, the state authorities and conservative quarters of society of both nations were vigilant in their policing of youths' bodily practices; e.g. youth dances, young women wearing mini-skirts and young men growing out their hair. These embodied practices of self-fashioning incited a moral panic and were seen as antithetical to the states' conception of decency for its young citizens. Strongly advocating a sense of national identity in music amidst this new musical culture were the film music icons, Zubir Said and P. Ramlee. The latter was especially reactionary in his opinions against the widely popular youth music cultures that were quickly overtaking the popularity of Malay films and musical styles from the 1950s to 1960s. However, I argued that a symbiotic relationship existed between the newly emerging Malay youth culture and the Malay film industry. Ironically, P. Ramlee was the first Malay film director and composer to introduce a rock & roll-styled song, of his own creation, called "*Bunyi Gitar* (Sound of the Guitar)" in the the film *Tiga Abdul* (*The Three Abduls*, 1964). Films such as *Muda Mudi* (*The Youths*, 1965) featured youth and *pop yeh yeh* music,

albeit from the narrative perspective of an ageing film-star played by Siput Sarawak. The film *A Go Go '67* (1967) provided an even greater emphasis on youth music, featuring numerous youth bands, singers and dancers. More importantly, unlike its predecessors, the film attempted to narrate from the youths' perspective, even though this was done in a patronising way by emphasising moralistically the potential of youth to contribute to society.

The prevalence of the disquieting youth culture of the mid-1960s to early-1970s marked the final phase of the Malay studio film industry in Singapore. While *A Go Go '67* was one of the last films⁴ to be produced in the Shaw Brothers' MFP studio in Ampas Road (Jalan Ampas), Singapore, the film's music director, Kassim Masdor, would move on to become a successful music producer for EMI-Singapore's Malay music division. Even though the film industry in Singapore had shut down, the musical legacy of 1950s to 1960s Malay film music endured in individuals such as Kassim Masdor, who gained the wealth of his musical experience and skills under the tutelage of P. Ramlee, while working in the film industry. Moreover, past the 1980s, there would be a resurgence in popularity of 1950s to 1960s Malay films and especially the songs of such films composed by P. Ramlee.

The music of films made in Singapore during the nation-making period of the 1950s to 1960s continue to resonate in present-day practices and discourses about national identity in both Malaysia and Singapore. I analysed in Chapter Seven how the divergent acts of remembering Malay film music icons – Zubir Said in Singapore and P. Ramlee in Malaysia – perpetuate the homogenous and rigid national cultural policies of both nations. Conversely, such acts of remembrance also challenge the hegemonic cultural policies of the state. In Singapore, recent state-sponsored events to commemorate Zubir Said, such as the *MAJULAH (Onwards)! Film Music of Zubir Said* festival organised by the National Museum, paralleled other concurrent events in which his national iconicity was mobilised by the Singaporean-Malay minority to claim legitimacy in a state that marginalises Malay culture. In Malaysia, however, P. Ramlee's iconicity is synonymous with Malay(sian) national culture. Despite his vibrantly cosmopolitan music and films, his life is interpreted

⁴ The last two films made in the Ampas Road studio were *A Go Go '67* and *Raja Bersiong (The Vampire King)*, 1967, dir. Jamil Sulong).

as a tragic-melodramatic allegory for the need to safeguard Malay musical culture and tradition from the threat of exogenous cultures.

Even though Ramlee is an omnipresent icon of a homogenous national culture in Malaysia, he is also mobilised by culturally-marginal groups to legitimate their Malaysian identity. In examining the production of a recent P. Ramlee tribute album, *Indiepretasi* (*Indie-pretation*, 2010), which involved Malaysian ‘indie’ musicians, I unravelled the paradoxical discourses of what it means to have a Malaysian musical identity in present-day Malaysia. The *Indiepretasi* album, ironically, challenged the hegemonic boundaries of Malaysian national culture while embracing P. Ramlee’s omnipresent national iconicity. As the musicians of the album were tasked by the project’s producer, Adly Shairi Ramli, to *interpret* – as opposed to ‘covering’ or reproducing – Ramlee’s music in their own ‘indie’ styles (such as rock, punk and hip-hop), I argued that the *Indiepretasi* project was a nuanced act of remembrance; an act of *interpreting independence* that highlights the enduring nation-making impact of 1950s to 1960s film music on national-music identity in present-day Malaysia. While Singapore is only recently beginning to remember Zubir Said’s musical contributions, Malaysia cannot escape the memory and music of P. Ramlee as a recurring leitmotif of its national culture. To reiterate my argument, music of the 1950s to 1960s Malay films produced in Singapore’s studio film industry articulated a cosmopolitan aesthetic agency of nation-making that continues to unravel the contestations and paradoxes of Malay ethno-nationalism. The aesthetically cosmopolitan music of independence-era Malay films while iconic of a homogenous Malay national culture is also remembered and re-interpreted in counter-hegemonic ways by the citizens of two nations, Malaysia and Singapore, that are inescapably and unforgettably intertwined, like the melody to a song.

Overall, this thesis has sought to contribute to the development of new and interdisciplinary research methods for understanding the uniquely co-dependent relationship between music, cinema and culture in a period of decolonisation and emergent nationhood. Despite the enduring prevalence of 1950s and 1960s Malay film music in Malaysia and Singapore, a sparse amount of critical and comprehensive research has been conducted on the topic. Furthermore, the general assumption of a homogenous ‘Malayness’ in this music is something that requires greater problematisation in light of historical, postcolonial, cultural

and political analysis; an issue that has been addressed throughout this thesis. Due to the limited amount of space allocated for this thesis, this study has paid most attention to the music of P. Ramlee, followed by Zubir Said, with invaluable insights provided by my interviews with Kassim Masdor and Ahmad Nawab. The musical contributions of other Malay film composers such as Yusof. B, Wandly Yazid, Ahmad Jaafar and Osman Ahmad, would provide another set of invaluable data in need of in-depth research. It is hoped that this thesis in contextualizing the role of film music within the politics of nationalism and other newly identifiable social moments will provide a solid framework for future explorations.

The prioritisation of Ramlee and Zubir Said's music over other composers and musicians, however, was fitting as they were both vocal proponents of Malay nationalism in music. Moreover, their film music and national-cultural iconicity continue to resonate across the causeway of present-day Malaysia and Singapore, thereby providing salient points of comparison between both countries for this thesis. Furthermore, this thesis has also been the first study to critically compare the shared musical culture of both nations, providing new and much needed musical perspectives on the intertwined political history of Singaporean and Malaysian nation-making.

As a pioneering contribution to the study of Malay film music and ethno-nationalism, this thesis hopes to pave the way for future research on the ethnomusicological history of Malay music in film that can diverge in many more conceptual directions. Most of the films and songs analysed in this study are easily accessible on YouTube. The numerous collection of 1950s to 1960s Malay films online are facilitated by die-hard fans based in Malaysia, Singapore and Indonesia. This aspect of Malay film music fandom and reception in particular is an area that needs to be researched further in a separate study. Moreover, I have only been able to discuss one P. Ramlee tribute album in a sea of musical interpretations of Ramlee's film music. This is another area that could benefit from its own study, intertwined with a ethnomusicological history of Malay popular music from the 1970s to the present day⁵. This thesis has also drawn from a selection of primary sources in the form of Malay film and music magazines from the 1950s to 1960s. These are resources

⁵ Lockard (1995; 1996; 1998) has attempted to outline a socio-political history of Malaysian popular music from this era but falls short of providing a ethnomusicological history of the period; something that is still much needed.

that have been severely under-utilised in current historical research on the Malay Peninsula, with the exception being Barnard's seminal study on pre-war Malay films (2010). However, there are few musicological studies about the Malay World in the 1950s to 1960s that examine these sources in any detail.⁶ This thesis and its potential in generating subsequent research output emanating from it addresses the dearth in Malaysian musical and historical scholarship while setting a path for more interdisciplinary research on postcolonial history, culture, popular music and cinema in the Malay Peninsula and Southeast Asia.

It is impossible for Malay film music from the independence-era to be bound to rigid national or ethnic boundaries when its very aesthetic foundations were vibrantly pluralistic and analogous to the history of constant change, exchange, interactivity and diversity in the Malay world. Despite the forced homogeneity of Malay ethno-nationalism, Malay music and film from the era of nation-making in their aesthetic expressions and narrative articulations subversively challenge a limited conception of ethnic and national identity. The deeply-embedded aspiring and inspiring cosmopolitan 'frameworks' of P. Ramlee's and Zubir Said's music – despite their own personal motivations, reservations and consequent appropriation by the Malaysian and Singaporean state – continuously reverberate in new interpretations, retrospective and contemporary, of identity, independence, self-determination and musical expression in the Malay Peninsula.

⁶ There has been a recent interest in the study of modernity and music in the Malay World, and Jan van der Putten's (2014) study uses such primary sources extensively to discuss musical culture in the Malay Peninsula from the early 1900s to 1950s (113-134). However, in the edited volume containing Van der Putten's study, (Barendregt 2014), my contribution is the only study that specifically addresses musical culture in the Malay Peninsula during the 1960s (Johan 2014, 136-161).

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APPENDIX

A. Film Song Lyrics

1. “Melaka” (music by P. Ramlee, lyrics by P. Ramlee)

(Verse 1)

*Melaka negeri yang mewah,
Tempat lahirnya Datuk Hang Tuah,
Banyak berjasa dalam sejarah,
Sangat terbilang tiap daerah,*

(Verse 2)

*Negeri Melaka negeri mulia,
Sudah terkenal dalam dunia,*

(Chorus)

*Negeri Melaka aman dan makmur,

Sejak dahulu sudah termasyur,*

(Verse 3)

*Negeri Melaka negeri yang terasal,
Negeri Melayu memang terkenal
Tempat pahlawan gagah dan handal,
Dagang senteru datang berjual,*

(Chorus)

*Negeri Melaka aman dan makmur,

Sejak dahulu sudah termasyur,*

(Verse 1)

Melaka is a land of affluence,
The birthplace of Datuk (Sir) Hang Tuah,
Many good deeds in (its) history (are),
Countless in every province,

(Verse 2)

The state of Melaka is noble,
Well known throughout the world

(Chorus)

The state of Melaka is peaceful and
prosperous
Illustrious since its beginnings,

(Verse 3)

The state of Melaka is the state of origin,
A Malay state that is well known,
A place of warriors gallant and consummate,
Numerous foreigners come to trade,

(Chorus)

The state of Melaka is peaceful and
prosperous
Illustrious since its beginnings,

2. “Berkorban Apa Saja (To Sacrifice Anything At All)” (music by P. Ramlee, lyrics by Jamil Sulong)

*Berkorban apa saja,
Harta ataupun nyawa,
Itulah kasih mesra,
Sejati dan mulia,*

*Kepentingan sendiri
Tidak diinginkan
Bahagia kekasih
Saja yang diharapkan*

*Berkorban apa saja,
Harta ataupun nyawa,
Itulah kasih mesra,
Sejati dan mulia,*

Untuk menjadi bukti,

To sacrifice anything at all,
Material possessions or your life,
That is a joyous love,
Genuine and noble,

Personal importance,
Is not desirable,
The happiness of your lover,
Is all you should wish for

To sacrifice anything at all,
Material possessions or your life,
That is a joyous love,
Genuine and noble,

To find evidence,

*Kasih yang sejati,
Itulah tandanya,
Jika mahu diuji,*

Of a love that is genuine,
That is the sign,
If one wants to be tested

*Berkorban apa saja,
Harta ataupun nyawa,
Itulah kasih mesra,
Sejati dan mulia,*

To sacrifice anything at all,
Material possessions or your life,
That is a joyous love,
Genuine and noble,

3. “*Tunggu Sekejap* (Wait for Awhile)” by P. Ramlee, lyrics by S. Sudarmaji

(Verse 1)
*Tunggu sekejap wahai kasih,
Kerana hujan masih renyai,
Tunggu sekejap,
Dalam pelukan asmaraku,
Jangan bimbang,
Walaupun siang akan menjelma,
Malam ini,
Belum puas ku bercumbu dengan dinda,*

(Verse 1)
Wait for awhile my love,
Because the rain is still pouring,
Just wait for awhile,
In my passionate embrace,
Don't worry,
Even though the sun will rise,
Tonight,
I am not satisfied flirting with you

(Verse 2)
*Tunggu sekejap wahai kasih,
Tunggulah sampai hujan teduh,
Mari ku dendang,
Jangan mengenang orang jauh,
Jangan pulang,
Jangan tinggalkan daku seorang,
Tunggu sekejap kasih,
Tunggu.*

(Verse 2)
Wait for awhile my love,
Wait for the rain to subside,
Let me serenade you,
Don't long for those who are far away
Don't return (When I return),
Don't leave me all by myself,
Wait for awhile my love,
Wait.

4. "Dang Anom's Lament" or "Saat Demi Saat (Second After Second)"

Dang Anom:
*Saat demi saat telah berlalu,
Ingatan daku hanya padamu
Tika berjuang menentang seteru
Menentang seteru*

Dang Anom:
Second after second has passed,
My thoughts are only of you,
As you confront (our) enemies,
Confront (our) enemies,

*Aku menabuh hati nan rindu
Saat sangat genting luas terbentang
Debaran hati bertambah kencang
Cemat¹ gelisah semakin bergoncang
Mudah-mudahan dikau selamat pulang*

I possess a heart in longing,
A second so perilous and spread open widely,
My heart beats with increasing turbulence,
My anxieties increasingly shaken,
With hopes that you may return safely,

*Saat demi saat pulang berulang
Permata hati terlalu terpandang*

Second after second returns and repeats,
The jewel of my heart gazes intently,

Malang:
Janganlah asyik memuja bayang

Malang:
Don't always idolise shadows,

¹ A *cemat* refers to the rope that ties a boat to dock.

Memuja bayang

Idolise shadows,

Malang & Dang Anom:
Kita yang suci tak akan terhalang

Malang & Dang Anom:
We, who are pure cannot be obstructed

5. “*Getaran Jiwa (Reverberating Soul)*” lyrics by S. Sudarmaji

(Verse 1)
*Getaran jiwa melanda hatiku,
Tersusun nada irama dan lagu,
Walau hanya sederhana,
Tetapi tak mengapa,
'Moga dapat membangkitkan,
Sedarlah kamu wahai insan,*

(Verse 1)
The reverberations of my soul envelope my heart,
My pulsation are arranged like a melody and song,
Even if (the reverberations) moderate,
It does not matter,
As long as it can awaken,
My awareness of your existence,

(Verse 2)
*Tak mungkin hilang irama dan lagu,
Bagaikan kumbang sentiasa bermadu,
Andai dipisah lagu dan irama,
Lemah tiada berjiwa,
Hampa,*

(Verse 2)
It cannot be lost, the melody and song,
Like a bee always ‘making honey’ (making love),
If the song and melody are separated,
My soul will be weakened,
Disappointed,

(Instrumental Interlude)

(Instrumental Interlude)

(Verse 2)
*Tak mungkin hilang irama dan lagu,
Bagaikan kumbang sentiasa bermadu,
Andai dipisah lagu dan irama,
Lemah tiada berjiwa,
Hampa.*

(Verse 2)
The melody and song cannot be lost,
Like a bee always ‘making honey’ (making love),
But if the song and melody are separated,
My soul will be weakened,
Empty.

6. “*Jeritan Batin (Wailing Soul)*” (music by P. Ramlee, lyrics by S. Sudarmaji)

*Dengar oh jeritan batinku,
Memekik-mekik, memanggil-manggil
namamu selalu,
Sehari rasa sebulan,
Hatiku tiada tertahan
Ku pandang kiri, ku pandang kanan,
Ji-kau tiada,*

Hear, oh the wailing of my soul,
It cries and calls for your name always,
A day feels like a month,
My heart cannot stand it,
I look to the left, I look to the right,
If you are not present,

*Bisa batinku nangis risau,
Makin kau jauh, makin hatiku bertambah
kacau,
Mengapa kita berbisa tak sanggup nahan
asmara,
Oh dengarlah, jeritan batinku.*

Constantly my soul cries with worry,
The further you are, the more my heart is
uneasy,
Why could we not bear to resist our romance,
Oh hear it, the wailing of my soul.

7. “*Bunyi Gitar* (Sound of the Guitar)” (music by P. Ramlee, lyrics by S. Sudarmaji)

(Verse 1)

Oh bunyi gitar irama twist,

*Tidak sabar si gadis manis,
Dengar lagu rancak gembira,
Hatinya rindu tergoda,
Ingin dapat teman,
Menari suka ria,*

(Verse 2)

*Sungguh merdu lagu ini,
Siapa mahu boleh menari
Pilih satu teman sendiri,
Ataukah si hitam manis,
Kalau sudi mari,
Kita menari twist*

(Bridge)

*Oh gitar berbunyi,
Menawan hati sedang berahi
Oh rancaknya irama,
Dapat mikat sukma,
Gadis dan teruna,
Mari cari teman gembira,*

(Verse 3)

*Gitar solo dan melodi
Ikut tempo kalau menari,*

*Sila adik sila cik abang,
Marilah kita berdendang,
Irama gembira hati jadi riang,*

(Instrumental Interlude)

(Repeat Bridge and Verse 3)

(Verse 1)

Oh the sound of the guitar in the melody of twist,

The young ladies are impatient,
To listen to an upbeat and happy song,
Their hearts aroused with longing,
To find a partner,
Dance and party,

(Verse 2)

This song is so melodious,
Anyone who wants can dance,
Find your own partner,
Or a dark sultry beauty,
If you feel like coming,
We will dance the twist,

(Bridge)

Oh the guitar sounds,
Attracting hearts in passion,
Oh how upbeat this style is,
Able to attract youths,
Young ladies and bachelors
Let's find a happy partner,

(Verse 3)

The guitar plays the solo and melody,
Following the tempo (rhythm) of your dancing,

Young ladies and gents,
Let us sing together,
A happy melody begets a joyful heart,

(Instrumental Interlude)

(Repeat Bridge and Verse 3)

B. Malay Texts Cited with Translations

CHAPTER TWO

An interview of P. Ramlee in *Utusan Zaman* [date not included] cited in Ahmad Sarji 2011, 276-277

Lagu dan muzik pop yang tidak bermutu akan melahirkan generasi yang liar pada masa hadapan. Anak-anak muda yang menyanyi ikut suka hati, bermain muzik ikut suka hati, berpakaian ikut suka hati akan menjadi terdedah kepada unsur-unsur yang tidak baik dan dengan sendirinya lahir angkatan yang tidak berdisiplin.

Pop songs and music that is not of quality will give birth to a wild generation in the future. Youths that sing self-indulgently, play music self-indulgently, (and) dress self-indulgently, will be exposed to qualities that are disagreeable and out of that will be born a generation that is without discipline.

(Yusnor Ef 2011, XIX)

Lagu Melayu adalah sebahagian jati diri orang Melayu, pengaruh luar boleh diterima tetapi harus berteraskan Melayunya, seperti muzik atau lagu-lagu P. Ramlee asasnya Melayu, tetapi unsur barat, latin (sic) dan India diserapkan tanpa disedari. Elemen-elemen jazz, bossanova (sic), mambo dan cha-cha terdapat di lagu-lagunya, tetapi jiwanya tetap jiwa Melayu.

Malay songs are an integral part of a Malay person's identity, in which external influences can be accepted while Malayness must be central, just like the music or songs of P. Ramlee; the foundations are Malay, but Western, latin (sic) and Indian elements are absorbed subconsciously (internalised). Elements from jazz, bossa nova, mambo and cha-cha are found in his songs, but his soul (enduringly) remains a Malay soul.

CHAPTER THREE

Dialogue from *Hang Tuah* (1956, dir. Phani Majumdar)

Jika saya mengeluarkan semua air mata saya sekalipun, takkan dapat membasuh lumuran darah pada tubuh si Melur dan Jebat. Mereka telah mengorbankan nyawa mereka kerana kematian saya. Padahal saya masih hidup.

If I release all my tears for but once, it would not be able to wash away the flow of blood from the bodies of Melur and Jebat. They have sacrificed their lives because of my death. In truth, I was alive.

CHAPTER FOUR

(P. Ramlee 1960, 4)

... 'MAJALLAH FILEM' berkembang biak di-dalam masharakt (sic) sabagai 'jurusan yang membimbing pembacha2-nya meredas di-Dunia Filem; juga menjadi sabagai salah satu daripada alat2 penting untuk meninggikan darjat Bahasa Kebangsaan'

Kerana majallah ini, di-terbitkan di-dalam bahasa dan ejaan Kebangsaan, tidak salah kalau saya katakan, 'MAJALLAH FILEM', ada-lah satu majallah yang berani. Berani berjuang di-tengah2 gelanggang yang sedang di-bena.

Hendak-nya keberanian 'MAJALLAH FILEM', dalam memulakan langkah-nya ini, akan berkekalan dan makin bertambah subur sa-hingga chita2-nya - Majallah Bahasa Kebangsaan Kebanggaan Kita - akan terlaksana.

... 'MAJALLAH FILEM' will expand widely in (our) society as a 'benchmark to guide its readers in their foray into the world of films; also as an important instrument to raise the standard of the National Language'

As this magazine is published in the National Language and its (official) spelling, it is not wrong for me to say, 'MAJALLAH FILEM', is a courageous magazine. Courageous to strive in the midst of an arena that is in the process of being built.

The courageousness of 'MAJALLAH FILEM' that is needed in initiating this process will endure and be ever fertile until its goal - (to be the) Magazine of Our National Language - is achieved.

(Kassim Masdor, 1999, Reel 7, my emphases).

Kebanyakan lagu-lagu (filem) Cathay-Keris ini terlampau ke-Melayuan sangat. Jadi tak dapat diterima oleh masyarakat kerana mungkin lagunya, sorry to say, tak begitu menarik tapi filem-filem Shaw Brothers walaupun tidak mempunyai itu, satu, apa kata orang; lagu yang very typical Malay tapi dia mempunyai commercial touch.

A lot of the film songs from Cathay-Keris were too excessively Malay. So, they were not accepted by society possibly because, sorry to say, they weren't that exciting but despite the Shaw Brothers films not having any, what people call very typical Malay songs... (Shaw Brothers film songs) have a commercial touch.

Dialogue in Dang Anom (1962, dir. Hussein Haniff)

M: Datuk, tiap-tiap sesuatu di dunia ini, ada batasnya. Begitu jugalah sabar... Kalau Sultan bebas melakukan kehendak hawa nafsunya saya juga selaku manusia bebas mengeluarkan kata-kata hati saya yang benar.

RT: Memang benar kata-katamu itu tetapi kita rakyat tidak boleh menderhaka kepada Sultan. Lagipun salah di sisi adat.

M: Ah! Adat! Bukankah adat itu ciptaan nafsu untuk meluaskan kezaliman? Sedangkan Sultan bebas merampaskan anak-isteri orang untuk memuaskan hawa nafsu tetapi rakyat; rakyat diikat dengan adat-adat kejam. Di manakah keadilan, Datuk?

RT: Malang, jangan terlalu melayan perasaan darah mudamu. Kelak binasa badanmu.

M: Tidak, tidak. Demi untuk keselamatan Anom dan kebenaran saya rela berkorban apa saja untuk menghancurkan adat-adat yang kejam ini.

M: Sir, everything in this world has its limits. The same goes with patience... If the Sultan is free to appease his lustful desires then I too as a free human being should be free to express the words from my heart that are true.

RT: Your words are true but the citizens cannot be treasonous to the Sultan. Moreover, it is wrong on the side of our customs.

M: Ah! Customs! Are not customs a manifestation of desire to spread cruelty? Meanwhile, the Sultan is free to abduct peoples' children and wives to fulfil his lustful desires, but the citizens; the citizens are bound to ruthless customs. Where is the justice, Sir?

RT: Malang, do not give in to your the feelings of your young blood. It will destroy your body.

M: Never, never. For the safety of Anom and the truth I am willing to sacrifice anything at all to demolish these ruthless customs.

CHAPTER FIVE

Dialogue in *Antara Dua Darjat* (1960, dir. P. Ramlee)

Zaleha (Z): Ghazali, mengapakah irama dan lagu tak boleh dipisahkan?

Ghazali (G): Kalau dipisahkan, pincanglah lagu dan rosaklah seni.

Z: Kalaulah aku dan kamu dipisahkan?

G: Pincanglah asmara dan rosaklah penghidupan

Z: Ghazali, why can't melody and song be separated?

G: If they are separated, song will be disordered and art will be ruined.

Z: What if you and I are separated?

G: Our romance will be disordered and our lives will be ruined

CHAPTER SIX

(Zubir Said 1967, 20)

Akibat perubahan2 dalam susunan masharakat menimbulkan perubahan2 pula dalam perkembangan seni nyanyian Melayu. Biduan2 dan ahli2 pantun tidak lagi mendapat pemeliharaan yang baik dan dalam masharakat lahir-lah seniman2 yang tidak bertanggung jawab dalam nilai chiptan-nya. Perubahan2 telah membawa kerosakkan pada lagu dan bahasa yang di-pakai dalam nyanyian akibat kemasokan unsor2 asing.

The result of changes in the organisation of society leads to changes in the development of Malay sung arts. Singers (artistes) and poets do not receive adequate patronage and born in society are artists that do not take responsibility in the value of their creations. These changes have brought detriment to the songs and language used in songs due to the intrusion of foreign elements.

(Zubir Said, Ibid)

Unsur2 kebangsaan hendak-lah di-tanamkan sa-banyak mungkin ka-dalam nyanyian Melayu bagi memelihara keperibadian-nya.

Unsur2 asing yang merosakkan hendak-lah di-hapuskan dan yang membawa kebaikan boleh-lah diterima.

Pengubah2 lagu serta biduan2 hendak-lah mempunyai pengetahuan yang se-layak-nya tentang bahasa dan jalan bahasa.

Sistem pengajaran (kebangsaan) nyanyian dengan tulisan musik hendak-lah di-adakan di-sekolah2.

National elements need to be implanted as much as possible into Malay songs to preserve its uniqueness.

Foreign elements that are destructive must be eliminated and (foreign elements) that are beneficial should be accepted.

Songwriters and singers (artistes) must possess adequate knowledge about (the Malay) language (vocabulary) and language usage (grammar).

A (nationalised) system for teaching singing and writing should be implemented in schools.

(P. Ramlee 1973, 205, my translation)

... secara lekas dapat mempengaruhi jiwa muda-mudi kita Malaysia, sehingga pemuda-pemudi tidak sedar pula berambut panjang (ala Beattle [sic]), berpakaian 'Groovy' yang tidak ketentuan, menghisap ganja dan lain-lain. Pemuda-pemudi pula berpakaian 'mini-skirt' yang singkat, kerana terpengaruh dengan pemain-pemain muzik pop.

... rapidly influenced the souls of our (Malaysian) youths to the point that these youths are unaware of their long hair (ala the Beatles), dress in 'Groovy' styles that are unfamiliar, smoke ganja (marijuana) and other things. There are also youths that wear short 'mini-skirts' due to the influence of pop musicians.

(N. Hanis 1967, 51)

Mini-skirt ialah suatu pakaian yang mendedahkan betis kita kepada umum. Adakah ini dikatakan kemajuan? Kemajuan akan tercapai dengan tidak payah memakai mini-skirt. Dan dengan memakai baju kurong kita dapat menarek hati lelaki, tak payahlah dengan memakai mini-skirt... Kalau benar2 kita hendak memakai pakaian2 yang pendek, pakai sahaja chelana dalam, bukankah lebih pendek?

Mini-skirts are a type of clothing that exposes (a woman's) calves to the public. Is this what is called progress? Progress can be achieved without having to wear mini-skirts. And, by wearing baju kurong (traditional Malay female dress) we are able to attract males; we don't need to wear miniskirts for this... If we really want to wear short (revealing) clothes, wear underwear, isn't that even shorter (more revealing)?

(N. Hanis, Ibid)

Mengapakah kita mesti meniru2 akan pakaian yang datangnya dari negeri lain, seperti negeri2 dari Barat. Tidakkah cukup pakaian yang ada pada negeri kita? Sedangkan negeri2 Barat tidak pernah bahkan tidak mahu menggunakan pakaian2 kita, mengapa pula kita mesti mempertingkatkan lagi pakaian yang datang dari Barat yang tidak sesuai dengan kita

Why must we copy the clothes that come from other countries, like Western countries (?) Aren't there enough clothes in our own country? While Western countries have never ever used our clothes, why then must we favour clothes that come from the West that are not suitable for us.

(A. Anis Sabirin 1967, 51)

Buat saya miniskirt itu saolah2 seperti sarong nangka. Diatas tutup rapi, sedangkan betis dan peha ditunjok2kan dikhalayak ramai. Rasa saya dari memakai miniskirt itu lebih baik jangan memakai langsung, itu lebih menawan hati lelaki.

For me miniskirts are like jackfruit covers. The top is wrapped tightly, while the calves and thighs are shown to the general public. I feel that instead of wearing miniskirts it is better not to wear anything at all; that is even more attractive for men.

(A. Zainy Nawawi 1967, 48)

Kalau sipemudi bergaya dengan miniskirtnya yang menonjolkan sabahagian pehanya, maka kapada sipemuda, mereka beraksi pula dengan baju dan seluar yang ketat2 atau 'fensi', kata muda-mudi dewasa ini. Biar apa jua pakaian yang mereka gayakan, tidak saorang pun boleh menegor-sapa mereka kerana pasti mendapat jawapan yang tidak begitu menyenangkan.

While young women are stylish with their miniskirts that reveal parts of their thighs, young males show off their shirts and trousers that are tight or 'fancy', as these young adults like to say. No matter what clothes they wear, no one can tell them otherwise because they will reply with an answer that is unsettling (rude or inappropriate).

P. Ramlee interviewed in (Noor As Ahmad 1967, 31)

... Satu hal yang sangat menduka-chitakan, ia-lah menurut yang saya tau, kebanyakan dari penyanyi2 dan pemain2 muzik pop itu tidak boleh membacha note lagu. Bagi saya ini adalah satu kelemahan yang mesti segera diperbaiki... Kerana kalau tidak... Saya kkuatir hari depan penyanyi2 pop itu tidak-lah dapat di-bawa ka-tengah dan ka-tepi, saperti perahu yang berlayar menggunakan layar burok saja.

...One matter that is disappointing is that, based on what I know, many pop singers and musicians cannot read musical notes. For me, this is a weakness that needs to be fixed... Because, if it is not (addressed)... I worry that the future of pop singers cannot be brought to the centre or to the side (as in, lacking direction), like a ship sailing with a ruined sail.

Dialogue in Muda Mudi (1965, dir. M. Amin)

Ana, kau baru dalam dunia ini. Lagu atau rekod pertama tidak ada erti. Hari ini, orang suka dengan suara kau. Esok, orang tak dengar lagi. Aku suka kau mashyur dan aku tahu kau boleh menyanyi disukai ramai. Tapi, aku suka beri kau nasihat. Kau terima atau buang, anak.... Ana, aku sudah mengalami segala-galanya.

Ana, you are new to this world. A debut single or record has no meaning. Today, everyone likes your voice. Tomorrow, people won't listen to you anymore. I want you to be successful and I know your singing is widely appreciated. However, I like to give you advice. You can accept it or not... Ana, I have experienced everything.

Dialogue in A Go Go '67 (1967, dir. Omar Rojik)

Bukan semua pemudi begini tak bermoral dan jahat, ayah. Juga tak semua orang yang alim baik, ayah. Saya dah besar. Saya tahu buruk-baiknya. Ayah tahu, kebanyakan dari mereka itu tak mempunyai pekerjaan yang tetap, ayah. Jadi, dengan menumpuhkan minat mereka terhadap muzik, mereka dapat mengisi kekosongan hidup dan terelak dari perkara-perkara jenayah... Ayah suka mendegar pemuda-pemuda kita mencuri, merompak, menyamun kerana kekosongan hidup mereka?

Not all youth are immoral and delinquent, father. Also, not all people who are religious are good, father. I am an adult. I know right from wrong. You know father, a lot of them

(youths) do not have permanent jobs. So, by directing their interest towards music, they are able to fill the emptiness of their lives and avoid criminal activities... Father, do you like hearing of our youths stealing, thieving, extorting because of the emptiness in their lives?

(Ibid)

Ayah selalu menuduh bahawa pemuda-pemuda dan pemudi-pemudi seperti kita ini adalah sampah masyarakat yang sudah tak berguna langsung. Yah (Fauziah) mahu Joe (Johari) buktikan pada masyarakat terutama pada ayah Yah sendiri bahawa kita dapat digunakan untuk sesuatu tujuan yang baik asalkan seseorang itu tahu menggunakannya.

My father always accuses that youth like us are the trash of society that are absolutely useless. I want you (Johari) to prove to society, especially my father, that we can be used for a good cause as long as people know how to make use of us.

From my interview with Kassim Masdor (2013)

Bila Uncle cipta lagu-lagu filem, Uncle taruk kat filem, Uncle rekod kat EMI. So become promotion (untuk filem). So, one day, the manager of Malay Film Production (Kwek Chip Jian), dia stop Uncle... Stop-kan Uncle (supaya) jangan rekod-kan ke EMI. Dia panggil Uncle, dia bilang, 'from today onward, you punya lagu tak boleh rekod kat EMI,'. I said, 'why?' ... (He replied) 'because, we pay you, already... (So,) you (should) pay me (back untuk lagu-lagu yang direkod untuk EMI)'. (Tapi, kebetulan,) you (MFP) pinjam lagu I untuk filem... (Mr. Kwek kata,) 'you (should) pay me, that means the song... belongs to us (MFP)'. Pasal dia dah jealous Uncle punya (lagu) dah make money juga, kan?... No such thing... (Saya balas balik,) 'You must remember Mr. Kwek, I working in Malay Film Productions. I working with you not as a composer, you must remember that... I am working with you as a continuity clerk,' ... 'If the lawyer (dari EMI) come to see you don't blame me'. 'Why lawyer?' (,balas Mr. Kwek). (Uncle jawab,) 'because whatever song I write is belong to EMI. I signed the (song-writing) contract with EMI' ... Jadi, lagu-lagu filem... Yusof B. dan Osman Ahmad - ... (mereka) memang bekerja di Jalan Ampas (MFP) sebagai composer and their song is belong to Malay Film Productions. Uncle dengan P. Ramlee - P. Ramlee kerja sebagai actor. Uncle sebagai continuity clerk. Kita dua orang punya lagu, bebas. Dia boleh recording kat mana-mana. They have no right to stop my songs.

When I wrote songs for film, I would use them on the films as well as record them for EMI. So, such recorded songs would be promotional for the film. So, one day, the manager of Malay Film Productions, (Kwek Chip Jian); he stopped me... He (tried) to stop me from recording (my film songs) for EMI. He called me and said, 'from today onward, your songs cannot be recorded for EMI'. I said, 'why?'. To which he replied, 'because we pay you, already... (So,) you (should) pay me (back for your EMI recordings),'. (In actuality,) you (MFP) borrowed my songs for the films... (Mr. Kwek then responded,) 'you (should) pay me, that means the song(s)... belong to us (MFP)'. The reason ... (Mr. Kwek) said this was because he was jealous as my songs were already making money, as well, right?... No such thing... (I replied,) 'You must remember Mr. Kwek, I work in Malay Film Productions. I work with you not as a composer, you must remember that... I am working with you as a continuity clerk,' ... 'If the lawyer (from EMI) comes to see you don't blame me'. 'Why (would a) lawyer (come to see me)?', responded Mr. Kwek). I answered, 'because whatever song I write belongs to EMI. I signed the (song-writing) contract with EMI' ... As such, the film songs of ... Yusof B. and Osman Ahmad - ... they were actually working in Jalan Ampas (MFP) as composers (by contract) and their songs belonged to Malay Film Productions. Myself and P. Ramlee - P. Ramlee was hired as an actor. I was a continuity clerk. Both of our songs were free (to use in whatever way we wanted). They could be

recorded anywhere. They (MFP) have no right to stop (the recording and distribution of) my songs.

(Kassim Masdor 2013, Ibid)

Dalam masa Uncle bekerja (di MFP), Uncle juga as a part-time producer for EMI.... as a talent-scout... rakam artis kasi EMI, bikin lagu kasi EMI... lama-lama mereka sukakan Uncle... So, satu hari Malay Film Production nak bikin satu filem, A Go Go '67... Jadi, music directornya, Uncle and Yusof B. So kita publish kat (news)paper... (untuk panggil) semua kita punya kugiran datang untuk audition... Siapa layak, bagus, timbullah... (dalam filem)... Di situ, Uncle banyak bikin lagu and di situ Uncle dapat banyak talent. Seperti, Sanisah Huri belum penyanyi. Dia adalah (seorang) dancers (sic) dalam kumpulan Terwellos... So, Uncle... (sebagai) talent scout... Uncle tengok dia... cute, cantik... Uncle ambil dia... dia tak boleh menyanyi. Uncle kasi dia menyanyi dalam filem A Go Go '67 itu... Dari situ dia yanyi, Uncle ambil dia taruk kat EMI. Terus EMI. Pass.

When I worked (in MFP), I was also a part-time producer for EMI... as a talent-scout... I recorded artists for EMI and made songs for EMI... In time, they (EMI) took a liking to me... So, one day, Malay Film Productions wanted to make a film, A Go Go '67... So, the musical directors for the film were Yusof B. and myself. So we published an advertisement in the newspaper... to call all the kugirans to come to (MFP) for an audition... Whoever was eligible, good, would appear... (in the film)... From there, I wrote many songs and from there, I found many talents. For example, Sanisah Huri was not yet a singer. She was one of the dancers from the Terwellos band... So, I... (as) a talent scout... I saw her... (she was) cute, pretty... So I featured her... she could not sing. I made her sing in the film, A Go Go '67... From there, she (started) singing, and I brought her to EMI. Straight to EMI. Pass.

CHAPTER SEVEN

(Asas Kebudayaan Kebangsaan 1973, vii)

- i. *Kebudayaan Kebangsaan Malaysia haruslah berasaskan kebudayaan asli rakyat rantau ini*
 - ii. *Unsur-unsur kebudayaan lain yang sesuai dan wajar boleh diterima menjadi unsur kebudayaan kebangsaan*
 - iii. *Islam menjadi unsur yang penting dalam pembentukan kebudayaan kebangsaan itu.*
- i. Malaysian National Culture must be based on the indigenous culture(s) of the citizens of this region
 - ii. Cultural elements of other cultures that are appropriate and reasonable may be accepted as an element of national culture
 - iii. Islam is an important element in the shaping of this national culture.

(Ariff Ahmad 1973, 210)

Masyarakat Melayu khasnya sukar menerima seni muzik bercorak berat sedikit oleh kerana pengertian seni yang bercorak berat tidak ada. Muzik yang berbentuk asli yang mempunyai form atau structure di masyarakat Melayu adalah primitif dan melebihi-beratkan rhythm sahaja. Oleh itu tidaklah dapat dinafikan bahawa jika masyarakat Melayu dikehendaki menikmati seni muzik jenis berat ini, konsep seni muziknya terpaksa ditambah dengan konsep Barat.

Malay society, especially, finds it quite difficult to accept serious styles of music because there is no understanding of serious styles of music. Indigenous types of music that have form and structure in Malay society are primitive and only emphasise rhythms. Because of this, it cannot be denied that if Malay society is required to appreciate these serious musical arts, their own musical concepts need to be added with Western concepts.

(Ramli Kecil interviewed in P. Ramlee: A Biography, 2010, dir. Shuhaimi Baba)

P. Ramlee pernah kena “boo” di stage. Di Dewan Bahasa (dan) Pustaka (Kuala Lumpur). Waktu itu “Malam Tiga Ramlee”: P. Ramlee, A. Ramlie, L. Ramli. Saya cameraman. Jadi, bila P. Ramlee nak keluar menyanyi, semua orang “boo”. Saya tengok, ... (konsert) pop di stadium, penyanyi Singapore and Malaysia, bila penyanyi Malaysia keluar, mesti orang “boo”. Jadi orang (Malaysia) tak suka waktu itu penyanyi tempatan.

P. Ramlee has been “booed” on stage. At the Malaysian Institute of Language and Literature (Kuala Lumpur). It was the “Night of Three Ramlees”: P. Ramlee, A. Ramlie and L. Ramli. I was the cameraman. So, when P. Ramlee came out to sing, everyone “booed”. I noticed... (in) pop (concerts) held in stadiums that had singers from Singapore and Malaysia, when Malaysian singers come out, people had to “boo”. So, at the time, (Malaysian) people did not like local singers.

(P. Ramlee interview footage in P. Ramlee: A Biography, 2010, dir. Shuhaimi Baba)

Lagu-lagu macam lagu joget, orkes-orkes combo, ... lagu-lagu asli, ghazal, dan... dendang sayang tidak pernah dipertandingkan atau dipertunjukkan. Kalau lagu-lagu ini tidak diberi galakkan, maka nescaya lagi sepuluh dua puluh tahun akan datang lagu ini akan dilupa terus dan muzik-muzik dari Barat... akan mewakili muzik kita.

Songs (or musical styles) such as joget, orkes-orkes combo (Malay Orchestras)... asli songs, ghazal and... dendang sayang have never been put on competitions or presented. If these songs are not encouraged, hence in less than ten or twenty years to come these songs will be fully forgotten and music from the West... will be representative of our music.

(Aziz Sattar interviewed in P. Ramlee: A Biography, 2010, dir. Shuhaimi Baba)

Hidup dia melarat, lah. Kesihan. Last saya pergi rumah dia (di Kuala Lumpur). Saya tengok (tears welling up in his eyes, and looking down), dia makan nasi dengan telur (amidst holding back sobs). Nama dia besar. Orang tahu P. Ramlee siapa. Tapi hidup dia melarat...

His life was burdensome. (I felt much) pity (for him). The last time I went to his home in Kuala Lumpur. I saw (tears welling up in his eyes, and looking down), he was eating rice with (fried) egg (amidst holding back sobs). His name was big. People (used to) know who P. Ramlee was. But his life was burdensome...

My interview of Ahmad Nawab Khan (2012)

... (Dokumentari) Shuhaimi Baba tu, ada... banyak yang tak berapa perfect. Saya pun dia ada interview juga... Interview tu saya tak berapa puas hati, pasal apa, ada orang-orang ... especially Aziz (Sattar); saya bukan nak jatuh dia. Dia cerita benda yang tak betul. Dia (ber)cerita. Jadi, bila jumpa dia, dia nak nama. Dia nak dapat macam kedudukan yang ‘tu everything kalau nak (tahu) tentang P. Ramlee. ‘you must come to me’. Ah, macam ‘tu.

Orang dia. Tapi ada orang-orang lain yang tahu tentang P. Ramlee itu dia orang tak... (pergi) jumpa. And then bila dia jumpa dia, dia cerita. Dia create the story... Today different. Tomorrow different. Kalau tidak dia akan cerita yang sama. Dia kenal P. Ramlee dekat Jalan Ampas saja. Bila P. Ramlee datang Kuala Lumpur (selepas 1964) dah tak ada lagi dah.

... (In the) Shuhaimi Baba (documentary) there are... many things that are not that perfect. She interviewed me, too... (In) that interview, I was not very satisfied because there are (certain) people... especially Aziz (Sattar); I don't want to defame him. He said a story that was not right. He (tells) stories. So, when you seek him (for information), he wants to make a name of himself. It is like he wants to occupy a position whereby everything that you want to know about P. Ramlee, 'you must come to me'. Ah, it's like that. People like him. However, there are other people that are knowledgeable about P. Ramlee that they (the filmmakers) do not... go to meet (and interview). And then, (the people) they (do) meet; they create a story. Today (the story is) different. Tomorrow (the story is) different. If (they were) not (fabricating stories) they would say the same story. They only know P. Ramlee at Jalan Ampas (Shaw Brothers' studio in Singapore). When P. Ramlee came to Kuala Lumpur (after 1964) they were not around anymore.

(P. Ramlee interview footage in P. Ramlee: A Biography, 2010, dir. Shuhaimi Baba)

Kalau kita tidak semaikan muzik-muzik traditional, asli ini ke dalam dada anak-anak kita, anak muda kita... satu hari muzik lain akan mengambil tempat kerana di dalam dada mereka itu kosong. Tidak ada apa-apa. Sama juga macam kita mengajar anak kita pergi belajar agama. Walaubagaimanapun dia pergi berapa tinggi pun dia jarang hendak menukar agama kerana agama yang telah diajar ibu-bapanya telah tersimpan dalam dadanya. Itu juga (dengan) muzik... supaya muzik lain tak boleh memenuhi jiwanya.

If we do not cultivate traditional and asli music into the chests of our children, our young children... one day other musics will occupy that space because the inside of their chests are empty. There is nothing. The same goes for when we teach our children to learn religion. However far s/he goes, s/he will rarely change religion because the religion that is taught by her/his parents are kept in the chest. It is the same (with) music... so that other musics cannot fill their soul.

C. List of Interviews Conducted

Not all the interviews conducted were cited but nonetheless, contributed significantly to the ideas formulated in this thesis. I indicate with an asterisk (*) the interviews that are cited.

*Adly Shairi Ramly. *Indiepretasi Album* (2010). July 11, 2013.

Ahmad Merican. *Malay Music and the History of Malaysian Broadcasting*, June 8, 2013.

*Ahmad Nawab Khan. *Malay Film Music and P. Ramlee*. June 12, 2013.

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Farizam Mustapha. *P. Ramlee Museum*. July 9, 2013.

*Kassim Masdor. *Kassim Masdor's Experience in the Malay Film and Popular Music Industry*. September 6, 2013.

Khoo, Eddin. *Music, Tradition and National Culture*. August 5, 2013.

*Low, Zu Boon. *MAJULAH! Film music of Zubir Said*. October 19, 2012.

*Pereira, Joseph C. *Beat Music Bands in 1960s Singapore*. October 21, 2012.

Peters, Joe. *Zubir Said's Music*. August 16, 2013.

D. Musical Transcriptions

1. Partial Transcription of Saadiyah performing “*Tunggu Sekejap*” in *Sergeant Hassan* (1958, dir. Lamberto V. Avellana). This transcription notes the musical transition from ‘child Salmah’ to ‘adult Salmah’.

♩ = 55-60

(1st Verse)

Salmah as a Child

Tung- gu se- ke- jap wa- hai- ka- wan ke- ra- na
hu- jan ma- sih re- nyai tung- gu se- ke- jap da-lam pe- lu- kan la la la

Instrumental Interlude

la...
(Lead String melody)

Adult Female Vocal Interlude

la la la la la la la la la la la la la la la

Salmah as Adult

Ma- lam i- ni be- lum pu- as ku ber- cum- bu de- ngan kan- da sa-

(2nd Verse commences...)

yang....

2. Transcription of P. Ramlee performing “*Tunggu Sekejap*” in *Sergeant Hassan*. Music and arrangement by P. Ramlee with lyrics by S. Sudarmaji.

$\text{♩} = 64$

(rubato)

Vocals
Tung-gu seke- jap wahai ka- sih kerana hu- jan ma- sih re- nyai tung-gu seke-

Guitar
D Maj B-7 B 9 E-13

Chords

Flute

String Ld

String 2

(Orchestra Enters)

Vo.
jap dalam pe- lu- kan as- ma- ra ku ja- ngan bim-

Gtr
E- E-/B A7 D Maj7 F#7(b9)

Chd.

Fl

Str Ld

Str 2

Vo. *9*
 bang walaupun si- ang a- kan men- jel ma ma lam i-

Gtr *9*
 8

Chd. *9*
 B-7 B7(b9) E-7 B7(#5) E-7 G#C#7(b9)

Fl *9*

Str Ld *9*

Str 2 *9*

Vo. *13*
 ni belum pu- as ku bercumbu dengan din- da Tung- gu seke-

Gtr *13*
 8

Chd. *13*
 F#- C#- F#7 B- E7 E-7 A7(#5)

Fl *13*

Str Ld *13*
 3

Str 2 *13*

Vo. 17
 jap wahai ka- sih tunggulah sam-pai hu- jan te- duh ma- ri ku den-

Gtr 17
 DMaj7 B-7 E-7 B7(#5) E-7 B7(b9)

Chd. 17

Fl 17

Str Ld 17

Str 2 17

Vo. 21
 dang jangan me-nenang o- rang ja- uh ja- ngan pu-

Gtr 21

Chd. 21
 E-7 A7 C#° F#7(b9)

Fl 21

Str Ld 21

Str 2 21

Vo.  lang ja- ngan ting-gal- kan da- ku se-o-rang Tung- gu se-ke

Gtr  F#-7 F#m7(b5) B7(b9) C7 B7(b9) B7(b9)

Chd. 

Fl 

Str Ld 

Str 2 

Vo.  jap ka- sih tung..... gu...

Gtr  E-7 A7 DMaj7

Chd. 

Fl 

Str Ld 

Str 2 

3. Transcription of *Dang Anom* (1962, dir. Hussein Haniff) title theme, composed by Zubir Said.

A $\text{♩} = 80-88$ B

The musical score is arranged in seven staves, each with a different instrument. The key signature is three sharps (F#, C#, G#) and the time signature is 4/4. The tempo is marked as quarter note = 80-88. The score is divided into two sections, A and B. Section A starts with a Gong strike, followed by a Vibraphone melody. Section B begins with a Violin I melody, which includes a triplet of eighth notes. The other instruments (Harmonium, Alto Sax., Tenor Sax., and Guitar) have rests throughout the piece.

Gong

Vibraphone

Violin I

Harmonium

Alto Sax.

Tenor Sax.

Guitar

G B2 C2

16

Vib. *16*

V.1 *16*

Ham *16*

Alto *16*

Ten. *16*

Gtr. *16*₈

G *21*

Vib. *21*

V.1 *21*

Ham *21*

Alto *21*

Ten. *21*

Gtr. *21*₈

B3

Musical score for measures 25-28. The score is for a band with the following parts: G (Drum), Vib. (Vibraphone), V.1 (Trumpet 1), Ham. (Hammond Organ), Alto (Alto Saxophone), Ten. (Tenor Saxophone), and Gtr. (Guitar). The key signature is three sharps (F#, C#, G#) and the time signature is 4/4. Measure 25 is marked with a rehearsal sign. The G part has a drum pattern of quarter notes. Vib. and V.1 play a melodic line starting with a half note G4, followed by a quarter rest, and then a quarter note A4. Ham., Alto, and Gtr. play a rhythmic accompaniment. Ten. plays a melodic line starting with a half note G2, followed by a quarter rest, and then a quarter note A2.

Musical score for measures 29-32. The score is for a band with the following parts: G (Drum), Vib. (Vibraphone), V.1 (Trumpet 1), Ham. (Hammond Organ), Alto (Alto Saxophone), Ten. (Tenor Saxophone), and Gtr. (Guitar). The key signature is three sharps (F#, C#, G#) and the time signature is 4/4. Measure 29 is marked with a rehearsal sign. The G part has a drum pattern of quarter notes. Vib. plays a melodic line starting with a half note G4, followed by a quarter note A4, and then a quarter note B4. V.1 plays a melodic line starting with a half note G4, followed by a quarter note A4, and then a quarter note B4. Ham., Alto, and Gtr. play a rhythmic accompaniment. Ten. plays a melodic line starting with a half note G2, followed by a quarter note A2, and then a quarter note B2.

4. Second performance of “*Jeritan Batin (Wailing Soul)*” in *Ibu Mertuaku* (1962, dir. P. Ramlee). Music and arrangement by P. Ramlee with lyrics by S. Sudarmaji.

♩ = 95

Instrumental Introduction

Vocals

Lead Sax

Strings

Trumpet

Saxes

Piano Fills

Double Bass

Conga

Vocals Enter

V. 5

L.S. 5

Str. 5

Tpt. 5

Sax. 5

Pn. 5

D.B. 5

C.Dr. 5

De-

V. ngar oh je-ri- tan ba- tin ku me-me-

L.S.

Str.

Tpt.

Sax.

Pn.

D.B.

C.Dr.

V. kik me-kik me-mang-gil mang-gil na-ma mu sla-lu se-ha-

L.S.

Str.

Tpt.

Sax.

Pn.

D.B.

C.Dr.

17

V. *ri ra-sa se-bu-lan ha-ti-ku tia-da ter-ta-han ku pan-*

L.S.

Str.

Tpt.

Sax.

Pn.

D.B.

C.Dr.

21

V. *dang ki-ri ku pan- dang ka-nan ji-kau tia-da*

L.S.

Str.

Tpt.

Sax.

Pn.

D.B.

C.Dr.

V. 25
 L.S. 25
 Str. 25
 Tpt. 25
 Sax. 25
 Pn. 25
 D.B. 25
 C.Dr. 25

V. 29
 L.S. 29
 Str. 29
 Tpt. 29
 Sax. 29
 Pn. 29
 D.B. 29
 C.Dr. 29

V. 33
 L.S. 33
 Str. 33
 Tpt. 33
 Sax. 33
 Pn. 33
 D.B. 33
 C.Dr. 33

V. 37
 L.S. 37
 Str. 37
 Tpt. 37
 Sax. 37
 Pn. 37
 D.B. 37
 C.Dr. 37

Saxophone solo

V. 

L.S. 

Str. 

Tpt. 

Sax. 

Pn. 

D.B. 

C.Dr. 

V. 

L.S. 

Str. 

Tpt. 

Sax. 

Pn. 

D.B. 

C.Dr. 

V. 

L.S. 

Str. 

Tpt. 

Sax. 

Pn. 

D.B. 

C.Dr. 

V. 

L.S. 

Str. 

Tpt. 

Sax. 

Pn. 

D.B. 

C.Dr. 

57

V.

L.S.

Str.

Tpt.

Sax.

Pn.

D.B.

C.Dr.

61

V.

L.S.

Str.

Tpt.

Sax.

Pn.

D.B.

C.Dr.

65

V.

L.S.

Str.

Tpt.

Sax.

Pn.

D.B.

C.Dr.

69

V.

L.S.

Str.

Tpt.

Sax.

Pn.

D.B.

C.Dr.