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Malay singing in Pahang villages: identity and practice

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Citation
Silahudin, S. (2021, May 18). *Malay singing in Pahang villages: identity and practice*. Retrieved from https://hdl.handle.net/1887/3166306

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Author: Silahudin, S.
Title: Malay singing in Pahang villages: identity and practice
Issue date: 2021-05-18

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Reflections on my pilot study: early encounters with Pahang musicians at two musical events

I thought it would be best to begin by describing my early encounters with musicians during the course of my pilot study in Pahang in October 2013. I had contacted some of my main informers, and explained to them my intention to learn about musicians in the area of Pahang for my doctoral dissertation. One of them suggested that I attend two musical events that were taking place in that month. Before I jumped into my pilot study, I prepared a few research questions: Who is involved in singing performances? What kinds of songs do the Malays in Pahang villages sing? Acknowledging my singing expertise, my informer suggested that I sing at these events. Thus, at both events, I both participated as an invited singer and took on the role of scholar. I thought this combination of roles offered a great opportunity for me to be identified as a singer-scholar during my pilot study, enabling me to get closer to the Pahang music community on my first encounter with it. Both musical events consisted of traditional singing, modern poetry singing, poetry recitation and theatre performance. In the following paragraphs I describe some of the songs and musicians that I encountered.

The first musical event was *Malam Citra Warisan Melayu* (An Evening of Malay Heritage) on 10 October 2013. It was held at Abu Bakar Secondary School in Temerloh, Pahang, and attended by around three hundred audience members, including district officials, schoolteachers, students and residents from nearby villages. The evening was organized by Temerloh Education Department in collaboration with *Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka* (the Institute of Language and Literature). As I was performing on the night, I spent most of my time back stage with the rest of the Pahang musicians/singers. After the opening speech, the first performance was sixty-five-year-old Aripin Said. He performed two traditional songs, 'Angin' (Wind) and 'Indung-Indung' (Mother, Mother), while beating a *rebana* held to the right of his body. The ease with which he performed could be seen through his intertwining of song and speech. Based on my conversation with one of the local musicians back stage, Said's performance was typical of a performance of *penglipur lara*

(a vocal form of storytelling), which was once a popular form of entertainment among Pahang villagers.

At the event I met two singers, Rabiatul and Fadlina. They have been making music for quite a long time. This was actually not the first time that I had met Rabiatul and Fadlina, as we had first crossed paths during the traditional poetry singing competition in 2012. Rabiatul performed *gurindam* (an irregular-verse form of traditional poetry), while Fadlina sang *syair* (quatrains with a rhyming scheme). A keyboard player provided live music to accompany their singing. The appearance of Roslan Madun on stage was highly anticipated by the audience and he did not disappoint, delighting them with songs of *seloka* (satirical poetry) and *nazam* (poetry song). The night ended with a performance of *lagu puisi* (modern poetry songs) by Siso Kopratasa. More than half of the audience sang along and cherished the moment.

My introductions to Pahang musicians continued at another musical event two weeks later. On 23 October 2013, an event titled *Malam Semantan Berbunga* II (A Blooming Night of Semantan II) was held, that, according to my informer, was the continuation of a previous event that had taken place in 2012. However, I have been unable to find any information about the first event. The theme of the night was *'Mengembalikan semangat perjuangan Melayu sejati'* (To return to the real spirit of struggle of the Malay). The event was held in *Dataran Patin* (Patin Square), situated at the confluence of the Semantan and Pahang Rivers. I had previously met several of the musicians at the event two weeks prior; only a few of them were new to me.

As a result of the theme for the night, most of the songs and poetry readings performed were connected with important historical events. It was through this event that I became familiar with other musical instruments including the *gendang silat* and gong. All the instruments present were used to accompany Said's singing performance. The musical performances were intertwined with poetry readings. Abdullah Karim Hidayat, known as AK Hidayat, delivered a poem titled *'Aku Seorang Nelayan'* (I am a Fisherman) in his unusual and melancholic voice. His performance deeply moved the nearly one hundred audience members who attended the event. Through his monologic theatre performance, Azmy Ahmad presented the story of the struggle of Bahaman, a nineteenth-century Pahang warrior. He also demonstrated a *silat* (Malay martial art) accompanied by the sound of *gendang* played by young musicians aged between ten and fifteen years old. Throughout his performance, he never missed catching the *keris* (the Malay dagger) used to represent Malay spirits. During his performance of the sorrowful song

‘Menjejak Bahaman’ (Tracking Bahaman), Roslan Madun could not avoid shedding a tear. The song remembers Bahaman, who was defeated by the British in the war of 1895. In my view, all the performers gave their utmost during their performances.

The variety of songs sung at both singing events showed me that songs are important and much-cherished possessions of the Malays in Pahang villages. Through my pilot study in Pahang, I was fortunate to briefly experience several forms of music and communicate with members of the Pahang cultural scene (musicians, singers, poets and actors). My relationship with them expanded after the aforementioned musical events. I became friends with many of them, communicating through Facebook. Through this online social medium, I was able to learn about their ongoing musical activities. We exchanged information and discussed many topics relevant to my current research. Their friends also became my acquaintances and have also contributed to my ethnographical music research in Pahang villages.

1.2 Background

In Pahang villages Malays are mostly associated with musical activities involving music practitioners, supporters or both at the same time. Malay villagers enjoy singing. Unfortunately, there is little information in the scholarly literature about their vocal music and music practices. Thus I aim to investigate the ways in which individuals and groups residing in Pahang villages engage in singing and musical practices in the course of their daily social life. I aim to solve the overarching research question: What are the cultural meanings (including historical resonances) of the songs and music practices of Malays in Pahang villages? The fundamental nature and meaning of music lie not in objects, but in people’s actions. Appreciating what people do and how they participate in musical activities will help to provide evidence for the nature of music and the function it fulfils in Pahang peoples’ lives. Hirata (2009) has observed that Malays are obsessed with musicality because they are Malay and it is part of them. They engage in a variety of singing and music-related activities.

In the search for an answer to the main research question, an exploration of three thematic areas was carried out. The first thematic area concerns the historical perspective of the musical identity of the Malay world, of which Pahang is a part. To explore this theme, the guidance question that is used is: What are the historical musical and singing characteristics of Malays?

The notion of historical discussion is significant as it will help to reveal the historical depth of singing references and imageries. This will eventually help to elucidate the cultural meanings behind today's vocal music genres in Pahang villages by identifying the extent to which present-day songs are rooted in the past.

Malays who perform music can be divided into three community-generated categories: professionals, semi-professionals and amateur musicians. A professional musician depends on music as his full-time career, while semi-professional musicians have other sources of income besides music. An amateur musician, as the name suggests, is one involved in music purely out of interest and passion. Thereby, the second thematic area groups professional and semi-professional musicians into four musical genres: traditional, regional pop, *kugiran* (an abbreviation for *kumpulan guitar rancak* (lively guitar band)) and punk rock. The guidance questions for the genres included in this study are: What is their social context and how is community formed through the music?

Amateur musicians also engage in musical practices through their involvement in music performance throughout their lives. From my perspective, amateur performers are as worthy of investigation as professionals and semi-professionals as their cultural practices are more real and interesting. Thus, for the third thematic area, I report on my engagements with groups of musical amateurs. *Nazam berendoi* and *dikir rebana* are two types of song performed by amateur groups in Pahang villages. In the past, both men and women performed these songs. However, today, only middle-aged and elderly women continue to perform them. Due to differences in the performance of these two forms of song, the following questions were posed: What are the cultural contexts of *nazam berendoi* and *dikir rebana* and how do the songs contribute to the formation of community? In the same thematic area, I posed two further questions relating to the participation in these forms of music by women aged seventeen to twenty-three: How do young women give definition to the music they practice and/or listen to? And how do they engage with the musical forms?

The purpose of this book is to uncover and reflect on the fundamental dimensions of singing and musical practices among Malays in Pahang villages. There are interesting correlations between the patterns of change within the musical culture of Malays in Pahang villages and those in many communities around the globe. In my view, Pahang villages are dynamic places. This book thus aims to provide an empirically based ethnography of professional, semi-professional and amateur musicians in Pahang in the early first quarter of the

twenty-first century, studying and discovering the types of songs sung and forms of music making undertaken by Pahang communities.

In general, each musical form creates two kinds of song community: the performers, who support themselves through performances; and the audiences/supporters. Each musical genre operates within a social context that includes community involvement in its production and consumption. As mentioned by Mattern, 'the wider context of reception and use defines a communicative arena in which meanings are created, shared, negotiated, and changed in which various individuals and groups appropriate music for different ends' (Mattern, 1998: 16). He continues by saying music 'opens social spaces for the communicative interactions that are necessary for the sharing of meaning and the creation of commonalities of identity and orientation' (Mattern, 1998: 16).

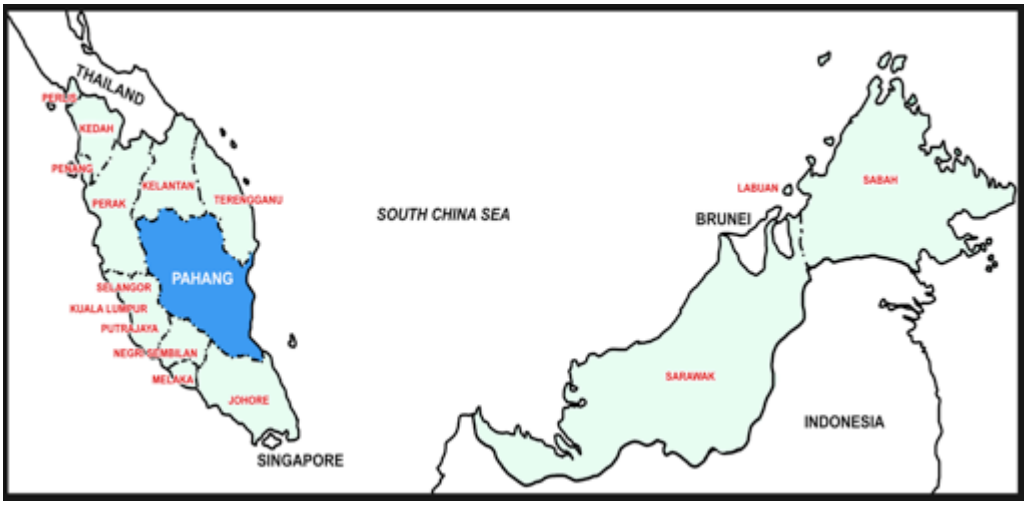
The social context of music is responsible for its implications for the community involved. One of the implications discussed by Mattern (1998) is that music serves as a record of a civilization or community. 'If music captures human experience and renders it meaningfully for contemporary audiences, then it is a legitimate window into the identity and history of a people' (Mattern, 1998: 18). Music can be seen as a vehicle for communicating with other people from other communities that consequently opens up the possibility of sharing experiences and identities with others of different backgrounds and knowledge. In addition to creating commonalities among people, music also creates differences between two or more distinct communities. However, exposure to different forms of music can differentiate experience and identity among the community.

1.3 The setting

As seen on Map 1, Pahang is the largest state in West Malaysia (36,137 square kilometres). It is also the third largest state in Malaysia, after Sabah and Sarawak on the island of Borneo/East Malaysia. The state stretches from the main mountain range in the centre of the peninsula to the east coast, which faces the South China Sea. The state is surrounded by highlands, rainforests, beaches and islands. The weather is typical of the tropics: Pahang's climate is hot and humid throughout the year. It has distinct wet and dry seasons that coincide with the seasons of the South China Sea.

Several major Malaysian attractions are located in Pahang, such as Pahang National Park, the Cameron Highlands, the Genting Highlands, Endau-

Rompin State Park, Fraser Hill and Tioman Island (Sukiman et al., 2013). Lanchang, a small town in the district of Temerloh is the central point of Peninsula Malaysia (Utusan Online, 7 September 2015). The capital of Pahang is Kuantan. Most state government agencies are located in the capital. Wan Rosdy Wan Ismail, the State Minister appointed by the Sultan, leads the state government of Pahang in administrative matters and people's affairs.



Map 1: The location of Pahang in Malaysia

The natives, also called *bumiputera* (sons of the soil), constitute the highest proportion of the population in Malaysia at 68.6 per cent, followed by Chinese (23.4 per cent), Indian (7.0 per cent) and others (1.0 per cent) (Utusan Online, 22nd July 2016). Of the native population, Malays make up 90 per cent, with the remaining 10 per cent being non-Malays, meaning members of the Orang Asli and tribespeople. This majority ethnic group is constitutionally defined and enjoys majority political power in Malaysia. The term Orang Asli was introduced around 1960 as a replacement for the earlier label 'Malayan aborigines' (Benjamin, 2004: 997). The authentically aboriginal Orang Asli of the Peninsula Malaysia are currently officially characterized as not indigenous. In official resources, 'indigenous identifies not the people whose ancestors have inhabited the peninsula for the longest time but solely the descendants of those – the Malays – who supposedly first brought civilization, presumably meaning the state, to the country' (Benjamin, 2015: 4). Officially only Malays qualify as 'indigenous' to Malaysia. In Malaysia, religion is linked to ethnicity. As a result, most Hindus are Indians, Buddhists Chinese and Muslims Malay. Of these three main religions, Islam is thus the principal religion and has become the official religion in Malaysia.

In Article 160 of the Malaysian Constitution, a Malay is defined as a Malaysian citizen who professes three recognized pillars of Malayness: practices Islam, habitually speaks the Malay language and conforms to Malay customs (Frith, 2000). Barnard et al. (2004) clarified that the Malay identity is shaped throughout history based on various overlapping and contested ideas of Malayness. 'While the official form of Islam is not specified, the implication is that the practice should be Sunni. While Shi'ism and other practices are not technically illegal in Malaysia, they are not encouraged especially amongst Malays' (Kinzer, 2017: 14). Hoffstaedter noted that due to Malay customs becoming less frequently practiced and an increased use of English (mainly in urban areas), the last powerful pillar of Malayness lies in the practice of Islam (Hoffstaedter, 2011: 35).

Pahang had a population of 1.6 million in 2015. Based on the 2010 census, 74.9 per cent of the population of Pahang, mainly the Malays, follow the teachings of Islam (Department of Statistics Malaysia). Meanwhile, 14.4 per cent of the population (mainly Chinese) practice Buddhism, 4 per cent follow Hinduism (mainly Indians), 1.9 per cent are Christians, and 2.7 per cent of the population are non-religious (mainly Orang Asli). During the period covered by this book, the ruler of Pahang, His Royal Highness Sultan Ahmad Shah Al-Musta'in Billah Ibni Almarhum Sultan Abu Bakar (r.1974-2019) was Head of Islam in the state. In a speech during his investiture ceremony in Abu Bakar Palace in Pekan in 2013, the Sultan commanded that even though Islam is the official religion of the country, non-Muslims should be allowed to practice their religious beliefs freely and without any disturbance (Utusan Online, 26 October 2013).

Bahasa Melayu (Malay Language) is known as and was chosen to be the national language on the independence of Malaysia. The language serves to link the multiple groups and ethnicities in Malaysia and contributes to increasing the feelings of nationhood. The Malay language is also the language of the education, modernization and social mobility of citizens of the country. However, a strong allegiance to local languages has by no means disappeared. The population in Pahang mainly speaks the Pahang dialect, which is one of the regional dialects of Malaysia. The Pahang dialect, compared to the colloquial language used by the majority of Malaysians, is somewhat different from other Malay dialects on the west coast of Peninsula Malaysia (Karim et al., 1986). The Pahang dialect forms a recognizable subgroup with the dialects of two other states on the east coast, Terengganu and Kelantan (Collins, 1989).

I first experienced the Pahang spoken language when I was in secondary school in Kuantan, Pahang. Most of the students were from Pahang,

Terengganu and Kelantan. At first glance, it was difficult for me to distinguish between the dialects because they have rather similar accents and spoken vocabularies. There are minor dialectual boundaries between the communities in the three aforementioned states. The location of three major rivers, as seen in Map 2, 'indicates the apparent factors which link these dialects to each other, despite the great distances separating them' (Collins, 1989: 254). Meanwhile Omar (1976) initially classified the dialects of Kelantan, Terengganu and Pahang into separate subgroups of Malay, although she noted that Pahang is a transitional area whose language links Terengganu Malay to Johor Malay in the south. In 1985, however, Omar revised her classification, placing Kelantan, Terengganu and Pahang in a single linguistic subgroup.

Map 2: The major rivers of the east coast of Peninsula Malaysia (source: Collins, 1989)

According to Junaidi Kassim, the schoolteacher wife of the former State Minister, the Pahang dialect is unique to the area associated with the Pahang River. Thus the community living along the upper reaches of the river has a faster speech than the community living downstream; this has been influenced by economics and living conditions. The community in the upper area speaks rapidly, representing the fast flow of the river in the area. In her metaphorical explanation, Junaidi notes that the river is the main communication route within the community. A slow pace of speech will make the community 'slow' in both delivering meaning and also earning a living because they will be 'abandoned' by the fast stream (Junaidi Kassim, personal communication, 31 March 2014).

There are basic similarities in culture, language (Malay) and religion (Islam) between Malaysia and Indonesia (Yaakub, 2009). The Malays in Malaysia and Sumatrans share some cultural traits that are tied to certain geographical areas (Liow, 2005). Indonesians perceive people with such cultural characteristics as 'Suku Melayu' (tribal Malays), with these groups residing in the coastal areas of Sumatra, the Riau Islands and Kalimantan (Milner, 2011). 'The tribal populations of Sumatra, both current and former, live mostly in those same areas today, […] speak Malay or other Malayic dialects as their own languages. Although current Malaysian usage would not accord the label *Orang Melayu* to these Malay-speaking tribal populations, they are sometimes called "Melayu" in Sumatra […] and there seems little reason to doubt that they are indeed descendants of the same population from which the majority of the Malays "proper" also descended' (Benjamin, 2002: 26).

Wee (1988) maintains that in the Riau Archipelago – an area which the *Orang Melayu* themselves regard as one of their major centres of population – the local Malays sometimes distinguish between *Melayu asli* (indigenous Malays) and *Melayu murni* (pure Malays). The *Melayu asli* 'are members of locally derived populations, often tribal in social organization', while the *Melayu murni* 'are mostly higher-ranking people of exogenous non-*Melayu* (usually Bugis) origin, whose members have often tried to decide for the other Malays just what constitutes cultural Malayness' (Benjamin, 2015: 8). Malayness is not restricted to the Malays proper, so Leach (1950) coined the label 'para-Malay'. Para-Malays (widely found in Borneo, Sumatra and Peninsula Malaysia) share the same general background as the *Orang Melayu*, but they lack fulfilment of one or more of the criteria (Islam, ethnic identity, language, the centralized state) of full Malayness.

In the following section, I discuss the Malay community in Pahang, followed by an introduction to the Pahang River.

1.3.1 The Malay community in Pahang villages

Malay inhabitants of Pahang villages claim descent from people born in Sumatra, which corresponds with Linehan's view (1936: 189-190) that the Malay population living near the upper and middle stretches of the Pahang River is of Minang origin. Some of the Malays themselves claim that they are of aboriginal, specifically Semelai (Orang Asli) origin. The Malay settlement of Pahang involved a degree of intermarriage with the Orang Asli and with

other pre-Melaka peoples already present in the region (Benjamin, 1997). Gianno (1990) came across several Malay-speaking populations in Pahang villages that had previously spoken Aslian.

Similar to communities in other states in Malaysia, the populations residing in traditional villages by the Pahang River have their own active and continuing cultures. The cultural continuity in their communities has attracted several academics to conduct studies in their compounds, but unfortunately a study of their music is not among them. Four main aspects of life have been emphasized in studies on Pahang River communities: education, social involvement and relationships, safety and living conditions (Shaffril et al., 2011). All four of these aspects are linked to the Pahang communities' positive relationships with their family members and neighbours. Through the studies, it was established that Malays in Pahang have average contentment levels. Abu Samah et al. (2013) conducted a study to ascertain the thoughts of the rural community that live near to the Tembeling and Pahang Rivers concerning their relationship with these rivers. In terms of socio-economic activities on the Tembeling River, locals generate income through a number of activities including eco-tourism, such as by offering water rafting and boat rides. As well as eco-tourism, the river is a source of protein. A small number of locals are river fishermen, on either a full- or part-time basis.

The Pahang River is still relied upon by several community groups who reside by the river. The Pahang is famous for its aquaculture, especially well-known freshwater species such as the *patin* (silver catfish). Some districts, among them Pekan and Temerloh, are known for their aquaculture products. Today, Pahang remains the leading state in terms of entrepreneurial aquaculture activities in Peninsula Malaysia (Department of Fisheries Malaysia, 2010). The river also provides transportation for some groups in the community. To conclude, Malays in Pahang villages have a close relationship with the Pahang River. Their daily activities are inevitably associated with the river as it is the lifeblood of community.

In the next section, I will elaborate briefly on the geography of the Pahang River and the position of the river in relation to the community.

1.3.2 The Pahang River

One of the most prominent features of the natural environment in the state of Pahang is the Pahang River (Map 3). The river basin is located in the

eastern part of the state and the Pahang is the longest river in Peninsula Malaysia (Tachikawa et al., 2004; Md Yaasin et al., 2013).

Map 3: Location of the Pahang River

The Pahang River covers 459 kilometres, covering a total area of 25,600 square kilometres (Shaffril et al., 2011). The river flows in a south-easterly and southerly direction passing through major towns such as Kuala Lipis, Jerantut and Temerloh, before finally turning eastward at Mengkarak in the central south and flowing through Pekan near the coast before discharging into the South China Sea (Md Yaasin et al., 2011). The lands surrounding the river include forests, rubber plantations, other rivers and marshes, agricultural land and urban areas (Tachikawa et al., 2004). There are two natural lakes in

Peninsula Malaysia, Chini Lake and Bera Lake, which are also found in the Pahang River basin.

For hundreds of years, the oldest Malay settlements were concentrated along the Pahang River. Prior to the establishment of roads, the river was the commercial highway. A water vehicle known as a *prahu kajang* (a boat made of waterproof matting) was widely used, especially to transport agricultural and forestry products for regional trade. It was not until the early twentieth century that major roads were constructed and surfaced with tarmac, offering a new form of communication in many rural areas and replacing the traditional role of rivers (Abu Samah et al., 2013).

Even though tarmacked roads are the predominant form of transport today, village dwellers still rely on the river to travel to certain places by boat. In Temerloh, water taxi services offered by several individuals are available from the Esplanade. Those villagers who live some distance from the town have to cross the river by boat to purchase their daily necessities (Roslan Madun, personal communication, 23 October 2013). Up until the Second World War, the Pahang River was alive with boat traffic.

Today, the river is still used for transportation but carries only a light flow of villagers going to and from farms, to nearby markets or fishing. River transit is sometimes dangerous or impossible, especially in years when water levels become too low during the dry season, or during the rainy season when the water is swift flowing. The Pahang basin experienced severe flooding at the end of 2014, during my field research. This was caused by non-stop rain falling for more than two weeks on the east coast of Malaysia. The local news reported that the 2014 *bah besar* or huge flood had caused the destruction of hundreds of houses, the breakdown of fish farming, the deaths of cattle and the destruction of many fruit trees. Villagers were evacuated to school buildings and community halls and the community's everyday life was disrupted. As I observed, no musical activity took place during this difficult time or in the subsequent several months as the villagers recovered from the tragedy.

In summary, for hundreds of years, the Pahang River has been a vital corridor for people and their goods. Today, the river still provides an important link and transports people from one place to another. During the monsoon season, the rain contributes to massive floods in Pahang. The flooding that occurred in 2014 was more intense than in previous years, reaching an unprecedented level. It had an immediate impact, including human death, loss of livestock, destruction of crops and damage to property. Musicians were among the victims to face flood losses. Musical activities stopped because

musicians feared the destruction of their musical instruments after the Pahang River burst its banks. The floodwater covered large areas of villages, pouring over music training areas and causing significant damage.

In the following section, I discuss several previous musical ethnography studies in Pahang as well as those covering other regions of Malaysia.

1.4 Previous studies of musical ethnography in Malaysia

The information in this section will focus on several published works that can be divided into two categories. First, I will discuss several studies of musical ethnography in Pahang, before evaluating studies of musical ethnography that focus on other parts of West Malaysia.

1.4.1 Studies of musical ethnography in Pahang

Several published works have dealt generally with Pahang music, but with incomplete discussions of vocal music. In her work titled 'An introduction to the major instruments and forms of traditional Malay music', Matusky (1985) discussed a vocal form of storytelling (*penglipur lara*), an important oral tradition among the Malays in Pahang. Through it, a folk music tradition has developed to accompany the telling of folk tales. There are five components to the storytelling: the use of stylized language, singing, chanting, musical accompaniment and drama. The two musical instruments that accompany the storytelling in Pahang are the *rebab* and the *rebana*.

As well as storytelling, the Muslim devotional genre of *zikir* was also discussed. This involves Arabic texts from the *Kitab Barzanji* (an Islamic book praising the Prophet Muhammad) being sung by groups of men and accompanied by a *rebana besar*. In 2003, the Pahang Cultural and Arts Department published a work entitled '*Koleksi pengenalan tarian dan muzik tradisional Negeri Pahang*' (A collection of introductions to dances and traditional music in Pahang), which introduced fourteen types of dance music common in Pahang. I consider this work a compilation of dance music as it only offers a brief description of each song. Even though this work is non-ethnographic, it has contributed to my knowledge of song forms, including *sewang* by the Orang Asli Jah Hut and Orang Asli Temiar, *anak indung* by the Malays of Ulu Tembeling (upstream), *dikir rebana* by the Malays in Temerloh and *gamelan* songs by cultural groups in the district of Pekan, Pahang.

In addition, Said (1997) has written two prominent works on Pahang musical culture. In his book '*Lagu-Lagu tradisional rakyat Pahang*' (Pahang traditional folk songs), Said discusses a number of songs he learned of during his ethnographic work between 1977 and 1983. Throughout his research, Said centred his attention on several villages along the Pahang River. The songs that are discussed in this book include *ugam mayang* (healing songs that request the help of seven supernatural princesses), *dikir rebana* (religious songs accompanied by a frame drum) and *jampi serapah* (incantations). He also explores folk songs including 'Indung-Indung' (Mother, Mother), 'Puteri Walinong Sari' (Princess of Walinong Sari), 'Burung Kenek-Kenek' (a well-known tune with extempore verses to the refrain of *pesan datuk nenek*), 'Lagu Orang Muda' (Tune for the Young), 'Anak Ayam Turun Sepuluh' (a song sung to children), and *burdah* (an Arabic song form from the *Kitab Barzanji*). The use of the *Kitab Barzanji* as a singing text is still significant today in amateur music genres and will be explored in Chapter 5 of this book.

Seven years later, in 2004, Said published '*Nyanyian rakyat khazanah bangsa yang hilang*' (The loss of folk singing as a national treasure), in which he briefly discussed a singing tradition called *penglipur lara* (folk romance). Historically, this singing tradition was popular among village-dwelling Malays and was performed to the accompaniment of several instruments including a *rebana*, a *rebab* and a *serunai*. In this work, he examined two song types that target specific audiences: first, songs for children, and second, songs for adults. The forms of song studied are various; some use stanzas of *pantun*, others were unstructured or freestyle poetry. He includes several examples in the work, including extended narrative songs such as 'Dayang Keknong', 'Burung Agut' and 'Anak Raja Bugis'; children's songs such as 'Tebang Tebu', 'Sapu Rengit' and 'Pak Sang Bagak'; and work songs such as 'Siul Kalui', 'Tepuk Daun' and 'Hitam Manis'. Thus, these written works incompletely describe the musical culture of Pahang. No reference was made in them to singing/vocal forms, their social and cultural contexts, or to the participation of the community through the songs. Thus, these works should only be used as a brief guide to the musical culture of Pahang.

1.4.2 Works on musical ethnography in other parts of West Malaysia

Besides published works on Pahang music, I also explored several works on Malay music in other parts of the peninsula. In a study titled 'Music in Kelantan, Malaysia and some of its cultural implications', Malm (1974) gave an account of music in the north-eastern part of the peninsula from an

ethnographic viewpoint. In the same area, Matusky (1992) and Hamzah (2014) studied Kelantan's shadow play and its music. In 'Malaysian shadow play and music: continuity of an oral tradition', Matusky explained that Malay shadow play is a performance tradition that reflects deeper-level cultural ideas. Meanwhile, in her dissertation titled 'The *angin* of the *dalang* in the Kelantan shadow play', Hamzah revealed the many aspects of the *dalang* (puppeteer) who manipulates the puppet, narrates the story, sings the *mantera* (magical charm) and controls the accompanying musicians. Shadow play adopts the characters, songs and clothing of the performance of Siamese *mandora* (an operatic dance performance using wooden masks). *Mandora* is a form of Malay traditional music and will be described in Chapter 2.

Dobbs (1972), with his dissertation 'Music in the multi-racial society of West Malaysia', contributed to my knowledge of the social and religious environment of the music of the peninsula, which reflects influences chiefly from the Middle East, Thailand and Indonesia. An American influence is also prevalent in many aspects of life. Although Dobbs's primary concern was music, the close relationship between the peninsula's traditional music and ritual made it difficult to write exclusively of that one art.

Through his work titled 'Idiosyncratic aspects of Malaysian music: the roles of the *kompang* in Malay society', Abdullah (2004) suggested that Malaysian culture can be described from two different perspectives: adaptation and idiosyncratic. From the adaptation perspective, he discussed how original music or musical instruments from outside the culture have been adapted, developed and changed based on the local context in terms of vocal arrangement, mode, playing techniques, ornamentation and decoration. From the idiosyncratic perspective, the music or musical instruments still preserve their originality; the local people still use the same types of instruments and play the music as it was originally written. Abdullah used the *kompang*, a musical instrument which originated in the Arab world but is used in West Malaysia, as an example that fits both perspectives. The *kompang* accompanies singing performances during the wedding procession, on religious occasions and at many new events. In the present study, singing accompanied by the *kompang* is seen as a ritual that opens a commemorative event (Chapter 3).

Inspired by her case study titled 'Activism in Southeast Asian ethnomusicology: empowering youths to revitalize traditions and bridge cultural barriers', Tan (2008) contributed to my contextualization of the involvement of young people in performances and singing workshops. Tan looked at how a heritage project in Penang known as *Anak-Anak Kota* (Children of the City) has created awareness among young people of the

importance of preserving their traditions. Through this platform young people are able to learn and appreciate their own and other cultures. Tan concluded that the project helps to revitalize community performances through promoting musical forms, instruments (a combination of Malay drums, gongs, Chinese woodblocks and Western violins) and genres that attract audiences.

Ross's work widened my understanding of musical ethnography in the south of Thailand near the Malaysian border. With extensive experience of travelling and staying with performers to observe their musical activities and everyday lives, Ross produced a 2011 dissertation titled '*Rong Ngeng*: the transformation of Malayan social dance music in Thailand since the 1930s'. Ross provided an interesting discussion on *rong ngeng* music as a popular medium for rural courtship. *Rong ngeng* is considered a rite of passage for many young men and women. It encompasses a diverse collection of tunes lifted from a combination of Western music and many local and regional music styles that gives it a distinctive character. Slow, ballad-like poetic exchanges from Melakan *dondang sayang*, the Arab-Malay song dance from *zapin* and syncopated rhythms from India could all be called *rong ngeng*.

In 'Music and cline of Malayness: sounds of egalitarianism and ranking', Benjamin's (2019a) explanation of the notion of Malayness in music contributed to my understanding. Benjamin discussed different varieties of Malay music that encode a cline of Malayness marked by varying degrees of melismatic elaboration of the transition between melody notes among the Malay groups of tribal-Malays, *rakyat-Melayu* (peasant Malays), modern urban Malays, and Bugis-descended royals and aristocrats in southern Peninsula Malaysia, the Riau Islands and Sumatra. Benjamin's outcomes are worth mentioning here. According to his findings, the performance of the song 'Serampang Laut' by a tribal-Malay group lacks any elaboration of the transition between the notes of the melody. However, a version of the song performed by a group of *rakyat-Melayu* demonstrated a moderate but clear degree of melismatic elaboration. The melismatic elaboration of the movement is yet more obvious when a modern urban professional singer sings the same song but in a *dangdut*-like rhythm and with different words. These three versions, with their increasing degrees of melismatic elaboration, 'correspond to the different positions of performers along the cline of Malayness' (Benjamin, 2019a: 101). The cline expands into the aristocratic and royal domain, as illustrated by *ghazal* songs sung by royal Bugis-descended singers. *Ghazal* performances display rich melismatic elaboration amplified by the decorative use of vibrato. Benjamin concludes that at the royal and modern-urban end of the cline the orientation is outward-looking (transcendental) and

hierarchical; meanwhile, at the tribal end of the cline, the orientation is inwards, turning away from the outer world.

In summary, an examination of these works has demonstrated that the ideas or contexts of Malay (traditional) music in West Malaysia have been influenced by music from many parts of the world as the Malays live in a multiracial society. The works mentioned here are significant as they also provide accounts of the social and cultural environments of the music that forms the focus of this study.

1.5 Theoretical perspectives

An important way of understanding community is through its noise (Attali, 1985), which is to say, through the types of noises the community makes. The importance of examining the cultures of sound lies in comprehending what forms an individual's or a people's identity. What sorts of theoretical frameworks might help to answer the question about the cultural meanings (and historical resonances) of songs and music practice in the context of Malays in Pahang? One can perceive that the relationship between songs and the people who produce, perform and utilize them is central to the sociology of music.

Music is not just the sounds it makes. 'People like and value some musics and not others as much because of their social and educational backgrounds, and because of the associations that accompany music, as because of musical style itself' (Ellis, 2009: 43). My study is grounded in ethnomusicology and anthropology in a broader sense. In the following sections, I discuss some considerations and theoretical notions used in this study.

1.5.1 Historical overview

My study is ethnographic rather than historical in method. However, in ethnography it is appropriate to present an overview of the historical context as this enables readers to interpret in a more informed manner the significance of the contemporary music practices described (Waterman, 1990). A historical overview contributes to the framework of my study on the past musical identity and social environment of the Malay world, of which Pahang is a part, as will be discussed in Chapter 2.

A number of Nicolas's works have been influential in this context. 'The musics of Southeast Asia developed into at least three distinct areas: firstly, the village which until today remains the repository of ancient religious and musical practices; secondly, the courts; and thirdly, the temples, which together established a new form of centralised organization and power, and consequently assumed the position as centres of musical activity, where musicians and dancers, players and puppeteers were employed in the service of the ruler, the aristocracy and the religious hierarchy' (Nicolas, 2011: 348).

Nicolas (2017) has also demonstrated that there were several types of music in existence on the Thai-Malay Peninsula in the thirteenth century. The oldest music was played by the Orang Asli, who arrived in the area in prehistoric times. The second was a type of music played at the Hindu-Buddhist temples, as exemplified by the Hindu temples in Lembah Bujang. The identity of this community remains somewhat problematic as it is unclear whether they were Mon, Indian or Malay. The third type of music was more diverse and found in the villages inhabited by the new settlers. The fourth type of music was played in the emerging courts of the Malay rulers. Finally, the fifth type of music was played by the Chinese in their own communities and temples.

Malay classical literature gives valuable data on past music forms. In searching for musical terms, Nicolas (2017) has surveyed a number of literary works dating from the fourteenth to seventeenth centuries and, as a result of this historical approach, has created a list of such terms (Nicolas 1994: 105-121). In this particular study, I aim to explore the ways in which legacies from the past can still be heard in the present and to consider the extent to which musical practices in the present are shaped by ideas, beliefs and feelings about the past.

Inspired by Nicolas' prominent works, relevant Malay literary works dating from the late fourteenth century to the late nineteenth century are cited. Musical terms in Malay literary works can be interpreted as having been known for a period of time in either musical circles or literary culture.

1.5.2 Music as a cultural system

Musical culture is a concept that has a long history in ethnomusicology. Merriam (1964) approached the interrelationships between music and culture from several directions. He argued that music should be studied 'in' culture. Musical culture encompasses sounds, ideas, behaviour and

materials: instruments, clothing and paraphernalia (compact discs, posters, magazines and other ephemera). Many researchers have sought to rework the relationship between music and culture.

Herndon and McLeod (1980) integrate the two camps of ethnomusicology that privilege music as sound and music as social behaviour in the notion of musical culture. One of their principles was that music should be studied 'in' culture in specific contexts, and 'as' culture as an area of purposeful activity. Nettl (1983) essentially argues that music is a particular domain of culture, a domain that requires special attention but must also be contemplated in relation to other domains of culture and behaviour.

Titon et al. (2005) drew on models for investigating music in contexts that situate it as a fundamental feature of cultural life. In many ways, notions of musical culture are embedded in the concepts of dynamism and change central to contemporary thinking on culture. Ethnomusicological investigations frequently focus on groups or areas when interpreting musical cultures, equating a 'culture' with a 'community' (Rice, 2003: 151). Inspired by Fenn's (2004) ethnographic work on Malawian music, I have reinvigorated the concept of musical culture in my present study by presenting an analytical model that emphasizes the process and the products constituent of musical culture. Two concepts form the basis for musical culture: style and space.

1.5.2.1 Style

A characteristically defining feature of post-Second World War music genres has been the stylistic innovations that have grown up around them. In the context of Malaysia, music styles since the 1950s have been determined by the visual style of the singers/musicians associated with certain music genres. The significance of music-based style has been mapped in relation to youth, first by the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies in the 1970s and later in Hebdige's work (1979). For Hebdige, style is at once 'refusal and appropriation', a 'profoundly superficial level of appearance' (Hebdige, 1979: 17). Style is a visual appendage of youth subcultures and, it is argued, marks out initiatives of resistance to an array of social disorders from class inequality and unemployment (Jefferson, 1976) to racism and social exclusion (Chambers, 1976). This concept clearly applies to my research on the punk-rock music community in Pahang (Chapter 4) and their ways of dressing, moving, singing and music making.

However, 'the situating of music-related styles as youth centered seems far less productive as an analytical strategy for understanding the significance of these styles as cultural markers of identity' (Bennett, 2013: 68). There have been attempts to position established theories of style that have been applied in the study of youth culture in relation to ageing groups. 'There is a popular assumption that subculturalists grow up and out of their respective scenes, that youthful music communities are a meaningful but relatively inconsequential phase on the path to the more serious endeavours of adulthood' (Haenfler, 2012: 11). Such assumptions are applicable to present-day *kugiran* musicians in Pahang (Chapter 4), given their claim to music genres from the 1950s. *Kugiran* musicians deploy their 1950s' musical identity through a variety of stylistic expressions, while simultaneously toning down the music/performance through the use of traditional elements. This echoes Bennett (2006: 222), who said, 'many of the features attributed to youth music are not necessarily regarded with the same importance by the older followers of 1950s' music genres'. 'Individuals are reflexive in their appropriation and use of particular musical and stylistic resources' (Bennett, 2006: 223). The meanings of style are contextual and change over the course of one's career. Thus performing 1950s' music is part of 'proving' the authenticity of their youth.

Musical styles connect performers with a meaningful past, longevity and authenticity (Haenfler, 2012); thus, in many cases, musicians and singers in Pahang hold very similar views regarding displays of style, seeing them as necessary or relevant while finding satisfaction in presenting their music. For traditional musicians/singers (Chapter 3), wearing traditional costumes indicates an emphasis on identity and symbolizes a connection with the past, as well as representing nostalgia. In most areas, style helps to facilitate an imagined community. Style is also seen as a legacy.

From the perspective of 'straight edge' followers, Haenfler (2012) highlighted how the wearing of straight edge identifiers helps to keep the movement's legacy alive. This aligns closely with the ideas of traditional musicians (Chapter 3) and the groups of older women associated with Islam-originated songs (Chapter 5) who feel a responsibility for the longevity of old songs.

1.5.2.2 Space

Relph (1976) outlined various kinds of culturally conceived space when he described the distinctions between actual space, symbolic space, cognitive space, sacred space and discursive space. Forman (1997) added to the list 'the recent phenomenon of cyberspace or electronic virtual spaces that exist within digital programs and electronic communication networks' (Forman, 1997: 18). Many researchers have investigated issues of space as they describe contextualized musical practice. In ethnographic descriptions, musical events occur in particular places. Descriptions indirectly connect musical practice/performance to the surrounding space. Some researchers have created frameworks that describe music within the context of a space. Investigating the relationship between song and space forms the fundamental interpretive core of Stone's (1988) study, which established that the notion of space seems to be a crucial feature of many African performances. Musical events are seen as occasions for performances at which people move from ordinary communication methods to extraordinary communication forms (Stone, 1988: 3) which are designed to be performative (Herzfeld, 1988).

Seeger (2004) provided detailed ethnographic evidence of specific spatial experiences related to musical practices within the Suyá community in Brazil. He offered spatial representations of how the Suyá community operates during the Mouse's song, which is performed as part of the Mouse ceremony rite of passage. Seeger stated that 'singing and silence were part of the constant recreation of significant space' (Seeger, 2004: 69).

A large body of literature was reviewed from the interdisciplinary fields of musical events (as music spaces) and music and identity. Based on the earliest studies, two main themes were found. Firstly, musical events (festivals) were seen as outward manifestations of community identity, functioning as image-maintainers or image-makers (Delamere, 2001; Quinn, 2005).

Secondly, musical events were seen to contribute to the reinforcement of cohesiveness within a community, thus strengthening the bonds between members (Ekman, 1999; De Bres and Davis, 2001). The field of ethnomusicology has made great progress in theorizing about musical places in terms of communities. Communities, including the Malays in Pahang villages, use a variety of spaces to house their collective memories. These spaces of collective memory have a strong musical component. Raimondi (2012) provided ethnographic evidence of a musical place (for example, the home-like quality of a lounge) as being a place to relive and re-experience emotional

memories. Such a musical place holds emotions and memories for its community.

Over the years, advances in technology have led to changes in how music is performed. Some literature has helped my understanding of the technology of the Internet as an interactive space. Technology influences the way people consume, create and share art, media and performance. Negroponte (1995) suggested that the Internet has become more socially oriented since the 1990s. His suggestion is supported by the development of Web 2.0 which, as Dinucci (1999) observed, provides more interactive content, consistent updates, and a more reliable and constant real-time connection to other people. Before the year 2000, the Internet was mostly a publishing medium; since then, it has become more communication-oriented (Manovich, 2008).

Other spaces relevant here are Facebook and YouTube. Facebook is the number one social networking site and has gained immense popularity. Nadkarni and Hofmann (2011) suggested that Facebook use is motivated by two primary needs: the need to belong and the need for self-presentation. Features to facilitate interaction include the wall, statuses, events, photos, video, chat, groups and the 'like'. YouTube is a video-sharing website founded in February 2005 and has become the fourth most-visited website in Malaysia (Alexa, 2019), after Facebook, Twitter and Google.

Through YouTube, users can share professional content, that is, user-produced content (Ding et al., 2011). Content, including local music, can be accessed by a global audience (Yu & Schroeder, 2018). Liikkanen and Salovaara's 2015 study considered perspectives of online music listening and watching videos with a specific focus on users' interactions and engagement patterns with recorded music. They identified that watching YouTube videos has become one of the most popular activities on the Internet.

1.5.3 Talent as representation

One of the prominent cultural notions relating to musical practice in Pahang is that of musical talent. An important aspect of the notion of talent as a cultural symbol is the fact that it brings about a discussion of social esteem, which is fundamental to any social process. Talent is assumed to be a special faculty for a specific activity, a gift that is conceptually contrasted with learned skill. In the music field, talent is viewed as being similar to an inherited position. There is a notion that an individual may well have a notable amount of talent yet not be an accomplished musician due to insufficient training. 'One

person's talent is something which is attributed to him or her by someone else and the person making the attribution of talent becomes an important element of the person's very talent' (Kingsbury, 1984: 59). In relation to my research, the village community validates the recognition and categorization of Pahang musicians: they are either considered professional or semi-professional, or amateur. The underlying notion is one of a hierarchy of terms acting as a mirror of a musician's musical values and cultural identity.

Drinker's study (1967) added to my understanding of the difference in meaning between the terms 'amateur' and 'professional' in regard to musicians. The word 'amateur' is taken from the Latin '*amator*', meaning a lover, and is similar to the Italian 'dilettante', which carries the definition of one who delights or has an interest in music. In his *Dictionary of Psychology*, Warren defined interest as 'a feeling, which accompanies special attention to some content', or 'an attitude characterized by focusing attention upon certain cognitive data' (Warren, 1934: 371). Thus, attention is a prime factor contributing to interest. Birdie explained what constitutes interest: 'choice, persistence, remembrance, success, learning, set/predisposition and emotion' (Harriman, 1946: 306). Unlike interest, talent is not transitory.

In music, amateur and professional musicians demonstrate different attitudes towards music (Juniu et al., 1996). Musical amateurs 'are serious in their participation but they do not make a living from the activity' (Juniu et al., 1996: 45). For amateurs, musical performance is more likely to be considered a leisure activity, as well as providing them with an opportunity to display their proficiency. The musical participation of amateurs is perceived as voluntary, enjoyable and fun. Amateurs can be just as committed to the activity as professional musicians. Professional musicians are 'significantly more extrinsically motivated than amateurs' (Juniu et al., 1996: 52). Professionals also perceive obligation and responsibility as connected to their musical participation. It is common to say that 'professionals make a living from the music activity and amateurs engage in music just for fun' (Juniu et al., 1996: 46).

The differentiation between professional and amateur musicians, however, has not been clearly defined by these works. Drinker suggested that, 'professional and amateur should not be thought of as opposites' (Drinker, 1967: 75). Furthermore, in Fraser's work on Minangkabau music, she asserted that, 'the most decisive factor in whether a musician is considered a professional or not is the way the activity is conceptualized and framed within the specific ethnographic and historical context' (Fraser, 2015: 35).

‘A judgment of musical talent is not something which is ever proved or disproved [... but rather] is an aesthetic judgment’ (Kingsbury, 1984: 69). Kingsbury also added that a musician’s talent should be regarded as ‘the property of cultural ideology [rather] than as a property of characteristic traits of the individual person’ (Kingsbury, 1984: 71). Talent represents a cultural experience of social hierarchy. In this study on Malay singing/songs in Pahang villages, I am very much concerned with individuals’/groups’ musical experiences in the social life within which they take place. The structure of such experiences sugggests a perceived structure of society as well as of musical practice.

1.5.4 Community formation around music

My study is about musicians and their communities. I find ‘community’ as a useful term for describing the gatherings of musicians and audiences where performance of genres and a common experience become the basis for a sense of solidarity. Some scholarly sources have contributed to the notion of community formation, which is also central to my research. Community has become a topic of study (Tsing, 2005; Comaroff and Comaroff, 2009). As well as face-to-face interaction, in the post-modern setting, debates about community centre on notions of virtual community created through the Internet, social networking sites and digital media (Boellstorff, 2010).

Music can be the primary catalyst for social interaction. Putnam (2000) notes that cultural activities are one of the best ways to build a sense of community. The musical genres discussed in this book provide an essential window into the creation of community, as well as the connection between a community and the unique networks it establishes. Social interaction through music ‘is a proactive process of [individuals] interjecting themselves into their community’ (Henderson and Hodges, 2006: 67). Thus, in Chapter 3 to 5, I document musicians and their audience members who, through their music making, engage in the process of community formation around music.

1.6 Methodology

The question of how communities are selected for study has never occupied the methodological space. In the early years of the field of history, communities were selected based on serendipitous encounter with a particular musical style.

Likewise, in my situation, I became fascinated with the songs of and musical community in Pahang after I was introduced to two prominent Pahang traditional singers, Aripin Said and Roslan Madun, in November 2012. At this time, I was a contestant in a national traditional poetry singing competition. Said and Madun acted as instructors for the participants.

Since then, I have developed my relationships with Said and Madun and my friendships with both of them grew stronger when they emerged as major informants for my research about Malay vocal music in Pahang, which began ten months after that competition. In Said's work 'Nyanyian Rakyat Khazanah Bangsa Yang Hilang' ('The Loss of Folk Singing as a National Treasure'), he stated that community in Pahang villages is rich in musical tradition (Said, 2004). It was through these men's contacts that I learned about other Pahang musicians from different musical genres and contexts.

Several phases of field study were conducted. A pilot study as a point of departure was conducted from October to November 2013 to familiarize myself with the region and the context of musical performances. I also benefited from the prior development of theoretical proposals to guide my data collection and analysis. My investigation then continued with a nine-month field study conducted from June 2014 to February 2015, and a three-month field study carried out from April to June 2016. So as to enrich my understanding, I continued communicating with some informants throughout the writing of this book through several conduits: meetings, Facebook, phone calls and Whatsapp messages.

During the field studies I typically lived with the community, observing and recording a number of musical events, and interviewing musicians, patrons and audience members. As an active traditional music performer myself, I was able to participate in some of the musical performances that took place during the course of my field studies. I was fortunate to be able to learn the necessary songs in a short space of time. I believe that by performing together with the Pahang musicians, I gained a clearer insight into how they interpret their own music and meanings. In the following section, I will outline discuss the three methodological components used in this work, which are participant observation, interviewing and textual analysis.

1.6.1 Participant observation

Much of the information included in this book comes from personal experience and participant observations over the series of field studies. As a

traditional singer, I was involved in several cultural singing performances together with traditional Pahang singers. Within this context, I was able to enhance my understanding of Pahang musical culture and a variety of music genres. The cultural singing performances were not limited to locations within the Pahang region, but also took place in other regions of Malaysia including Kuala Lumpur, Johor, Melaka, Selangor and Penang. While conducting my field studies, I was given the opportunity to lead discussions on traditional Malay poetry (*syair*, *nazam*, *seloka* and *gurindam*) alongside Roslan Madun in schools and universities.

As well as contributing to an array of singing performances with Pahang traditional singers, I paid several visits to wedding celebrations, concerts, Sunday markets, district festivals, singing competitions, home-based music training sessions, karaoke restaurants, school music rooms, music training centres and music shops. All the singing performances that I attended were recorded and all appropriate vernacular texts (taking this term from Wallach 2002), including banners, posters, stickers, videos, compact disc covers and advertisements of music concerts, were collected to complement my observation.

With their permission, I spent time with singers/musicians, patrons and audience members with the aim of understanding the normative patterns of musical and social behaviours that characterize all events of a particular type. The ultimate goal was to reach and produce an interpretative description of the cultural meaning of a particular singing/music event.

Analysing these musical events allowed me to understand how these singers/musicians and this community perform songs and why they do so in this particular way. With the aim of understanding their musical culture, I learned to sing their songs and play traditional instruments, including the gong, *gendang*, *kompang* and *rebana*. In addition to learning songs and playing traditional instruments, I learned an old dance called *tari pelanduk* (mouse-deer dance). Traditional groups perform *tari pelanduk* as a supplementary element to song performance.

1.6.2 Interview sessions

I collected historical and singing data for this study in the primary form of oral interviews with Malay-speaking informants. I have categorized the interviewees into three groups. The first group consists of musicians and singing performers. The second group consists of audience members including

villagers, concertgoers, schoolteachers, patrons and state officials. Equally important, I also analysed the responses of a third group consisting of *budayawan* (cultural authorities).

The interviews were conducted in environments selected by the informants, including their homes, music practice areas, coffee shops and at performances. No formulated or structured questions were prepared before the interview sessions; there was simply an open discussion with the informants regarding the historical development of singing culture in Pahang, and their views on related topics. Impromptu interview sessions were also conducted after cultural events.

Conversations with informants continued via electronic communications, including email and text messaging on specific matters while assessing field notes and video recordings. This follow-up ensured that my interpretation of the recorded performances was in line with local supposition. I also made sure that my informants were willing to share information without compulsion and hesitation.

All the interviews were recorded, documented in video recordings and transcribed where appropriate, as well as being transliterated for future reference.

1.6.3 Textual analysis

Two types of textual analysis were used in this study: analysis of written texts (old and contemporary) and analysis of audio-visual texts, those recorded both by myself and by others (with their permission). For the written texts, I referred to a number of published and unpublished works from university and state libraries, archives, online books, websites and social media. Written texts also included those transcribed from speech, thoughts and singing performances (song texts) collected in the field. Song texts revealed literary behaviour, which could be analysed in terms of both structure and content.

Songs in Pahang villages are not only performed in Malay, but also in Arabic. The Arabic sung texts were from the popular Islamic book *Kitab Barzanji*, which, to enhance my understanding I read on my return from my field studies. To enrich my understanding of singing in the past, I depended on chronological data provided by the website of the Malay Concordance Project (MCP). The MCP website contains more than 150 works of Malay classical

literature. Some of these works are useful in studying forms of song and musical contexts dating from as early as the late fourteenth century.

A number of audio-visual texts were used in this study to give greater context to my research. First and foremost, I referred to an array of video recordings of singing performances captured by myself whilst in the field. I also studied videos recorded by individuals prior to this study (with the producer's permission). I borrowed four films of traditional Pahang music and dance performances from the Malay Documentation Centre of the Malaysian Institute of Language and Literature, Kuala Lumpur. I referred to these films to supplement my understanding of the traditional music that has been performed by Malays in Pahang villages for more than a century. Several music albums were also listened to and reviewed for this study. I learned the songs on these albums and have provided interpretations of the songs' lyrics. Equally importantly, I also analysed music videos uploaded by fans to online social media, including Facebook and YouTube.

1.7 Organization of the book

The book is divided into six chapters, including an introduction and conclusion.

This chapter has laid the foundation of this study, introducing the background of the Pahang Malays, especially those who live in villages, and the theoretical concepts of singing/vocal genres and identity.

Chapter 2 examines the past musical identity and social environment of the Malay world, of which Pahang is a part, with the aim of understanding past songs and the contexts of their performance.

The next two chapters, 3 and 4, discuss the social contexts of the musical genres performed by professional and semi-professional musicians. Chapter 3 focuses on traditional music and regional pop music, while Chapter 4 is devoted to *kugiran* music and punk rock. The formation of communities around each musical genre will be discussed in these chapters.

Chapter 5 discusses amateur musicians and their songs: *nazam berendoi* and *dikir rebana*. The chapter's analysis encompasses the cultural contexts of the songs as well as the formation of community through the songs. In the same chapter, I discuss engagement and music consumption by amateur women aged seventeen to twenty-three. This discussion highlights the feminine

nature of the meaning they give to the music they practice or listen to and how they engage in music as part of their leisure time.

Last but not least, Chapter 6 discusses the major findings in relation to the research questions that have been presented in this book. Four points are discussed in this chapter: the social status of musicians, continuity and discontinuity in genres, gender-related songs and community formation. As part of my analysis, I relate my findings on these points to current knowledge in the fields of musical ethnography and Malay studies.