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## Malay singing in Pahang villages: identity and practice

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## CHAPTER 3

# TRADITIONAL MUSIC AND REGIONAL POP MUSIC

### 3.1 Introduction

This chapter<sup>3</sup> focuses on two music genres: traditional music and regional pop music. I have combined these two musical styles in the same chapter as both genres are considered part of Pahang's musical heritage (Pahang art music). The fundamental question that guides the exploration in this chapter is: To what extent is today's traditional music and regional pop music similar to that of the past musical world discussed in Chapter 2? In an attempt to answer this question, in the following section, I shall discuss the background of each music genre.

#### 3.1.1 The background of traditional music

Malays in Pahang villages consider traditional music to include music inherited from the past and attached to older traditions. The term 'traditional music' refers to established musical traditions in which the music consists of vocals, instrumental accompaniment and instrumental dance music.

In the context of Pahang villages, traditional music can be categorized into five sub-categories: 1) *lagu tradisi rakyat* (traditional folk song), 2) *lagu rakyat baharu* (new folk song), 3) *lagu puisi tradisional* (traditional poetry song), 4) *lagu tarian* (dance music), and 5) *lagu puisi kontemporari* (contemporary poetry song). The frequent affiliation of traditional music with the state's customs and rituals ensures the continuity of the music with its past forms. The lyrics of traditional songs are 'of literary context that is an integral part of the music composition' (Proehoeman, 2012: 102).

Songs taking traditional forms continue to appear today as musicians are spurred on to attempt a return to the old or traditional ways of singing/music making. The musical community (including music practitioners)

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<sup>3</sup> A part of this chapter has been published as Shafa'atussara Silahudin. 2019. 'The formation of traditional music and regional pop music community in popular social media', *Malaysian Journal of Communication* 35,4: 422-439.

finds satisfaction in traditional songs that provide links to the past. Malay in Pahang, especially the older members of the community, believe that it is their obligation to perform historical songs/vocal genres at singing events as a way to ensure continuity with the past. They see it as their obligation and responsibility to make sure that their musical heritage survives and thrives.

Traditional songs serve a wide variety of objectives. Nostalgia, in vocal form, can act as a powerful tool for a community trying to understand its present existence. Furthermore, singers/music practitioners have long practised and used their abilities to ensure that traditional songs are remembered for a long time. They reinvent musical traditions in order to preserve their heritage. Traditional songs are performed at present-day singing events. Some songs can only be sung in specific contexts, while others are appropriate for a range of contexts.

To summarize, traditional songs have indeed become part of Malay traditions. The songs are remembered because they have a considerable impact on the community. Hence a number of strategies have been employed to create new opportunities for performance.

### **3.1.2 The background of regional pop music**

Regional pop (*pop daerah*) is another music genre that is well known in Pahang, with its first emergence being traced to the late 1970s, which was a period of technological change (including the emergence of cassette technology, although vinyl records were still used by some), and economic and organizational development in the music industry. 'Regional' in this context is classified as using the Pahang spoken language (Pahang dialect) in song lyrics. Borrowing the definition from Wallach, regional music is 'a catch-all category that includes every style of music sung in regional languages, from the most westernized pop to the most stable indigenous performance tradition' (Wallach, 2008: 34).

Pahang regional pop has been seen as innovative because the genre adopts multiple elements of global sounds. In other words, Pahang regional pop is a term that refers to a mixture of traditional verbal arts and national/international musical influences, with song lyrics in the Pahang dialect written by local songwriters and sung by local singers.

In summary, regional pop combines something new and modern with the use of traditional melodies. Pahang regional pop acknowledges modernity

in a local context without losing its local flavour. Its aesthetic aspects, including rhythm, melody, tempo and formal structure, however, are quite similar to traditional music.

### 3.2 Traditional music

During my musical fieldwork in Pahang villages, I encountered several individuals and groups of musicians who were directly involved in traditional music. However, only three prominent names will be discussed further in this chapter: Aripin Said, Roslan Madun and a group called Anak Kayan. All of them are professional musicians. To many, they are the backbone of traditional music in Pahang. Each of them has contributed to the practice of traditional music in a number of ways. All of them are motivated to work hard to develop the traditions of their music through creative activities that they feel are crucial to themselves and to those with whom they associate. The discussions that I had with them covered their backgrounds, modes of performance, music styles and repertoires, as well as the use (or reception) of their music and its purpose. In this section I will also look at the formation of community around different music genres.

#### 3.2.1 Aripin Said

Aripin Said (Figure 3.1) was born in 1948 in Temerloh, Pahang. He is a major performer of traditional music, not only among the Pahang people but also nationally, having been a constant advocate of *lagu tradisi rakyat* (traditional folk song) for more than fifty years. Aripin Said was raised by his grandmother, who was a midwife in their village. From a young age, Aripin Said frequently heard old folk stories, traditional axioms (*petua*) and Malay proverbs from his grandmother. Aripin Said began singing when he was a teenager, when he sang songs to entertain his friends. Aripin learned the songs from several village folk who were family friends. He also favoured playing traditional instruments, for instance, the *rebana*. Aripin is now a retired civil servant, having spent more than thirty years in service as a schoolteacher in several schools in Pahang and the neighbouring state of Terengganu.

Due to his passion and enthusiasm for traditional folk music, by the end of the 1960s, Aripin Said had started to collect the repertoires that were still being performed by people in villages at that time. This led to his involvement in traditional singing in the 1970s, driven by a desire to ensure the continued existence of traditional folk music in village communities. At that

time, he mainly performed his songs at school events and school pupils were among his first audiences. Even today, he is frequently invited to perform by government departments and private agencies.



Figure 3.1: Aripin Said on a single frame drum (*kompang*)

As a result, after thirty years of research into hundreds of traditional performances, Aripin Said has produced four albums of traditional folk songs, released in CD format (Figure 3.2). On these albums, he sings all of the songs and is accompanied by three traditional musical instruments: the Pahang single-framed drum), the flute and the double-framed drum. Aripin's first commercial album was released in 2002 (Figure 3.2, picture 1), produced by the Ministry of Culture, Arts and Tourism of Malaysia in Kuala Lumpur. The Pahang Corporation Library then released his three subsequent albums: two in 2008 (pictures 2 and 3), and one in 2012 (picture 4). It is immediately clear that one aspect of the albums that exhibits a local influence is the titling of the songs (see Appendix I), which are mostly story songs. 'Angin' (Wind), 'Puteri Kayang' (Princess of Paradise) and 'Indung-Indung' (Mother, Mother) are among Aripin Said's best-known songs. Most of the songs on his albums can be characterized as laments. The lyrics are mainly in the form of *pantun*, a traditional genre of poetry that uses a lot of allegory and metaphor. With the publication of traditional folk songs on CD, this subcategory of traditional music was no longer limited to live performance as it had been in the past. The consumption of traditional folk songs on CD also opened up the genre to a larger audience.



Figure 3.2: Front covers of Aripin Said's music albums

In 2015, Aripin Said was awarded the title of *Tokoh Warisan Kebangsaan* (National Heritage Figure) in the category of *Orang Hidup* (Living People) by the Malaysian government. This honorary award was introduced in 2007 by the Ministry of Tourism and Culture of Malaysia to acknowledge individuals who have contributed over a long period to uplifting cultural heritage and tradition in music, dances or the visual arts.

Aripin Said sings traditional folk songs at a variety of events. In the following section, I discuss the performance of traditional folk songs by Aripin Said at two singing events that I attended in 2013 and 2014. The first event was

*Malam Semantan Berbunga II*, held on 23 October 2013 at *Dataran Patin* (Patin Square) in Temerloh. The second event was a wedding reception held on 29 November 2014 for a member of the Malay elite of Pahang, who lives in one of the most prestigious neighbourhoods in Kuala Lumpur.

### **3.2.1.1 Singing event 1: Traditional folk songs at the commemorative event *Malam Semantan Berbunga II***

*Malam Semantan Berbunga II* was held to honour and recognise the Pahang warriors who fought against the British between 1891 and 1895 during the British occupation of Pahang. This event was a collaboration between three prominent agencies: *Majlis Teater Negeri Pahang* (Pahang State Theatre Council), *Majlis Perbandaran Temerloh* (Temerloh Municipal Council) and Anggun Performing Arts.

The event drew an audience of approximately two hundred people and was held at Patin Square, located at the confluence of the Pahang and Semantan Rivers. Alongside Aripin Said, other cultural performers including Roslan Madun, Fadlina, Siso and the traditional music group Anak Kayan participated in this event. *Lagu tradisi rakyat* (traditional folk songs) were presented along with other subcategories of traditional music, including *lagu puisi tradisional* (traditional poetry song) and *lagu rakyat baharu* (new folk song).

The event opened at about 9 pm with a performance of the traditional folk song ‘Angin’ (Wind) by Aripin. He began the song by beating a *kompang* for a few seconds. According to Aripin Said, there were several reasons for this. Beating the *kompang* before singing is a ritual for Aripin Said, allowing him to express his hope of a peaceful, dry night, which was especially important when the event took place (in October) as it was the rainy season in Pahang. In addition, the sound of the *kompang* would have called the audience to attention. Once he was satisfied that the audience was ready for him to begin, Aripin Said then began to sing ‘Angin’.

According to Aripin Said, ‘Angin’ was composed to praise the wind for its sound, constant flow and production of waves (Aripin Said, personal communication, 23 October 2013). He believes that human beings should learn the characteristics of the wind. Through the lyrics, Aripin Said invites the audience to appreciate the content of the Malay work of *Sejarah Melayu* regarding the greatness of the empire of Melaka (the first Malay empire on the Malay Peninsula) in the fifteenth century. He urges the audience to be proud of



*Hikayat Pahang* (a classical text which originated in Pahang), a work that features the stories of Pahang warriors. Equally important, through ‘Angin’, Aripin Said reminds the audience of the importance of the Semantan River, which is historically important, not only to local people, but also to the nation.

Before Aripin Said appeared on stage for the second time, several other cultural performers took to the stage and performed other forms of traditional music. For his second and final appearance of the night, Aripin Said collaborated with a group of four young musicians known as Anak Kayan (Figure 3.3). Two traditional folk songs, namely ‘Indung-Indung’ (Mother, Mother) and ‘Puteri Kayang’ (Princess of Paradise), were performed.



Figure 3.3: Aripin Said’s performance accompanied by young musicians

The musical instruments used in these songs were an aesthetic part of the performance. Two young musicians played the *rebana anak* (small frame drum), one played the *rebana ibu* (big frame drum) and one was on the gong. Before he sang each song, Aripin explained the song’s background to the audience. Both of these traditional folk songs embrace folk stories. ‘Indung-Indung’ for instance, tells the unique double-edged story of the asymmetrical Malay weapon, the *keris*, and its related reverence rituals. From the perspective of an audience member whom I met after the show, Aripin Said’s performance was honest and pleasing, and improved by his inclusion of traditional *pantun* quatrains.

Below, I discuss the performance of traditional folk songs at a second singing event, which took place in 2014. I was fortunate enough to be

personally invited by Aripin Said to watch his performance at a wedding reception held by Pahang elites living in Kuala Lumpur.

### 3.2.1.2 Singing event 2: traditional folk songs at a wedding reception within the Pahang elite community

On 29 November 2014, I had the opportunity to watch a performance of traditional folk songs at a wedding reception held by the Pahang elites community who live in one of the most prestigious neighbourhoods in Kuala Lumpur. Aripin Said was entrusted to perform a traditional music set in front of about two thousand guests as the wedding's host came from the same village as Aripin Said. The former had moved to Kuala Lumpur more than forty years ago. Growing up in the village with tradition and music, the host wished for the songs of his childhood to be played at the wedding reception. To cater to the host's wishes, Aripin Said brought a *Gendang Silat Pesaka* ensemble (Figure 3.4) from his village to accompany his singing.



Figure 3.4: The martial art ensemble of the *Gendang Silat Pesaka*

The ensemble of the *Gendang Silat Pesaka* consists of five instrumentalists: one player of the *serunai*, one player of the knobbed gong, hung from a wooden rack, one tambourinist and two players of the *gendang*. *Gendang Silat Pesaka* were initially intended to provide music for the performance of *silat* (a fencing dance without weapons). Interestingly however, the ensemble evolved to be capable of accompanying traditional folk song performances. During the performance, all the instrumentalists were seated on the floor mat, with Aripin Said standing to sing. A large tent was set up in front

of the host's neighbour's bungalow to provide shelter for the performers. Supported by the sound system, the music could be heard by the guests through six speakers scattered around the event space.

Among the traditional folk songs played were 'Joget Burung Tiong' (Dance of the Mynah), 'Puteri Kayang' (Princess of Paradise), and 'Puteri Walinong Sari' (Princess of Walinong Sari). Alongside traditional folk songs, *irama Melayu* (Malay tunes) was also performed. *Irama Melayu* uses five song patterns: *asli*, *inang*, *zapin*, *masri* and *joget*. *Irama Melayu* was a popular music style that began to appear in the traditional theatre of *bangsawan* in the 1920s and 1930s and was, according to Seneviratne (2012), performed live in theatres, at amusement parks and in dance halls in urban centres. 'Since its very start, *bangsawan* had been dubbed as a "Malay" or "native" theatrical form' (Putten, 2014: 282).

Why did the wedding host choose to have traditional folk songs performed at his wedding reception? What is so special about this kind of music that he gave it the privileged status of the main form of musical entertainment at the wedding reception? Aripin Said explained to me that traditional folk music is associated with traditional community in Pahang villages (Aripin Said, personal communication, 29 November 2014). While traditional folk music clearly has nothing to do with the wedding ritual, its adoption at the wedding reception appears to be about more than titular and textual references to the wedding. The performance of Pahang traditional folk songs at a wedding reception is often a nostalgic gesture, especially for the Pahang diaspora (in this case, those in Kuala Lumpur). It generates feelings of nostalgia for others who have moved away. The performance of traditional folk songs at such an event is a way to articulate the Pahang identity, especially among the people of the diaspora, as well as adding value and meaningful elements to the wedding celebration.

Although the host was one of the members of the elite community, he had expressed a deliberate preference for traditional music, identified as containing stories in the songs and instrumentation, over more cosmopolitan genres. Sharing and appreciating traditional music at weddings helps to create an awareness of the musical heritage of Pahang among the wedding guests. Performing traditional folk songs at a wedding reception is a sentimental way to represent the Pahang community in the diaspora. It provides an avenue through which the traditional identity of Pahang is experienced and defined internally by creating a sense of Pahang tradition among the diaspora through the use of metaphors in the songs.

To conclude, Aripin is recognised mainly for his expertise in the traditional folk genre. He has recorded and released four albums of Pahang traditional folk songs. The songs are very closely related to old folk stories that are becoming somewhat forgotten by the present-day community. The performance of traditional folk songs, I argue, is limited and only welcomed at certain events. Aripin Said, in his capacity as a Pahang musician, persists with singing traditional folk songs as a part of his musical identity as he feels a sense of responsibility to preserve traditional folk music within the contemporary community.

As a Pahang traditional singer, Aripin Said's performance is incomparable. Listening to Aripin Said's music led me to discover another traditional music singer, Roslan Madun. In the following section, I shall describe his work, as he is one of the most prominent traditional music singers in Pahang.

### **3.2.2 Roslan Madun**

Roslan Madun (Figure 3.5) was born in Temerloh, Pahang in 1952. In his teenage years, Roslan Madun was exposed to stage performance through the traditional theatre of *bangsawan* in his village. When he started performing, he was the youngest actor in the *bangsawan* company. Roslan Madun's first attempts at musical performance were dismissed by his father, who was a religious teacher and practitioner of Islamic *dikir* in the village. Regarding his singing, in a talk given on 4 December 2018, Roslan Madun noted that *pop yeh yeh* (a type of popular music in the 1960s) was the first music genre in which he took an interest. His attachment to *pop yeh yeh* did not last long; he then switched to performing traditional music. Roslan Madun began to sing professionally in the 1980s. The most important figure in Roslan Madun's development as a traditional music singer was Aripin Said, who used to be his teacher.

Roslan Madun's musical journey has not been limited to the Pahang area. In the early 1980s he moved to Kuala Lumpur to work as a journalist for a Malaysian publishing company. His passion and enthusiasm for traditional music never waned though. He continued to sing traditional songs at many kinds of singing events. During this period, he earned a living from both his journalism and his singing. After spending some twenty years in Kuala Lumpur, in the 2000s Roslan Madun returned to Pahang. Collaborating with local friends, he established an organization called Anggun Performing Arts.

This organization aims to expand art- and culture-based programmes in Pahang. Between 2001 and 2006, Anggun Performing Arts collaborated with the state government to host several music festivals and theatrical performances that were mainly held in the vicinity of Temerloh. With more than thirty years of involvement as a traditional music singer, Roslan Madun has been involved in hundreds of song events at the local and national levels. In addition, Roslan Madun is one of the regional musicians who has taken part in national cultural missions to other countries including Korea, Japan and Cambodia, not to mention the neighbouring countries of Indonesia, Singapore and Brunei.



Figure 3.5: Roslan Madun

Roslan Madun is usually linked to two out of five subcategories of traditional music: *lagu rakyat baharu* (new folk song) and traditional poetry song. Roslan Madun currently has a repertoire of more than eighty songs and has released more than sixteen albums, many of which were self-financed. To create the albums he hired recording studios from several different independent recording companies located in Pahang, Kuala Lumpur and Melaka. The synthesizer keyboard is the most prominent instrument used in the accompaniment on these albums. Malm and Wallis (1984), in their study of patterns of change in the music industries in several countries, found that synthesizers offered the production of new sounds that traditional instruments could not produce. As well as synthesizer keyboard, bamboo flute and frame drum also feature.

As seen in Figure 3.6, the visual images on the CD artwork are suggestive of the repertoire. Each illustration on the cover encapsulates the

content of the songs. Half of the album covers depicted in Figure 3.6 include Roslan Madun as the main figure. In album 4 of the figure, Roslan Madun is wearing the traditional attire of *baju Melayu*, or the Malay traditional blouse, in a different way, combining this traditional costume with a *songkok* (Malay male head-dress), or a piece of cloth tied around his head. The traditional musical instrument of the Pahang frame drum is included to complement the look. The frame drum is styled in several different ways on his album covers.

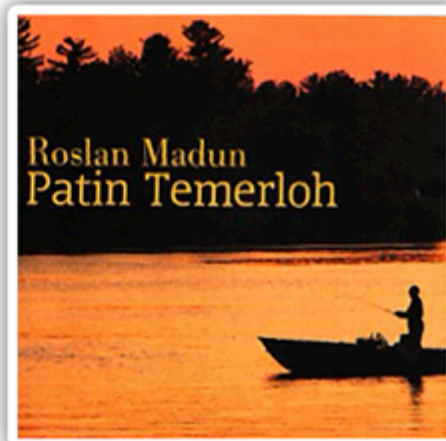
Several other figures are also displayed on Roslan Madun's album covers. On album 1, for instance, there is a photograph of the previous ruler of Pahang, His Royal Highness Sultan Ahmad Syah. On another cover, Roslan Madun uses a photograph of Pahang-born Tun Abdul Razak, the second prime minister of Malaysia, who governed the country from 1970 to 1976; in this way he commemorates the latter's devotion to the country. The inclusion of these two important figures on his album covers emphasizes the value of tradition and the development of Pahang. These two important figures are significant to Pahang people. The photograph of Sultan Ahmad Shah signifies the sovereignty and wealth of Malaysia. Meanwhile, the photograph of Tun Abdul Razak, known as the Father of Development of Malaysia, indicates his importance to the country, which experienced strong economic growth under his governance. The Pahang people benefited under his tenure in terms of the opening up of new areas for plantations and, later, the implementation of a new economic policy (*Dasar Ekonomi Baru*) intended to improve the lives of Malays.

Roslan Madun believes that views of his village in the background of his albums are reflective of his music. Open fields, a temporary shelter (*pondok*), a swamp area and the Pahang River are among the landscape views displayed on the album artwork. On album 2 (Figure 3.6), there is an image of a villager rowing a small boat (*sampan*) on the Pahang River. Together with the image is the name of the album 'Patin Temerloh'. A *patin* is a freshwater catfish that inhabits the Pahang River. The district of Temerloh has been called the town of *patin* (*bandar ikan patin*). During the course of my field research, I saw see many posters which said 'Temerloh Bandar Ikan Patin' (Temerloh, the City of Catfish) posted on pillars along the main roads in the city. Thus, the Pahang River is an important image that appears on Roslan Madun's album covers, reflecting the local identity.





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Figure 3.6: Album artwork from several of Roslan Madun's albums

On albums consisting entirely of traditional poetry songs, intended to be used by educational institutions, the covers have backgrounds of floral embroidery, as can be seen on album 6 (Figure 3.6). This kind of album includes the full range of traditional poetry songs: *syair*, *gurindam*, *nazam* and *seloka*. These repertoires are used as teaching materials by teachers, and are taught to younger listeners at primary and secondary schools. They are also used as reference material by students taking traditional poetry courses at university.

In 2013, Roslan Madun produced an exceptional album, which was intentionally released as supporting material for teaching *Penghayatan Sastera dan Budaya* (Appreciation of Literature and Culture), one of the main courses of the National Service Training Programme (*Program Khidmat Latihan Kebangsaan*). The album was funded by the national agencies the *Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka* (Institute of Language and Literature) and the *Jabatan Latihan Khidmat Negara* (National Service Department). On this album, Roslan Madun showcased the voices of three other young singers: Shafa'atussara (the present author), Zafirah Bahiah and Ariffin Uzir, each of whom had won first prize in the *syair*, *gurindam* and *nazam* categories, respectively, in a traditional poetry singing competition in 2012.

### 3.2.2.1 New folk songs in a social context

There are several elements of new folk songs that are considered traditional. The musical patterns in new folk songs are drawn from *irama Melayu* (Malay tunes) and/or a combination of five tunes: *asli*, *inang*, *zapin*, *masri* and *joget*. In addition, new folk songs can be played on both traditional and modern musical instruments. While *pantun* is the primary lyrical form in many traditional songs, the situation differs for new folk songs. In new folk songs, lyrics are not restricted to the *pantun* form. New folk songs are mostly used to commemorate historical events in Pahang. The song 'Menjejak Bahaman' (Tracking Bahaman), for instance, is about the life of Bahaman, a Pahang warrior who rebelled against the British in the Pahang War of the late nineteenth century.

Roslan Madun has performed this song at several singing events. One of them was the *Malam Semantan Berbunga II* on 23 October 2013. This event highlighted the theme of struggle and unity and was partly intended to commemorate the struggle of Pahang warriors against the British. Before he began to sing, Roslan Madun briefly introduced the story behind the song.



According to him, giving his explanation is important for the audience, especially the younger generation, who might otherwise disregard local history.

During his singing performance, I could see that Roslan Madun sang with his whole being. The first two verses of the song are about the historic Semantan River, where the struggle of Bahaman began. The chorus concerns the struggle of Bahaman, which is likely to have been forgotten by today's community. It is then followed by a final verse that urges people to unite for a better nation. I was glad to be part of this event as an invited singer as I was able to appreciate the significance of the event from the perspective of a participant. This singing event acted as a medium that helped to engage the community with the cultural dimensions of local history. The location of this singing event was of prime importance, held in a historic place on the banks of the Semantan River (a branch of the Pahang River). Legend has it that this was where the British killed Bahaman, the Pahang warrior.

Roslan Madun also sung 'Menjejak Bahaman' at a dinner event titled *Malam Inspirasi Perjuangan* (Night of the Inspiration of the Struggle), which was held in September 2016 in Selangor. The *Ikatan Muslimin Malaysia* (ISMA, Malaysian Muslim Alliance) organized this event in collaboration with the *Persatuan Belia Islam Nasional* (PEMBINA, National Islamic Youth Association). The event remembered the struggle of prominent Malay nationalists as well commemorating the progress of Malays and Islam. This song, which is popular nationally as a patriotic song, was, remarkably, chosen as the theme song for the evening.

Another new folk song worth mentioning here is 'MH370 Sebuah Misteri' (The Mystery of Flight MH370). In collaboration with Amir Atan (a music arranger), Roslan was inspired to write this song as a result of the mysterious loss of Malaysia Airlines Flight MH370 on 8 March 2014. This Boeing 777 flight disappeared during a scheduled flight from Kuala Lumpur to Beijing, China. It became a matter of concern not only for the nation, but for the whole world. During this difficult time for the country, Roslan Madun wrote this song to express the grief of the family members and relatives of the perished passengers of Flight MH370. Through this song, he articulated this unexpected national anguish. The song concerns people's anticipation of the fate of the victims, whether or not they were alive, and placed hope in God as a way to face up to and deal with this tough situation. This song was dedicated to the family members of the unfortunate flight passengers of MH370, especially those in the district of Maran, Pahang. Roslan Madun only performed this song live once, on the morning television programme, *Malaysia Hari Ini* (Malaysia

Today). After that it was only aired on Pahang public radio, which played the record for several months.

Moving on, the song ‘Lemak Manis’ is popular among *kompang* music groups in Malaysia. Roslan Madun first released this song in the early 2000s. The song is composed in the *joget* style and the lyrics follow the *pantun* format. This song is frequently played on Pahang radio stations and is considered a traditional Pahang song. It is widely performed at many singing events. Because of its popularity, since 2014, Roslan Madun has been invited to sing this song at every graduation ceremony of the Pahang branch of MARA University (*Majlis Amanah Rakyat*).

Further evidence of the popularity of ‘Lemak Manis’ can be found in the following examples. A university music group, for instance, sang the song using creative rhythmic body movements at a *kompang* music competition held at the University of Malaya in Kuala Lumpur (GT SHL, YouTube, 29 March 2013). Harmonik Perdana, a group of young musicians from Kuala Lumpur performed this song in the pilot episode of the music competition programme *Dendang Rakyat* (Traditional Folk Flavour). This episode was aired on national television in January 2016. The group rearranged the song to appeal to contemporary tastes by adding the sound of a *sape* (a non-Malay musical instrument which is popular among the Dayak ethnic group in Sarawak in Eastern Malaysia).

‘Menjejak Bahaman’, ‘MH370 Sebuah Misteri’ and ‘Lemak Manis’ are among the new folk songs that perform certain functions for the community in the present. Roslan Madun is one of the few singers in Pahang who actively chooses to perform this kind of music at singing events. As well as new folk songs, Roslan Madun also performs traditional poetry songs.

### **3.2.2.2 Traditional poetry songs in a social context**

Traditional poetry songs include the song forms of *gurindam*, *nazam*, *seloka* and *syair*. They have emerged as a poetry genre, and are performed to an audience by chanting and singing. Roslan Madun began to sing traditional poetry songs professionally in the 1990s. Traditional poetry songs are mainly performed creatively, with or without a musical accompaniment of modern and traditional instruments. The lyrical poetry is taken from well-known texts written by prominent poets/writers. For certain occasions, new traditional poetry is composed.

In the performance of *gurindam*, lyrics are adopted mainly from the classical work *Gurindam Dua Belas Fasal Keenam*, written in the year 1847 by Raja Ali Haji (1808-1873). Haji was a nineteenth-century historian from Penyengat Island, Riau Island in Indonesia, once the administrative centre of the Riau-Lingga Empire as well as the cultural capital of the Malay world. The most popular tune it is performed to is '*Bangsawan*', inspired by a song from the traditional theatre of *bangsawan*. Yet, *gurindam* is not restricted to a specific tune; other appropriate tunes can also be used (Roslan Madun, personal communication, 23 January 2020). *Gurindam* conveys moral instructions based on the principles of religion (Aveling, 2002). In general, it contains useful advice, teaches good behaviour and reflects Haji's rich life experience and observations of society, which remain largely relevant today (Amin, 2014).

*Nazam* has been performed in villages since the nineteenth century. Its popular sung text is 'Sifat Dua Puluh' (Twenty Characters), which is usually performed to one of two prominent tunes: '*Serkam*' or '*Tanjung*'. Roslan Madun has also composed a new *nazam* song, namely 'Nazam Hati Mulia' (Couplets of Pure Heart). This song provides useful advice for Muslims to follow the path of Islam and respect one another. The song form of *seloka* is full of *jenaka* (humour). In his Malay-English dictionary, Wilkinson (1903) explains that *jenaka* means wily and full of stratagems. The song form utilizes *cerita jenaka Melayu* (Malay comic tales), for example, featuring the ludicrous character of Pak Pandir; wily characters, such as Si Luncai; and extremely down-on-their luck characters, such as Lebai Malang (Liaw, 2013), who are, nevertheless, relevant to this day. The song form expresses criticism of current societal and environmental problems yet from a light-hearted perspective. The performance of *seloka* should provide amusement and education at the same time. Today, only a few people would have the skill to write new sung *seloka* texts.

*Syair* has become an essential song form for Roslan Madun. Malay *syair* can be classified into a number of categories, including romantic *syair* and historical *syair*. The singing of *syair* is monophonic and is presented using the technique of *ad libitum* (at one's pleasure). *Syair* singing, to some extent, bears a resemblance to Qur'anic cantillation or *tarannum*. Farmer (1965: 1073) defined *tarannum* as 'unpretentious psalming varied and embroidered by the singer'. *Tarannum* is a kind of chant, 'a monophonic style of singing or recitative in free rhythm... used as a heightened speech-song...' (Brakeley, 1949: 210).

In a historical context, Malay *tarannum* reciters were trained by Arab experts whose *tarannum* recitation was based on *maqamat* (a melodic mode used in traditional Arabic music). ‘The call for prayers and other Islamic vocal practices are examples of Islamic recitations must likely have tremendously influenced the melodic perception and aesthetic preferences among the Malays. Since Malays are Muslims by birth, they become familiar with *tarannum* recitations through family members and subsequently learn Islamic recitation in school and other Islamic education centres’ (Meddegoda, 2016: 48).

Since 2013, Roslan Madun has carried out a series of tours titled ‘Menjejak Syair’ (Tracking *Syair*) in the neighbouring countries of Brunei and Indonesia. Brunei was his first destination. While in Brunei, Roslan Madun and his theatre group from Pahang visited several important places related to the chronicle mentioned in the prominent sung text ‘*Syair Rakis*’. Pengiran Shahbandar Pengiran Md Salleh wrote this text in the 1840s. The text takes the form of a reminder given by the Sultan to his people that the danger they were facing came from the attempt by foreign forces to set aside the sovereignty of the Sultan. This text exposes the tricks that the foreign forces used to expand their powers over Nusantara (Malay world). I was lucky enough to be able to follow this tour and learnt that the sung text of ‘*Syair Rakis*’ originates from Brunei, and was widely appreciated by the fans in Malaysia.

The tour continued in September 2014. This time, Roslan visited Pekanbaru in the Province of Riau, Indonesia. Roslan’s intention was to attend the annual *Pekan Sastra Sumatra* (Sumatra Literary Week) organized by *Balai Bahasa Riau* (Riau Language Centre), held at the Pangeran Hotel, Pekanbaru. A variety of arts competitions, including *lomba syair* (*syair* singing competition), featured at this event. The contestants came from every province of Sumatra and each contestant represented his/her own province. Roslan Madun was delighted to be appointed as one of the judges for the *syair* singing competition. While he was judging the singing of each contestant, he learnt several ‘new’ *syair* tunes that were unfamiliar to his ears. I presume that this visit to Pekanbaru was the first chance that he had had to collect *syair* tunes practiced by distinct community groups.

Roslan Madun actively performs *syair* at many kinds of singing events. As well as performing, he frequently gives lectures on traditional singing. Between 2013 and 2016, I attended five workshops held at different institutions (see Appendix II). The attendees were students of primary and secondary schools, schoolteachers and university members. At the beginning of each workshop, Roslan Madun would give an introductory description of traditional sung poetry forms (*syair*, *nazam*, *gurindam* and *seloka*). This would

then be followed by a demonstration of *syair* tunes. Whenever I attended the workshops during my field research, Roslan Madun would invite me to demonstrate the several methods of *syair* singing that I had learned from him.

In October 2013, Roslan Madun was invited to perform traditional poetry songs at the presentation ceremony for the *Malam Penyampaian Hadiah Sastera Darul Ta'zim* (Night of Darul Ta'zim Literary Presentation Award) held in Johor, the southern state of the peninsula. Roslan Madun invited Amir Atan (on keyboard), Zafirah Bahiah and me (on vocals) to collaborate with him at this special event. This annual state-organized event highlighted and celebrated three hundred writers from Johor. Within the twenty-five-minute slot allocated to our group, we performed songs from four traditional poetry song forms: *syair*, *nazam*, *gurindam* and *seloka*. During the *syair* performance, three tunes were presented ('*Batu Belah*', '*Sarawak*' and '*Perindu*'); for the *gurindam* performance, only the tune of '*Bangsawan*' was chanted; for the *nazam* song, we used a '*Serkam*' tune; and lastly, for the *seloka* example, the song '*Si Luncai*' was performed.

Roslan Madun disseminates traditional poetry songs in several ways. First, through his continuing research on the innumerable *syair* tunes he has collected since 2013 from several regions in the Malay-speaking world (Malaysia, Brunei, Riau, Riau Island, Jambi and Medan). Second, Roslan Madun is regularly invited to give traditional singing workshops for schoolteachers and students at various institutions not only in Malaysia, but in the neighbouring countries of Indonesia and Singapore too. His contribution to preserving the musical genre of traditional poetry singing, especially among the younger generations, has caused him to be given the title 'King of Syair' by Awang Sariyan, former director of the *Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka* (the Institute of Language and Literature). Roslan has also been honoured with the title 'King of Traditional Folk Song' by a non-governmental organization in Perak (Roslan Madun, personal communication, 10 February 2017).

To summarize, Roslan Madun is recognized mainly for his performances of two types of traditional music: new folk songs and traditional poetry songs. Because of his extensive involvement in traditional music, especially *syair*, he is known as the 'King of Syair'. During the period when my fieldwork was being carried out, Roslan was continuously engaged in cultural work (*kerja-kerja budaya*), for instance, delivering traditional singing workshops for educational institutions, judging traditional music competitions, performing songs at singing events and acting as a consultant on cultural music matters in several states of Malaysia. Roslan Madun also continues to produce 'new' sung texts to meet the objectives of certain singing events.

Learning about traditional music in Pahang led me to a music group called Anak Kayan, whose music offers a different perspective on traditional music. In the following section, I shall discuss this group, which is active in the traditional music genre and performance contexts.

### 3.2.3 Anak Kayan

‘*Anak*’ means children, and ‘*kayan*’ implies wood, which is an important material for Malays (Man Kayan, personal communication, 4 June 2016). Anak Kayan was established in 2009. The founder of the group is Noor Azman Norawi, who was born in 1967. He is known among friends as Man Kayan and previously worked as a bank officer in Temerloh. Anak Kayan consists of thirteen members (eleven men and two women) aged between ten and fifty years old. They are Man Kayan’s wife Suhada on the gong, and two sons, Noor Ashraf and Noor Alif, on guitars; Zuharidan on bass guitar; Afiq Syahmi, Muhaimin and Iskandar on frame drums; Farah Aqilah on (female) vocals; and Najman, Amry, Shah and Shazwan as fencing dancers.

The group’s main objective is to broaden the appeal of traditional music by using the two-faced frame drum (*gendang*) – normally mainly used to accompany the performance of *silat* (a fencing dance without weapons) – as musical accompaniment. Besides the frame drum, the other musical instruments the group uses are the gong, bamboo flute, cowbell, snare drum, cymbals, *gedombak* (a single-skinned drum), *tetuang* (buffalo horn), *rebana kercing* (tambourine rattles), accordion, tambourine, *darbuka* (goblet drum), acoustic guitar and bass guitar. As well as promoting traditional musical instruments along with modern ones in their songs, they also advocate *Kemelayuan* (Malayness) by donning Malay traditional attire for their performances. As seen in Figure 3.7, the male members don different styles of *tanjak* (head-wrapping) with brooch adornments. Some wear waistcoats or jackets with trousers layered with a *samping* (sarong-style cloth). The clothes are made of embroidered silk. The female members wear Malay *kurungs* (a traditional Malay costume) with headscarves. This notion of Malayness is driven by their desire to look back to their neglected heritage.

As far as Man Kayan is concerned, the musical journey of Anak Kayan has just begun. The members of the group have never received any formal musical education; rather they are self-taught. This non-systematized approach to learning musical performance has tended to make it a social activity. Some group members were sent to a village in the district of Jerantut

(on the upper reaches of the Pahang River) with the aim of learning how to play the traditional drums from the elderly practitioners who still perform frame drum music. They learned the tunes from the older players through a combination of aural, visual and tactile training. I believe that this is a great way to preserve traditional musical skills among young enthusiasts. ‘I will never stop challenging myself to learn aspects of music by composing and experimenting with the songs,’ noted Man Kayan enthusiastically (Man Kayan, personal communication, 4 June 2016). Anak Kayan also participates in song-writing contests at the state level. In 2010, Anak Kayan achieved second place in a music competition.



Figure 3.7: Anak Kayan in traditional Malay costume

As a new style of traditional music group, Anak Kayan mainly played cover songs in the first year after the group was formed. The identity of the group has gradually developed through its performance of traditional music, specifically traditional dance songs and contemporary poetry songs. In the context of traditional dance songs, Anak Kayan’s performance of the ancient dance song ‘Tarian Pelanduk’ (Mouse Deer Dance) is significant. Because of the dance’s infrequent performance in the community, Anak Kayan is always invited to perform the dance at the state’s official singing events. The Pahang state cultural department has filmed this ancient dance song performance and documented it as Pahang musical heritage.

In 2015, responding to the increase in popularity of poetry songs within the state’s communities, Anak Kayan began to write their own

contemporary poetry songs. According to Man Kayan, he has composed more than a hundred contemporary poetry songs. Most of the lyrics to the songs come from published contemporary poetry, written mainly by Pahang poets. The year 2017 was significant for Man Kayan as, with the help of the *Perbadanan Perpustakaan Awam Pahang* (Pahang Public Library Corporation), he published an album of twelve contemporary poetry songs (Figure 3.8). Among the poetry songs on this album, entitled *Man Kayan Lagu Puisi Penyair Pahang* are ‘Di Tebingmu Semantan’ (The Cliff of Semantan) by Kelompen Koe, ‘Sinar Rawi’ (A Ray of Narration) by Rashid Mohamad and ‘Sepi Seorang Lelaki’ (A Deserted Man) by Rosni. Both traditional and modern musical instruments were employed to accompany the songs, lending them more sophistication and elevating the art form (Man Kayan, personal communication, 1 July 2018).



Figure 3.8: Man Kayan produced an album of contemporary poetry songs

Anak Kayan receives many invitations to participate in singing events, including Malay weddings and *berkhatan* (male circumcision celebrations). Anak Kayan has also been invited to perform in several retail spaces, for instance at car boot sales in Pahang. Anak Kayan has been permanently appointed by the state to play their repertoire at the monthly cultural *Program Merakytakan Seni* (Programme of Bringing Arts to the Community) in Kuantan, Pahang, to promote traditional values (*nilai-nilai murni*) through music.



Among the group's greatest achievements is their participation in several international singing events. In 2011, Anak Kayan represented the country in a cultural exchange programme in the Province of Riau, Indonesia, with the mission of promoting the traditional music of Pahang. With their burgeoning reputations, in 2014, they were invited back to Indonesia to perform in Medan. In 2012 and 2015, Anak Kayan participated in *Festival Puisi dan Lagu Rakyat Antarabangsa Pangkor* (Pangkor International Festival of Poetry and Folk Song), which was held on Pangkor Island, Perak. This annual singing event, organized by the state of Perak, provides a platform for national and international poets and musicians to come and celebrate their body of work.

During my shorter period of field research in 2016, on 4 June 2016, I was delighted to attend a singing event at which Anak Kayan performed, held at Man Kayan's home, which acts as a music school, in the village of Permatang Badak in the district of Kuantan, Pahang. In the following session, I describe the group's musical performance and the performance context.

### **3.2.3.1 A singing event in the village of Permatang Badak**

From Kuala Lumpur, it took me about four hours to arrive at Permatang Badak. When I arrived at around 8 pm, Man Kayan introduced me to the group of people who had been invited to watch the singing event. I was also introduced to an official representative from the *Jabatan Kebudayaan dan Kesenian Negara Cawangan Pahang* (National Department for Culture and Arts, Pahang Branch).

After a few minutes' talk, we were taken to the music rehearsal area located to the rear of the house. I could see a big mat spread out on the ground. Around the edges of it, traditional and modern musical instruments as well as a sound system had been placed. The streetlights at the corner of the house helped to illuminate the area. Several foldable plastic chairs had been set out and there were also mats scattered about for the audience members, who were family, friends and relatives.

The night started at around 8.45 pm. During their long-hour performance, Anak Kayan presented a variety of traditional songs in front of approximately a hundred people from the village. Before they started their set, Man Kayan announced that it was a tradition of theirs to play some traditional folk songs by Aripin Said, the most well-known singer in Pahang. The first two songs thus performed were 'Indung-Indung' and 'Tebang Tebu'. The

drummers began playing and the rest of the group joined in. The group then executed a new folk song of their own creation, 'Semalam Di Kuala Pahang' (A Night Downstream of Pahang). This song is an evolution of the song 'Menghilir Di Sungai Pahang' (Downstream of the Pahang River) by the respected singer, Roslan Madun.

As well as Man Kayan as the lead singer, this singing event also furnished performances by the group's young female singer, Farah Aqilah. The repertoire of a female singer is somewhat different to that of a male singer. At this event, Aqilah sang the dance song 'Tari Tualang Tiga (Toalang Three Dance)'. This song reminded one audience member of the classic Malay film of 1958, *Sumpah Orang Minyak* (Oath of the Oil People). The lead role in the film was filled by P. Ramlee (1929-1973), born Teuku Zakaria bin Teuku Nyak Puteh, Malaysia's most prominent actor of 1950s. The music was by P. Ramlee and the lyrics by S. Sudarmadji (1923-1989). And, just as in Hindi cinema songs are dubbed by recorded singers, in this classic Malay film, the angelically voiced singer Saloma (1934-1983) dubbed this song.

At this singing event, a special segment featured a performance of the ancient dance song 'Tarian Pelanduk' (Mouse Deer Dance). It was performed by a male dancer (Figure 3.9) and accompanied by *rebana* music. The motion of the dancer is intended to resemble the movement of the mouse deer. The community in the district of Kuala Lipis, Pahang first invented the dance. The idea of the 'Tarian Pelanduk' is taken from the historical way of trapping animals, especially mouse deer, in the jungle. It is mainly performed at wedding celebrations and other community events. Each performance lasts no more than thirty minutes. To someone who is new to this ancient dance song, it seems inconsequential, but to the communities involved, it is significant. This was proven in the feedback interview I held with members of Anak Kayan, in which they pointed out that the aesthetic aspect is among the reasons that this ancient dance song continues to be performed. The dance song represents the traditional community but this does not mean that its interpretation is completely static. Anak Kayan chooses to incorporate soft vocal sounds into the performance, while the structure of the music continues to emphasize an indigenous aesthetic.

This singing event also featured the performance of poetry readings by several major Pahang poets who are close friends of Anak Kayan. Instrumental music played by Anak Kayan accompanied the poetry readings. Listening to a poet reading his or her work is illuminating. Some poets also read other poets' work with intelligence and sympathy. The act of listening to a poem being read required the audience to concentrate fully and focus.

According to Kelompen Koe, one of the poets who performed on the evening, his poems are no different to songs, but he cannot sing (Kelompen Koe, personal communication, 4 June 2016).



Figure 3.9: A dancer performing *tarian pelanduk* accompanied by *rebana* and *gendang* players

I was informed that poetry reading has long been a common cultural activity within the community and it is not unusual for it to be performed at such an event.

To conclude, Anak Kayan first became established as a covers group that would be asked by the community to play popular traditional tunes (mainly from the repertoires of Aripin Said and Roslan Madun). The group has since expanded its repertoire into traditional dance songs and contemporary poetry songs. The use of the *gendang* is an important part of the group's musical identity, as well as its use of other contemporary instruments. Its musical performances act as a storage device and provide a collective memory for the community.

In the following section, I shall discuss the social contexts that describe how community forms around the performance of traditional music.

### 3.2.4 Community formation around traditional music

To discuss community formation around traditional music, I will focus on the community built around traditional poetry songs, that is to say,

*syair*. My discussion of community formation around *syair* will be divided into three parts: the institutionalization of *syair* singing practice through the establishment of the *Syair* Academy, *syair* concerts and *syair* singing competitions.

#### **3.2.4.1 The *Syair* Academy**

In 2014, Roslan, with the support of his friends, created the *Syair* Academy. He believes that the practice of *syair* singing needs to be fostered and introduced to the community. Unlike the institutions of Minangkabau Arts in West Sumatra, Indonesia (see Fraser in 2015) or the *Akademi Seni Budaya dan Warisan Kebangsaan* (National Academy of Arts Culture and Heritage), the Malaysian higher learning institution for performing arts, this academy is an independent organization that functions as a *syair* learning centre, offering several specialist study modules. The details of the study modules available go beyond the scope of this present study.

In its first year, the *Syair* Academy was based in Temerloh, Pahang. The teachers at the academy included Roslan Madun himself and a few of his previous students (including the present author), who had become experts in the subject matter in their own right. However, in 2015, the academy moved to Kuala Lumpur as Roslan Madun began to develop his singing career outside of Pahang. The *Syair* Academy then changed its name to the N.D. Lala Academy of the Arts, to honour its new patron. N.D. Lala is the stage name of Amir Amzah Salleh, a male singer who came to prominence in the 1980s and is known for his humorous traditional songs that express cynical views. Since the establishment of the academy, many *syair* singing workshops have been organized in schools and universities.

From the beginning, the N.D. Lala Academy of the Arts has offered a *syair* singing course for young and amateur singers. The course mainly takes place on Saturdays or during the school holidays. Roslan is involved as a teacher in these workshops, alongside several established *syair* performers who are former students of his. As well as the *syair* course, the academy also offers theatrical classes for inexperienced actors. Several established actors are invited to give acting lessons that take place once a week for three months. This theatre course costs RM100 per month for each learner. As an add-on to this acting course, students can choose to study *syair* singing and other subcategories of traditional music.

In October 2014, the N.D. Lala Academy of the Arts was invited by the University of Science in Penang to give a workshop on the practice of traditional poetry singing. Roslan Madun and the present author were invited as panellists to a three-hour workshop. The audience members, who were mostly literature-studies students were introduced to several tunes of *syair*, as well as learning about other traditional song forms, including *gurindam* and *nazam*. The students then used their new skills to sing at the end of the workshop. The highlight of this singing workshop was a traditional music concert on the evening of the same day. As seen in Figure 3.10, a student took part in this concert and delivered a traditional song that she had learned during the day alongside Roslan and the present author.



Figure 3.10: A female student (right) delivering a traditional song at the concert alongside Roslan and the present author

The academy is also responsible for the emergence of a community of contemporary *syair* writers. In 2014, Roslan made a request on Facebook for writers interested in Malaysia to compose *syair* texts related to Pahang culture for a new project. This created an opportunity for Malaysian writers who had no prior experience in the writing of *syair* texts. Most of the writers who contributed were modern poets, novelists and screenwriters.

As a result, in 2018, some forty-two *syair* texts by twenty-five writers were compiled by Madun (2018) and published by *Perbadanan Perpustakaan Awam Pahang*. The books were distributed and sold to organizations, schools and interested individuals at a price of RM24 (GBP4.35) per book. Several performers have used *syair* texts from the book in their performances. One of the *syair* texts, 'Cikgu Jantan Pendekar Handalan' (Teacher Jantan, the

Excellent Warrior) was performed by Roslan Madun at an official poetry reading in Kuala Lumpur, attended by delegates and officials, that was organized by the International Institute of Islamic Civilisation and Malay World in conjunction with Malaysia's Independence Day celebrations.

The N.D. Lala Academy of the Arts has also contributed to the development of new *syair* performers, some of whom have gained international reputations. Amira, a twenty-five-year-old schoolteacher began *syair* singing at the academy in 2015. Then, in November 2018, she and another singer represented Malaysia in a *syair* singing competition organized by the Education Department in Tanjungpinang, Indonesia. Amira was the runner-up, coming second to a contestant from Pekanbaru, Indonesia. In a conversation with Amira after the competition, she told me that she was grateful to have received this recognition. Her involvement in *syair* singing has moulded her musical identity and inspires her to maintain this practice (Amira, personal communication, 16 January 2019).

To conclude, the impetus for establishing the N.D. Lala Academy of the Arts – the first of its kind in Malaysia and probably in the Malay world – was partially conservationist: to develop, discover and cultivate the practice of *syair* singing in the framework of enriching and preserving traditional Malay music culture. Through a number of workshops provided by the academy, several young *syair* performers have appeared in Malaysia and neighbouring Singapore and Indonesia, enabling continuity of the practice of *syair* singing in the community. The N.D. Lala Academy of the Arts is also one of the main organizers, in collaboration with the Institute of Language and Literature and the Malaysia Institute of Translation and Books (*Institut Terjemahan dan Buku Malaysia*), of an annual *syair* concert in Kuala Lumpur.

In the following section, I shall discuss the first of these *syair* concerts, which was held in September 2016.

#### **3.2.4.2 The 2016 *syair* concert**

Examining community formation around *syair* singing can notably be explored at musical events, that is to say, at *syair* concerts. This *syair* concert was the first of its kind, and was organized as part of the yearly programme of the Kuala Lumpur Diversity Arts Festival. The Malaysia Institute of Translation and Books and the Institute of Language and Literature, in collaboration with the N.D. Lala Academy of the Arts, were the organizers of this concert. With the theme of '*Syair Merentas Benua*' (*Syair Across the*

Continent), this concert featured fourteen *syair* performers from five South-East Asian countries: Malaysia, Indonesia, Brunei, Singapore and Thailand. The concert was held in the auditorium of the Institute of Language and Literature in Kuala Lumpur.

The presence of fourteen *syair* performers from the aforementioned countries is obvious evidence that a transnational Malay traditional music community has formed. Having been a *syair* performer for more than twenty years, through his endeavours since 2014, Roslan Madun has brought together *syair* performers not only from Pahang, but also from other regions of the Malay-speaking world. This *syair* concert was held as a way to commercialize *syair* singing in line with other popular music (Roslan Madun, personal communication, 15 December 2017).

Every *syair* performer comes from a different background and is blessed with his/her own faithful followers. Through this annual concert, *syair* fans from other regions converge in Kuala Lumpur, and this encourages the development of a global *syair* community. Table 3 provides a list of the *syair* tunes and the themes of the *syair* texts presented at the 2016 concert. Some thirteen tunes were delivered to the accompaniment of a combination of modern and traditional music ensembles. Six *syair* tunes from Indonesia were performed at this concert: ‘*Tukutur Balam*’, ‘*Rawi*’, ‘*Burung*’, ‘*Kepulauan Riau*’, ‘*Beghondak*’, and ‘*Pekanbaru*’. One *syair* tune from Brunei, known as ‘*Tambang Bengawan*’, and six *syair* tunes from Malaysia, ‘*Sarawak*’, ‘*Hiasan*’, ‘*Batu Belah*’, ‘*Perindu*’, ‘*Selendang Delima*’, and ‘*Dodoi*’ were also performed.

Table 3: Themes of *syair* texts and names of *syair* tunes

No.	Theme	Tunes
1.	‘Usulnya Bangsa Melayu’ (The Beginning of the Malays)	‘ <i>Sarawak</i> ’
2.	‘Sultan Muzaffah Syah Raja Undang-Undang Melaka’ (Muzaffah Syah, The Sultan of the Laws of Melaka)	‘ <i>Hiasan</i> ’
3.	‘Sultan Alauddin Panglima Islam’ (Sultan Alauddin, the Islamic Warrior)	‘ <i>Tambang Bengawan</i> ’
4.	‘Kemangkatan Seorang Panglima’ (The Death of a Commander)	‘ <i>Tukutur Balam</i> ’
5.	‘Cerdiknya Akal Seorang Tun Perak’ (The Intelligent Tun Perak)	‘ <i>Batu Belah</i> ’

6.	(Same as number 5)	' <i>Perindu</i> '
7.	'Serikandi Alam Melayu' (Heroines of the Malay World)	' <i>Rawi</i> '
8.	(Same as number 7)	' <i>Burung</i> '
9.	'Sultan Mansur Syah Raja Diplomasi' (Sultan Mansur Syah, the King of Diplomacy)	' <i>Kepulauan Riau</i> '
10.	'Sultan Mahmud Pertahankan Negeri' (Sultan Mahmud Defending the State)	' <i>Beghondak</i> '
11.	(Same as number 10)	(Same as number 1)
12.	'Hayati Sejarah Orang Melayu' (Appreciating the History of the Malays)	' <i>Selendang Delima</i> '
13.	'Peliharalah Khazanah Kita' (Guarding Our Treasure)	' <i>Pekanbaru</i> '
14.	'Ketahanan Diri' (Self Resilience)	' <i>Dodoi</i> '

The audience was also able to see several distinct themes in the *syair* texts. I found that most of the themes related to the history of the Malays; this history belongs not only to the Malays in Malaysia but also to those in other parts of the Malay world. This showed me that through *syair* singing the audience at this concert had historical and cultural bonds with one another.

As one of the *syair* performers at this concert (Figure 3.11), I could see that this event successfully assembled a highly respectable audience, consisting of policymakers, academics, teachers, school and university students and government-employed artists. They were delighted by the *syair* tunes performed. I remember the response of one of the audience members after the concert. She came up to me and said that she was surprised to have been introduced to and to have learnt a number of the *syair* tunes by the end of the concert. All the tunes were categorically new to her. For a very long time, she had only known one *syair* tune, that of '*Selendang Delima*'. She noted that attending the *syair* concert had broadened her view of *syair* singing, and she had discovered that *syair* can be performed to a variety of melodious tunes.

Based on several short conversations with audience members, this concert indirectly motivated them to want to learn more about *syair*, and encouraged them to attend the *syair* singing course run by the N.D. Lala Academy of the Arts. The concert also attracted several retailers. Outside the auditorium, there were several stands selling concert t-shirts and books on a



variety of subjects, including historical, socio-cultural and musical topics. When the concert ended, the audience browsed the bookstands, enquiring about, discussing and purchasing the books on display. The audience members also mingled with each other and talked about the *syair* concert they had just enjoyed.



Figure 3.11: The 2016 Malay Archipelago *syair* concert (courtesy: Noor Kasmara)

A *syair* community rooted in one place does not exist, but rather cyber communities from different backgrounds form its make-up. The *syair* community continued to grow after the concert. In this digital age, people create communities around *syair* songs online and participate in ongoing conversations about *syair* on popular social media, for instance, Facebook. Online *syair* communities are not formed of people from Pahang in the main, but rather from people of different backgrounds, including non-Malays. I have observed several individuals in the online community who are *syair* fans and had attended the *syair* concert discussed above. However, within the limitations of this study, I only observed online interactions among the *syair* community in Malaysia on Facebook, which was used to engage in community building and activism. Here are some of their stories.

Lim, a middle-aged Chinese woman, teaches the Malay language in a school and actively participates in the online *syair* community on Facebook. I got to know her when she introduced herself to me after the *syair* concert. Lim and I continued our conversation about *syair* on Facebook. Through the platform, she began to learn to sing *syair* from several videos posted by the online *syair* community. Many of the videos are shared from YouTube. Lim

feels that by learning to sing *syair*, she is able to enrich her teaching of Malay for her students (Lim, personal communication, 2 May 2018).

On her Facebook wall, Zurinah Hassan, the first female laureate of literature from Kuala Lumpur, shared her reflections about *syair* singing with her followers. On 8 July 2017, Zurinah opened a discussion on the topic of tunes and themes in *syair* songs. This drew her followers into a conversation, and contributed to a productive debate among them.

From his comments on Facebook, Amran Ibrahim from Perak, who also attended the *syair* concert, was inspired to widen the appeal of *syair* by commercializing it. By using a *gambus* (a six-stringed Arab musical instrument), Amran incorporates an Arabic element into the musical accompaniment to *syair* singing. As an independent young poet, Amran is actively involved in online conversations about *syair* among the online community. A study of Amran's Facebook profile shows that he also posts videos of himself performing *syair* and asks for feedback from his Facebook followers.

On 12 October 2016, a schoolteacher known as Seni Jiwa noted that, after attending the *syair* concert, he had continued to learn to sing *syair* by attending a traditional singing workshop. At the time of writing, he listens to *syair* songs on YouTube. A YouTube channel is the main source of *syair* songs for him, as it is difficult and almost impossible to find recordings of *syair* for sale (Seni Jiwa, personal communication, 20 December 2017).

To conclude, it can be said that singing events such as the *syair* concert can provide a communicative forum through which the commonalities of a community are constructed and developed. The bonds of the (diasporic) *syair* community – in this context, the concertgoers – then continue to develop through various online activities on Facebook. Their active participation on Facebook with regard to *syair* songs and traditional Malay musical culture influence the flow of their discussions with other members. The social medium of Facebook provides an informal meeting place which the *syair* community uses to share information and to talk about the subject.

In the following, I shall discuss another *syair* singing event, which may have helped to form the community, which I witnessed during my field research in May 2016.

### 3.2.4.3 *Syair* singing competition

In the preface to ‘Contesting Tradition: Cross-Cultural Studies of Musical Competition’ in the 2003 special edition of the journal *World of Music*, Gunderson notes that studies of global music traditions have demonstrated competition’s ‘role in defining and refining performance practice and repertoire, as well as its importance in forming and solidifying visions of community identity’ (Gunderson, 2003: 7). *Syair* singing competitions have been organized annually since 2010 by the Malaysian Ministry of Education in collaboration with the Institute of Language and Literature. This government-sponsored event comprises three stages of evaluation: district, state and national level. A concept paper for this singing competition is disseminated to primary and secondary public schools in each state. Having seen the concept paper for the *syair* singing competition, I know that it contains a list of *syair* texts with nine tunes<sup>4</sup> to choose from.

The concept paper also includes the rules of the competition, with detailed information concerning scoring and judging aspects. Three criteria are to be judged: mastery of *syair* tunes (40 per cent), vocal suitability (40 per cent) and performance style (20 per cent). Based on my personal experience as a judge of *syair* singing competitions in Pahang and elsewhere in Malaysia, the winner generally ensures that their voice is considered melodious by inserting melismatic elaborations or decorations into his/her *syair* singing. These decorations are referred to as *patah lagu* (song fracturing) or *lenggok* (twisting). The *syair* competition was established for several reasons. First of all, the competition serves to uncover students’ talent in *syair* singing. Secondly, this kind of event aims to instil and nurture a love of the Malay language and culture among young people.

On 26 April 2016, I attended a district level *syair* competition held at Jengka 12 Secondary School in the district of Maran, Pahang. Seventeen contestants (fourteen female, three male) from secondary schools in the district of Maran participated in this competition. The contestants were dressed in traditional costume (Figure 3.12), as were the teachers who accompanied them. For me, the competition day had a similar atmosphere to that of a Malay wedding as the guests at a wedding would also wear traditional Malay attire.

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<sup>4</sup> The nine *syair* tunes are ‘Siti Zubaidah’, ‘Sarawak’, ‘Mayang’, ‘Batu Belah’, ‘Hiasan’, ‘Perindu’, ‘Dodoi’, ‘Dandan Setia’, and ‘Selendang Delima’.



Figure 3.12: Several contestants in the *syair* competition in Maran, Pahang

Several components were to be evaluated during the competition: vocal technique, proficiency in performing the *syair* tune and the appearance of the contestant. Each contestant delivered one *syair* text chosen from the sixteen on the list provided by the organizer. Each contestant could only choose one *syair* tune. I was informed that in many cases, the contestants would have been coached by their schoolteachers. Several techniques are used to develop singing skill among the contestants, including referring to the *syair* performances by Roslan Madun on his *syair* albums. This information supports the idea that a *syair* community was formed during the preparation for the competition. Roslan Madun was one of the judges of this *syair* competition.

Before the competition started, some contestants had come to Roslan Madun asking for singing advice. It is worth mentioning here that Roslan Madun's *syair* albums were a major source of reference for the contestants. As far as I am able to ascertain, there is inadequate reference material on *syair* singing available for sale. For the contestants, meeting with Roslan Madun, the

leading *syair* performer, before the competition would have inspired them to perform their best in the competition. This suggests that through the *syair* competition, a community could be formed. *Syair* singing has the ability to attract followers through its texts and the music.

Every winner at the district level then competed at the state level in the following month. On 12 May 2016, I attended the Pahang state level of the *syair* competition, which was conducted at Abu Bakar Secondary School in Temerloh. The winners from all eleven districts in Pahang gathered and competed against each other for first place in the competition and, consequently, the chance to represent the state of Pahang in the national level of the competition in Kuala Lumpur. At the state level, the audience was naturally larger than it had been at the district level; it included state officials, schoolteachers, university lecturers, Pahang poets and parents. At this stage, the parents of the contestants had taken leave from work to attend the event and support their child. In this regard, the *syair* competition clearly stimulates family values in the community. How did the audience view the students' participation in this competition? In terms of the positive aspects of this singing competition, several parents shared that it was impressive how the students' talent had developed as a result of participating in the competition. They felt that it was useful as a means through which to motivate the students to attain a higher level of achievement.

Musical development is meaningful in various ways. Ain, who I spoke to after the competition, represented the district of Temerloh. She shared with me her nervousness on entering the competition, even though the 2016 competition was her second time competing at the state level. Entering the *syair* competition for two years in a row suggests that she is very fond of *syair*. Ain also shared how this competition provides the contestants with a chance to develop their skills in *syair* singing. A male contestant indicated that this competition had motivated him to take diverse approaches to music learning. For the teachers, the competition provided motivation for them to try their best for their students. They also noted that rather than winning, it was their students' exposure to performing within the process of the competition that was important.

At the competition, booksellers from the *Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka Cawangan Pantai Timur* (east coast branch of the Institute of Language and Literature) sold discounted books to the audience members. A mobile book truck was parked outside the competition hall. While waiting for the judges to announce the results, the audience members browsed the selection available in the book truck. I felt that the participation of the bookseller at this event was

appropriate, and would certainly cultivate a sense of appreciation of and passion for Malay literature, as well as traditional Malay culture, among the community.

To summarize, competition is uniquely important in the music world. It is significant that competition appears to play a role in musical traditions. The *syair* singing competition offers opportunities to strengthen the community by bringing it together. The value of the *syair* singing competition is recognized primarily in terms of its ability to act as a motivational tool that creates commonalities among the community. Among the positive aspects listed, traditional music appreciation is the most popular unifying theme. The students' attitude towards their participation in the *syair* singing competition becomes increasingly focused as they aim to achieve their potential.

### **3.3 Regional pop music**

Individual and group musicians performing Pahang regional pop include Chik Asan, Razak Ahmad and vocal music group Anok Semantan. The regional pop musicians are also active members of the *Persatuan Pencinta Loghat Daerah Negeri Pahang* (Association of Fans of Pahang District Dialects) established in 2016. In this chapter, I focus on the group Anok Semantan as a model for the musical style.

#### **3.3.1 Anok Semantan**

Anok Semantan was established in 2006 in Temerloh. 'Anok' means child, while 'Semantan' refers to the Semantan River in Temerloh. The combination of these two words literally means that members of the group are natives of Temerloh. Anok Semantan is considered a pioneer of Pahang regional pop music. The group's founder, adviser and composer is Afzainizam Ismail, aged seventy-six. In the 1970s, Afzainizam became a famous singer after participating in a national singing competition in Kuala Lumpur organized by *Radio Televisyen Malaysia*, the Malaysian public broadcaster. After about thirty years of involvement in mainstream music, in the late 1990s Afzainizam returned to Temerloh, Pahang, and began to compose songs in the Pahang dialect, as well as setting up a new group. Anok Semantan consists of five young singers: Putra, Fadlina, Zurin, Hariz and Pyan, all of whom are aged between twenty-nine and forty-four and are based in Temerloh. Some of the members were formerly *nasyid* singers. Hariz and Pyan are Afzainizam's sons.

From this perspective, it seems to me that Anok Semantan is partly a musical family. All of the group's members have other employment in the private and government sectors, with singing only forming part of their careers. All five singers attended university or college for tertiary education; they are highly educated singers.

One of the group members, Fadlina, explained to me that Anok Semantan 'was established with the intention of upholding the Pahang spoken language among the state's communities, based on the national slogan "Language Represents the Nation's Cultures"' (*"Anok Semantan ditubuhkan untuk memartabatkan bahasa pertuturan di negeri ini, berasaskan satu cogan kata nasional "Bahasa Melambangkan Budaya Bangsa"*) (Fadlina, personal communication, 2 June 2016). It is useful at this point to turn to Maros's explanation of the situation in one of the districts in Pahang. Most Malays in this district speak variations of Kelantanese, Terengganu or standard Malay, rather than the Pahang dialect, and it is assumed that migration and language-contact situations contributed to these changes in the usage of the Pahang dialect. The dialect is probably 'in a transitional stage as the native speakers' linguistic repertoire increases with contact from other varieties of the Malay language' (Maros, 2010: 75). Thus, my understanding of the remarks by Fadlina is that regional pop music is an important instrument in inculcating interest among locals to proudly speak the Pahang language in their everyday conversations.

### **3.3.1.1 Anok Semantan's album**

In 2009, Anok Semantan produced a commercial karaoke CD with the title *Lagu-lagu Loghat Pahang*. The album contains twelve songs (for the list of song titles please refer to Appendix III). Among the most-famous songs are 'Makwe Koi' (My Girlfriend), 'Ngape Bio Semok' (Why Let the Bush Grow?), 'Gone Gamoknye' (How About It), and 'Meling-Meling' (Indifferent). All of the songs on the album were recorded in Afzainizam's home recording studio. The songs were recorded and sold on commercial video compact discs (VCDs), which at the time was the most popular and most affordable format for music and video distribution in the community.

To summarize my understanding of the Pahang regional pop music genre from the music on the album, the music has several distinctive characteristics or stylistic traits. It can use a variety of rhythms (strong beats, or slow and emotional rhythms) and melodies adapted from the repertoire of

traditional songs (for instance, *joget*) and ornamentation. Music in this genre is played predominantly in 4/4 time. The songs incorporate diatonic scale systems and Western instruments such as electric guitar, bass guitar and digital keyboard, enriched with the sounds of traditional Malay musical instruments such as the bamboo flute and frame drums, which give the music a nostalgic and melancholic quality. The guitars provide continuous rhythm and occasionally solo lines, the bass guitar plays the bass accompaniment, and the keyboard provides rhythm and sometimes offers solos.

The compositions are mainly simple in lyrical structure, with a limited number of *pantun* verses. Some songs are melancholy, while others have a cheerful character, sometimes requiring the listener to dance. The songs encapsulate normal issues in the community. The lyrics and melodies alike are fairly straightforward but are beautiful and pure. In Anok Semantan, the male members mainly sing the lead melodies. A harmonic texture is part of Anok Semantan's regional pop songs. The easiest place to hear this is in the background melodies sung by the group. At a certain point in the songs, the group uses passages in vocal harmony to emphasize certain words, often the refrain or the end of a verse.

The album cover illustration projects the aesthetic agenda of the music. Anok Semantan's album artwork portrays the group in traditional humility (Figure 3.13). The male singers are wearing different coloured *baju Melayu* (a loose-fitting shirt with long sleeves) and long trousers. *Baju Melayu* comes in two styles. The first has a raised stiff collar known as a *cekak musang* collar (literally a 'fox's leash'). The second does not have the *cekak musang* but instead the opening is hemmed with stiff stitching and ends with a small loop at the top of one side that hooks onto a single button. This style is known as the *teluk belanga*.

*Baju Melayu* is worn with long trousers with a *samping*, which is wrapped around the middle of the body. The *samping* is a three-quarter-length sarong-style woven cloth embroidered with traditional patterns. To create a relaxed look in the photos, the male singers had either attached the *samping* to their shoulder or tied it around their waists. Meanwhile, both female singers had donned *baju kurung* (long blouse for women). To increase the Malayness of her appearance, Fadlina had personalized her look with an untied batik cloth on her head and a white flower behind her ear. The appearance of Anok Semantan in traditional attire on the album's cover may have played an important role in the promotion of the product, as it may have attracted an audience specifically interested in regional pop music.





Figure 3.13: Anok Semantan (taken from the album cover) in traditional Malay costumes

The group identifies that local radio was a powerful ally in exposing (new) listeners to their music. On an afternoon in April 2018, while on my way to Kuantan, Pahang, I tuned into a radio programme on a Pahang radio station. The DJ used the term '*lagu tradisional Pahang*' (Pahang traditional song) to denote a regional pop song by Anok Semantan. I could not understand why he called the song 'traditional'. I think that perhaps in this context his use of the term was probably related to the use of the Pahang dialect in the song's lyrics, which is the prominent element in Pahang regional pop music.

In brief, employing the Pahang dialect in song lyrics gives regional pop songs additional aesthetic and authentic elements. As well as the Pahang dialect, there are non-verbal elements that make this music distinctive, in particular the distinct rhythm, melody and harmony that provide the texture of the sound. In the following section, I discuss the local features depicted in the music videos of Anok Semantan that can be viewed on the popular music website of YouTube.

### 3.3.1.2 Local features in music videos

The aesthetic characteristics of regional pop songs have been translated into several music videos, which has consequently opened up a platform for responses from the community. In this section, I take a closer look at several videos of Anok Semantan's regional pop songs disseminated on

YouTube. All the music videos were recorded against the backdrop of Temerloh, and depict traditional and modern elements. To give a sense of tradition to some of the music videos, they were recorded against backdrops of village landscapes (an abandoned old house, the Pahang River and the Pekan Sehari traditional market) and traditional/village lifestyles (people bathing in the swamp, and children playing hide and seek, chasing chicks and fishing in the pond).

As seen in Figure 3.14, the music video of the song ‘Ngape Bio Semok’ was recorded against the backdrop of an abandoned old house to depict a traditional setting.



Figure 3.14: A screenshot from the music video for the song ‘Ngape Bio Semok’ with the backdrop of an abandoned old house

This somehow offers a juxtaposition with the image and fashions of the singers, which simply symbolize modern elements. The male singers appear in Western-style shirts and jeans, while the female singers wear modern Muslim headscarves, and modern dresses and trousers. To depict a contemporary or modern scene, some of the videos were recorded in industrial areas and at popular attractions, including parks around Temerloh (Kenangan Garden, Kubang Gajah Square and Temerloh Lake Park). Both the traditional and modern elements form part of the collective memories of the community.

Anok Semantan’s regional pop music also features social criticisms, including of unproductive behaviours, incompetence regarding the management of family wealth due to a lack of education, loitering and street

rating problems. Such criticism is considered *madah* (a polite observation made through song). As an example, the following transcription of the Anok Semantan song ‘Ngape Bio Semok’ indicates their feelings towards lazy people. Among others, this song provides useful advice for people to work hard and reach their goals.

*Ngape bio semok? (2x) / Why Let the Bush Grow?*

*Tanah sekangkang kere ngape bio semok? (2x) / Why let the weeds grow in a small land?*

*Ngape bio lari? (2x) / Why let the buffalo run?*

*Kerbanye ande seko ngape bio lari? (2x) / There is only one buffalo but why has it been released?*

*Ngape mudoh lepe? Ngape mudoh ghalek? (2x) / Why is it easy to be forgotten? Why is it easy to be infatuated?*

*Kalanye ngendok senang kenela beringat-ingat, / If you want to live happily be mindful,*

*Kalanye ngendok menang kenela bekerja kuat, / If you want to win, you need to work hard,*

*Orang lepaih ke bulan awok dalam selimut, / Others have already reached the moon, but you’re still in bed,*

*Orang naik kapeterebang awok tengesot-ngesot. / People are on a plane, but you’re still crawling.*

Some lyrics mention values with the intention of cultivating and nurturing a healthy lifestyle; some even include Malay proverbs in the song: for instance, *sikit-sikit lama-lama jadi bukit* (little by little, in the end it becomes a hill) and *berakit ke hulu berenang ke tepian biar sakit dulu asal senang kemudian* (it is necessary to work hard in order to succeed). In my view, these Malay proverbs in songs can be considered examples of *bait*. Accounts of important historical places can also be conveyed through song lyrics. The song ‘Kole Semantan’ (Mouth of the Semantan River), for instance, appraises the important place of Kuala Semantan, which is located at the confluence of two major rivers, the Semantan and the Pahang. This song also features the history of Mount Senyum, a popular limestone mountain associated with folk stories and myths.

To summarize, there is a cultural significance to Anok Semantan's regional pop music. The various symbols and aesthetic concept of regional pop represented in visual and audio forms are inevitably a cultural expression of the Pahang dialect's spoken community. Symbols in music, to quote Wolvers, 'may have a certain cultural connotation which is familiar to those who share a specific group identity' (Wolvers, 2010: 12). In a national context, Pahang regional pop music is termed 'folk music', as it is influenced by traditional elements. Anok Semantan regional pop music is dependent on the VCD medium for distribution and consumption. The music has also been disseminated through the Internet as it appeals both to a regional audience and the Pahang diaspora. The next section concerns the formation of community around Pahang regional pop music, especially on the Internet.

### **3.3.2 Community formation around Pahang regional pop music**

How did a community form around Pahang regional pop music? To discuss community formation around Pahang regional pop, I focus on two themes. The first explains the intrinsic benefits of watching regional pop songs being performed live by Anok Semantan at a huge concert, as noted by members of the fan community. The second concerns online community building on the participatory website of YouTube.

#### **3.3.2.1 Intrinsic benefits of attending Anok Semantan's concert performance**

Intrinsic benefits, as categorized by McCarthy et al. (2004), are those that individuals can gain through participating in the arts that consequently affect them internally. Intrinsic benefits entered the conversation among fans who attended Anok Semantan's performance in the *Konsert Pesona* (Incantation Concert) on 4 November 2017, which was held outdoors at Serambi Teruntum in Kuantan, Pahang. The concert was aired on TV2, a television channel operated by *Radio Televisyen Malaysia*. As well as Anok Semantan, a number of singers/musicians performing an array of music genres also featured in this concert. Anok Semantan was, however, the only Pahang regional pop group that was given a chance to perform on the same stage as several prominent musicians.

I was not in Pahang for the concert, so I watched it on television at home. During the first part of the concert, my focus was on Anok Semantan's

singing performance. In general, I did not benefit much from watching the concert on television apart from listening to the music. I wanted to know how avid fans felt about and what their reaction had been to Anok Semantan's performance at the concert. The day after the concert, I spoke to my contacts in Pahang by phone. Not long afterwards, I was able to interact with several individuals who attended the concert and heard about their experiences.

Salman is a fan of Anok Semantan's music. Living in Kuantan, he was excited that the concert was being held in his area. Salman attended the concert with several friends to experience the live performance of their favourite music group. On being asked to what degree he was absorbed in the performance, Salman realized that Anok Semantan's live performance had had an intrinsic impact on him. The live performance of regional pop songs had captivated him and his friends and made them appreciate and have pride in Pahang's dialect. This levelled their engagement, as well as creating an increased sense of community among the fans of regional pop music.

Anok Semantan's live performance in the concert included several forms of acting. This increased the affectivity of the group by activating the fans' feelings of unity. Salman, in addition to his previous remarks, demonstrated the gestures made by fans during the group's performance and described the situations in which the gestures were made. He then offered an interpretation of this: the fan community which knew Anok Semantan's songs participated in a group display of positive hand gestures and verbal call-and-response to Anok Semantan's performance. To support his account, Salman shared with me several obscure photographs of fans' reactions to the group's performance that he had captured during the concert.

Afzainizam also shared his thoughts on the fans' reaction to Anok Semantan's live performance. He remembered how the fans responded to the songs with a joyous and friendly atmosphere. They experienced transcendence and felt that they were part of the performance. Anok Semantan's set was seen as uplifting and enjoyable, providing a supportive environment for fans' emotional responses. After the concert, Afzainizam and others met up and had a sincere and passionate discussion, displaying their dedication to the performance. The performance of regional pop songs encourages their fan community to reminisce about collective memories. The individuals who I have spoken with were pleased that the concert was broadcast live. The concert increased the visibility of the town of Kuantan, Pahang in the national media. This benefited the town, local people and local culture. As a result of Anok Semantan's performance at the concert, local people have an increased sense of place and have seen their identity reinforced in the songs.

In summary, the fan community that attended this concert had a common bond and frame of reference. Regional pop music, such as that performed by Anok Semantan is a symbol that establishes pervasive, long lasting feelings and motivation among its fan community. It brings about a sense of belonging and a sense of community that creates a specific meaning and dimension in their lives. At this point, I should not forget to mention an online Anok Semantan community in which I participated. The following section explains how the availability of regional pop songs on social media, primarily YouTube, has helped to form a virtual community, and indicates the importance of these songs in the lives of the members of the community.

### **3.3.2.2 Virtual community on YouTube**

The availability of Pahang regional pop music in digital environments has generated a community. An example of the emergence of community on the Internet is represented by people participating in conversations on YouTube, one of the most popular video sites. I consider this an important topic in understanding the relationship between the online music-watching community and Pahang regional pop music in the terrain of digital technology. Music ranks as the highest of the video categories visited on YouTube and acts as a focal music platform that provides social spaces and cultural resources for affiliation. People primarily use YouTube to look up artists, videos or live events. There is no doubt that YouTube plays a significant part in the experience of the contemporary music listener.

My examination of YouTube shows that all twelve songs from Anok Semantan's first album have been uploaded to this video-sharing website. These videos were professionally made and there was typically no information embedded in them. Interestingly, neither the producer nor the singers uploaded their music from the album; instead, the videos have been uploaded to YouTube by fans (user-uploaded copies). Anok Semantan's songs were uploaded to the website as early as 2010, a year after Anok Semantan's first album was released in 2009. The number of views of each video ranges from the thousands to hundreds of thousands, showing that interest in Anok Semantan's songs is relatively high. The following paragraphs describe how online Anok Semantan's regional pop music is used and discussed in specific contexts.

Aiman, an online music user from Pahang, shared with me that YouTube is an important medium for him (Aiman, personal communication,

23 January 2019). If he wants to listen to Anok Semantan's songs, he searches directly on YouTube, facilitated by mobile digital technologies, primarily his mobile phone. This is in line with Hartley's view that 'the site has been seen an archive' (Hartley, 2012: 165), with Vernalis even calling it 'an archive without a librarian' (Vernalis, 2013: 152). In addition, online music consumption encourages communication on the topic. While listening to songs on YouTube, Aiman explained that he would share, communicate and comment on Anok Semantan's song with other online music users.

The presense of Anok Semantan's songs on the site enables the participation of online music consumers in the community. They participate in dialogues and share their feelings about songs. It is likely that these online music consumers are from the Pahang and/or have a cultural relationship with Pahang. Commenting on the song 'Makwe Koi' (My Girlfriend), one viewer says that she misses her village in Pahang. Another viewer left a comment saying how lucky he had been to find this song on YouTube. These comments are inspired by the stated view that by listening to the song, it brings back memories of their village in Pahang, as well as evoking nostalgic thoughts.

I refer to an online conversation between Mohamad Azmi and Mohamed Ibrahim regarding the song 'Ngape Bio Semok' (Why Let the Bush Grow?). They have something in common – both are married to Pahang women. Through marriage, they have learned about Anok Semantan's regional pop, and have subsequently become fans of the music. Inspired by the same song on YouTube, Emma Salleh (from Sarawak in north-west Borneo Island) and Amir Daniel (from the south of Johor) agreed that Anok Semantan's songs have played an important role in introducing the Pahang dialect to them. It is evident that the presence of Pahang regional pop music online induces digital music consumers to learn more about the culture of Pahang.

Some viewers have thought that the Pahang dialect used in Anok Semantan's songs is identical to the dialects of several other regions. Reza Khadafi commented on the song 'Gone Gamoknye' (How About It), saying that the Pahang dialect is nearly identical to the spoken language in Padang, West Sumatra, Indonesia. Mizi Amanah left a comment on the music video for 'Kole Semantan' (Mouth of the Semantan River) observing that the Pahang dialect is identical to the spoken language of the people in the state of Perak.

Most online viewers describe Anok Semantan's songs as simple and state that they can listen to them while driving and working. As demonstrated, the availability of Pahang regional pop music on YouTube has transformed listening modes (from offline to online listening) and meanings in the lives of

the members of the Anok Semantan's regional pop community. These shifts have helped online consumers to communicate with like-minded and differently minded individuals about music in conversations that meld together and cannot easily be separated.

As well as uploading original, 'authentic' music videos from Anok Semantan, some fans engage with other types of videos. In some cases this involves reproducing clips of music videos where they retain the original audio content but add user-created elements to the video. I also found videos that had discarded the motion picture and replaced it with a still photo. In a third variation, the videos used stills, but the visual content also included the song's lyrics rolling across the screen in a similar way to karaoke videos. A consumer named 'Odexers', for instance, created an 'alternative' music video for 'Ngape Bio Semok', with the lyrics provided to invite viewers to sing along, and a request to rate and comment on the video.

The fourth and fifth types of videos are amateur recordings of live performances of Anok Semantan in concert and videos of cover versions, respectively. The different types of videos clearly invite attention from consumers but elicit different engagement patterns. The original videos of Anok Semantan's music receive more views, votes and comments than those containing the lyrics or still videos. This is probably because when viewers feel the need to discuss a song, they are more likely to share their opinion in the context of the 'authentic' music videos.

In a nutshell, YouTube is a participatory site. In relation to online music consumption, a participatory culture can be used to describe fan community activities. Anok Semantan's music videos on YouTube have hundreds of thousands of viewers. Participants engage with each other through three public ways of interacting with music videos: viewing, commenting and voting. The comment field offers space for qualitative taste judgements, and discussions often concern the artists, videos, and music. However, discussion can also go off-topic and address different issues.

### **3.4 Concluding thoughts**

This chapter has provided accounts of social contexts and the formation of community through the sounds of two music genres. I have identified that both traditional and regional pop music have features in common with songs from the past. The poetic forms of *pantun* and *seloka* are a common source of inspiration for traditional and regional pop musicians. As well as *pantun* and



*seloka*, in traditional music Malays in Pahang villages incorporate other historical song forms: *syair*, *nazam* and *gurindam*. Meanwhile, *madah* and *bait* are used in regional pop music. There are various cultural elements in the lyrics of both traditional songs and regional pop songs.

The musicians in these genres, who cite their love of Malay arts and culture, have made changes to the songs to keep them relevant. By all accounts, the traditional poetry songs that originated long ago have been hugely revitalized. In this sense, innovations and significant changes in the function, performance practice and style have occurred in *syair* under the leadership of Roslan Madun and other singers and musicians who have provided music for *syair*. Innovations can noticeably be seen in performance practices (annual cultural events, concerts, singing workshops and competitions), the role of *syair* performers and the function of *syair* in the community. The performance of *syair* and other traditional poetry songs, once popular forms of sung entertainment for nobles in palaces, has been transformed into a cultural, government-sponsored form of entertainment, considered ‘revitalized performance’. Traditional poetry songs are performed at the request of the government and state agencies in the interest of preserving a traditional art form, as well as being incorporated in the school curriculum. At the time of writing there is also an attempt underway to establish official names for several other unidentified *syair* tunes.

Regional pop music, supported by a mixture of music genres adopted from local and global sources, has made the use of *pantun* verses and other traditional elements admissible in contemporary music. In regional pop, the significant innovation is that poetic forms (for instance, *pantun*) are sung as song lyrics in the Pahang dialect, something that has never previously happened. This gives the music genre a distinct character. Regional pop musicians have made these traditions relevant in the modern world.

The community at large has shown pride in traditional music and regional pop music as both form part of their own cultural and artistic heritage. The genres continue to succeed today both because their performers have been able to adapt to using different performance outlets and due to the availability of technology and the modernization of musical traditions. Through several performance outlets, communities around both traditional and regional pop music have been formed, created and maintained.

Special associations have been established to ensure the upholding of musical traditions. Two examples are the *Syair* Academy (now the N.D. Lala Academy of the Arts) and the Association of Fans of Pahang District Dialects,

which both support the performance of these Pahang music forms. The activities of the musicians in both these genres intertwine with other activities in the local community. The genres seem to play a decisive role in the formation of the identity of individuals and their belonging to a group. The music types also have historical dimensions, carrying on traditions handed down from the past. Musicians in traditional music and regional pop music are very important actors on the music scene.

My musical fieldwork in Pahang villages did not concentrate on just one musical tradition but tried to consider all those features important to the locality. My journey became more interesting when I met musicians in Pahang villages who had chosen non-traditional sounds for their music. In the next chapter, I share my experience of *kugiran* and *punk rock* music.