Heterogeneity in the Musical Acquisition of Orang Asli Children from the Mah Meri and Semai Groups

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Abstract

The music acquisition and aesthetics of children in two Orang Asli villages, the Mah Meri of Kampung Sungai Bumbun, Carey Island, Selangor, and the Semai of Kampung Ulu Geroh, Gopeng has shifted from an oral tradition transmitted from ancestral lineages to institutionalized learning acquired from a teacher outside the Orang Asli cultural tradition. The interaction of Orang Asli children with friends from multicultural backgrounds, exposure to the mass media, and the evangelization of religious groups has also increasing dislocated Orang Asli children's music from a place-based and ethnic heritage to one of "deterritorialized" space and time. These phenomena emerged due to the nation's hegemonic policies of assimilation, development and globalization since Independence in 1957. This article discusses the variables that influence and determine the music acquisition of Mah Meri and Semai children today. These variables include; issues of identity, worldviews and religion, tourism, locality, the mass media, and multiculturalism. I posit that there is growing heterogeneity in the music acquisition of Orang Asli groups conglomerated into specific ethnic categorizes. I argue for the construction of multiple Orang Asli identities in a developing country constantly exposed to national and global aspirations. These emerging identities transcend the stereotyped categories of Orang Asli groups originally constructed to administer control and surveillance over Orang Asli movements during British governance in the 1900s.

Keywords *globalization, heterogeneity, indigenous music, modernization, Orang Asli music education, multiple identities, musical transmission*

Abstrak

Pembelajaran and estetika muzik kanak-kanak dari dua kampung Orang Asli iaitu Mah Meri dari Kampung Sungai Bumbun, Pulau Carey, Selangor dan Semai dari Kampung Ulu Geroh, Gopeng telah beralih dari pembelajaran tradisi lisan yang diwarisi secara turun-temurun kepada pembelajaran formal di institusi dari guru di luar tradisi mereka. Interaksi kanak-kanak Orang Asli dengan rakan-rakan dari pelbagai budaya, pendedahan kepada media massa, dan penyebaran agama semakin mengasingkan muzik kanak-kanak Orang Asli dari muzik alam sekeliling dan warisan etnik mereka Pembelajaran muzik mereka semakin diasingkan daripada pengaruh

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unsur-unsur dari persekitaran kawasan kediaman mereka. Fenomena ini terhasil oleh polisi hegemonik kerajaan iaitu polisi integrasi, pembangunan dan globalisasi sejak Merdeka dalam tahun 1957. Artikel ini membincangkan pelbagai unsur yang mempengaruhi pembelajaran muzik kanak-kanak Mah Meri dan Semai hari ini. Kepelbagaian ini termasuk isu identiti, sistem kepercayaan, agama, pelancongan, lokasi, media massa dan kepelbagaian budaya. Saya bercadang bahawa terdapat kepelbagaian dalam pemerolehan dan pembelajaran muzik Orang Asli yang telah dikategori kumpulan-kumpulan etnik spesifik. Saya berpendapat bahawa aspirasi nasional dan global negara telah membawa kepada perkembangan kepada identiti yang pelbagai di kalangan Orang Asli hari ini. Tingkahlaku dan aktiviti muzikal kanak-kanak Orang Asli mencerminkan identiti ini. Identiti yang ditonjolkan hari ini melepasi kategori yang kebiasaannya diwujudkan untuk mengawal dan memerhati Orang Asli semasa semasa zaman pemerintahan British dalam tahun 1900s.

Kata kunci globalisasi, kepelbagaian, modernisasi, multiple identities, muzik Orang Asli, pendidikan muzik Orang Asli, penyebaran muzik

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Introduction

The Orang Asli are the indigenous people of Peninsular Malaysia. The music of indigenous communities is often orientalized as "authentic" and encrypted in a musical tradition immune to change. Their music and identity is imagined as manifesting the music of an ancestral tradition frozen from change. The musical traditions of each of the eighteen Orang Asli subgroups embody a variety of differences depending on their livelihood, ecological niche, belief system, and cultural interactions. Whilst these components were pertinent to the construction of Orang Asli identity and musical tradition, their increasing susceptibility to Malaysia's larger vision and aspiration has influenced their musical acquisition and production today.

This article examines the musical acquisition, transmission and changing aesthetics of Orang Asli children from two Orang Asli subgroups: the Mah Meri of Kampung Sungai Bumbun, Carey Island, Selangor; and the Semai of Kampung Ulu Geroh, Gopeng, Perak. It is based on historical research and ethnographic fieldwork conducted in 2009 and 2011-2012 respectively. I suggest three hegemonic structures– development (modernization), nationalism (assimilation), and globalization as major influences on Orang Asli musical aesthetics today.

Figure 1 Location of Kampung Ulu Geroh, Gopeng, Perak (A) and Kampung Sungai Bumbun, Carey Island, Selangor (B). Retrieved on 28 June 2012. https://maps.google.com.my/maps?hl=en&authuser=0

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The Mobile Identity

Fundamental to the analysis of Orang Asli musical aesthetics today is the concept of "identity". I utilize Hall's (1983) concept that "identity is not essentialist but strategic and positional". He states that identity:

> does not signal that stable core of the self, unfolding from beginning to end through all the vicissitudes of history without change … it accepts that identities are never unified and in late modern times, increasingly fragmented and fractured; never singular but multiply constructed across different, often intersecting and antagonistic, discourses, practices and positions (Hall, 1983, pp. 3-4).

The construction of identity and musical aesthetics are inseparable. This article discusses the Orang Asli identity as mobile and unstable, in opposition to the earlier concepts of identity as stagnate and unchanging. Hall discusses three conceptions of identity; the Enlightenment subject, the sociological subject and the postmodern subject. During the Enlightenment, the "self" was conceived as "stable, unchanging, fully unified, centered and endowed with capacities of reason". A new perspective, the "sociological self" emerged with the conceptualization that identity is formed by the "interaction" between self and society. This identity internalized the values of its social and cultural milieu, constantly modified in continuous dialogue with the others. The postmodern identity is fragmented, disjointed and composed not of a single but several sometimes contradictory and unresolved identities. Identity is conceptualized as fluid, moveable and constantly shifting. It assumes different identities depending on time, context, situation, place and whatever is advantages to it (Hall 1983). Identity has become a "moveable feast: formed and transformed in relation to the what we are represented or addressed in the cultural systems which surround us" (ibid. 1987).

The changes from a homogenous to a more heterogenous identity spurred by socio-political changes, nationalism and globalization has led to the construction of Orang Asli with multiple identities and diverse musical aesthetics and interest. The inter-marriages between Orang Asli with the plural population in Malaysia due to exposure and interaction have also led to the dilution of homologous ancestral lineages. "New" identities are formed over time when Orang Asli communities convert from their animist beliefs to Christianity or Islam. This identity is constructed from a coalition between indigenous customs, rituals and values with the fundamental beliefs in the new belief system. One of the most dominant and rapid components influencing Orang Asli identity and musical aesthetics is their exposure to the virtual world through the media. The media exposes the Orang Asli to global ideas, culture, and trends. The shaping and reshaping of the Orang Asli identities is influenced by what they choose to consume, whether predictable or novel.

This article begins with a brief background of the Orang Asli and Malaysia's goals to develop, integrate, and modernize the Orang Asli. These hegemonic structures have led to the reconstruction of Orang Asli identities, and consequently their musical aesthetics and culture.

Background

The Orang Asli are the earliest inhabitants of Peninsular Malaysia. They live in scattered villages along the foothills of the Titiwangsa or Central Range, and the mangrove forests along the southwest coastal plains of the Peninsula. In the 2004 census, the Orang Asli numbered 0.6 percent of the national population of 23,953,136 people. The Orang Asli are divided into three major groups; Negrito, Senoi and Aboriginal Malays (Bellwood, 1998, Benjamin, 1975; Dentan et.al., 1997; Nicholas 2000). Each group is further divided into six sub groups. The Mah Meri and Semai fall under the Senoi category. In the 2003 census on Orang Asli population, there were about 2,839 Mah Meri and 43,892 Semai out of a total of 147,412 Orang Asli (JHEOA, 2003). The Mah Meri reside in Carey Island, Selangor, and along the southwest coastal plains of the Peninsula. The Mah Meri ancestors were maritime and mangrove forest hunter-gatherers. Today, the Mah Meri are sedentary agriculturalists and wage labourers (Lai, 2008; Rahim, 2007). The Semai live on both slopes of the Main Range in Perak, Kelantan and Pahang. In the past, the Semai were swiddeners dependent on their forest for their subsistence. Today, they are permanent agriculturalists who manage rubber, oil-palm, durian orchards and participate in the wage sector (Gomes, 2004; Nicholas, 2000). The Mah Meri and Semai both speak different variations of the Austroasiatic language.

Figure 2. Distribution of 18 Orang Asli subgroups in Peninsular Malaysia. Retrieved on the 28 June 2012. http://cameron-highland-destination.blogspot.com/2009/04/orang-asli-in-malaysia.html.

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Orang Asli music contains a repository of wisdom, knowledge and worldviews transmitted from generation to generation for thousands of years. Inspired by their natural environment, the Orang Asli sing and perform the geographical landscape, flora and fauna, and ethos of their people. In many indigenous societies, music and songs were important to inculcate cultural values, celebrate the rites of passage, and for the socialization process. Children were taught the value of respect for their elders, the natural environment, and living things. Gender differences and roles were distinguished and normalized through songs (Blacking 1995). In many Orang Asli settlements today, traditional music has declined and gravitated toward the preference for music disseminated by the mass media. The lack of interest in their traditional music and songs stem from several factors—a growing detachment from their previous natural environment and the attraction to a more modern life-style founded on capitalistic values and laced with consumerist culture. A process of deculturalization occured with the decline in the transmission of their music and songs. On a more optimistic stance, one may refer to this phenomenon as a transformation in Orang Asli identity. I suggest that this transformation developed from national policies implemented by the Malaysian government through the Department of Orang Asli Development or *Jabatan Kemajuan Orang Asli* (JAKOA) after Independence. These policies have resulted in the changing identities of the Orang Asli today.

Statement of the Problem

Prior to Independence, the Orang Asli chose to lead a subsistent livelihood, interdependent on the natural forests resources from the foothills of the Central Range or mangrove forests of the southern coastal plains of the peninsula. Unlike Malays, Chinese and Indians who survived on trade and agricultural activities during pre-independent Malaysia, the Orang Asli maintained their livelihood independent of the growing envelopment into the consumerist culture. Their livelihood and life-style began to change after Independence with the Malaysian government's goals and concepts that greatly affected them. The "imagined community" (Anderson, 1983) propagated through the construction of a "bangsa" (race/ nation) Malaysia, and the most recent "1 Malaysia" concept, and Malaysia's goals to achieve the status of a developed country by "Vision 2020" remains strong. The impetus for a developed country was founded on the perspective that a "progressive" society had to achieve high mass consumption ideals - the fifth and last stage of Rostow's (1960) model of economic growth (Nicholas 2000, p. 44). Rostow's theory was linear and had a limited and objective paradigm in perceiving the notion of "progressive".

Adopting a paternalistic approach, the Malaysian government decided there was little room for a "primitive" and "backward" society like the Orang Asli, so goals justified as "modernization" models were constructed to modernize and gradually integrate them into the mainstream society (Dentan et.al., 1997; Nicholas, 2000). Development programs labeled as "modernization" schemes included the introduction of modern education, economic activities (such as commerce and industry), facilities (water, electricity, houses), medical, and health services (Nicholas, 2000, p. 96). The destruction of the natural forest environment of the Orang Asli through deforestation,

industrialization, the construction of dams, highways and houses left many no choice but to be resettled into new housing areas that detach them from their original way of livelihood and life-style.

The policies of nationalism (integration) and development (modernization) have greatly impacted the identity of the Orang Asli today. This changing identity is observed in their musical activities. The next section provides a brief history of the musical acquisition and transmission of the Mah Meri and Semai children and culminates in a description of their contemporary musical activities in 2009 of the Semai children in 2011-2012 respectively.

The Musical Activities of the Mah Meri (2009)

Kampung Sungai Bumbun is a homogenous Mah Meri village located in Carey Island, Selangor. It consists of approximately 500 villagers and is a popular tourist destination today. The Mah Meri children go to SK Pulau Carey primary school located in the village itself. Most of the children that attend this school are children from other Mah Meri villages on the island. The syllabus and curriculum of this school is typical of any government school. Unlike the traditional Mah Meri music and songs, which was orally transmitted from generation to generation, the Mah Meri children today learn much of their music from "deterritorialized" time and space. Their gradual participation into the modern world, one thriving on technological advancements, have enabled them to listen, learn and perform music from the past and beyond their space-bounded context. This section begins with a brief portrayal of the musical life of the Mah Meri in the early 1900s until the late 1900s.

Mah Meri Music During the Twentieth Century

During the early and late twentieth century, music and dance was performed in the context of festive celebrations and sacred ceremonies such as weddings, durian or paddy harvest festivals (not in existence anymore), the annual *Moyang* (ancestral spirit) ceremony and the *Popoit* ritual (healing ceremony). During festive celebrations, villagers would gather at the village *balai* (gathering place) to celebrate the event. Music and dancing were core activities during these events. Music was transmitted through rote learning from the adults to the children during these musical events. During the late nineteenth century, Skeat and Blagden (1906) described a ceremony called the "*Balai Berentak*" (*balai*: hall; *berentak*: rhythm) that consisted of six performers, each stamping a pair of bamboo tubes of different lengths, known as the *ding tengkhing* (quarrelling bamboos), (Skeat and Blagden, 1906, p.141).

> The feast then begins, the freshly-brewed liquor is drunk, and, to the accompaniment of strains of their rude and incondite music, the jungle-folk of both sexes deck themselves freely with flowers and fragrant leaves and indulge in dancing and singing throughout the night. This ceremony is called the "*Berentak Balei*" or "Drumming upon (the floor) of the Tribal Hall" (Skeat and Blagden 1906, pp. 144-145).

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During the 1980s, Karim (1981), Nowak (1987), and Werner (1997) describe a ritual known as the "*Main Jo'oh*," a ceremony similar to the *Berentak Balai*. Although Karim delineated a detailed description of the *Popoit* ceremony (healing ceremony), this ritual is almost obsolete in their medicinal practices today (Nowak 1987). The Main Jo'oh was performed in many contexts. The annual '*Ari Moyang* (Ancestral Day) was accompanied by Main Jo'oh live music and dance during festivals and rituals. The '*Ari Moyang* re-enacted the Mah Meri's myth of the origins of human beings. In the 1980s, Nowak describes a Main Jo'oh ensemble that performed during the second night of a wedding at Kampung Sungai Judah . . . "the usual violin, gong, and drum play and occasionally some women play bamboo stampers (*dik tengkeng*)" (Nowak 1987, p.108). Karim (1981) describes the Main Jo'oh music and dance performance as:

> … unpredictable, unlike the male and female dancers who move their feet and hands in a consistent, controlled manner, The masked dancer performs an animal-like prance where the stomach and buttocks are constantly joggled and the hands move about in an awkward and clumsy manner. Occasionally, they pause to stare and gape at the audience and the dancers before joining in the dance again (Karim, 1987, p.116).

Gendoi Ranggun Seman, in her 80s, remembers her musical experiences during her younger days when *jo'oh* music was popular in the village. Her description affirms the existence of a combination of Mah Meri and Malay music in the village. She mentions names of well-known *jule* (violin) players, musical instruments, and titles of some *jo'oh* songs performed during her younger days.

> That time I was still schooling; they would perform the Main Jo'oh at the *balai* (gathering place) at about 8 pm. There was a *busut* (mound) made from yellow dirt. There was Ahmad Kassim, Bumbung and his father, Usoi (another *jule* player). When one was tired of fiddling, the other would take over; they would alternate. The *banjeng* (bamboo zither) would sound . . . *keceng keceng keceng*. When there were weddings, we would *ronggeng (joget*) . . . there were many *jo'oh* and *joget* songs, Malay poems, Musang Song, Balaw Song and Sidud Song (Ranggun Seman, personal communication, April 22, 2009 in Chan, 2010).

Gendoi Chedan Atan, in her 60s, remembers the excitement at the array of colourful lights, costumes, food, and sacred practices at the Datok Kong (a local Chinese deity) temple during the Chinese opera season. Her testimony is evidence of Mah Meri interaction and contact with the Chinese across the river where the lived. She states:

> We went to Permatang Pasir, at Jugra Hill, to watch Chinese Opera at the Dato Kong (Chinese local deity) temple. On the first night, they prayed and pierced their tongues, on the second and third night; they started performing. The Chinese *towkay* told us, "tomorrow they are still praying, you don't need to go, but on the third day, you should go, that's when they have the *wayang* (show)." We waited for the high tide, then paddled our boats out in the evening and only came home in the early morning. They sold many things at the temple: rambutan, *kuih* (cakes), and *cendol*.[1] We bought things, watched the opera . . . *tung tang tung tang* (sound of drums and gongs) . . . the costumes were very beautiful costumes. We did not understand what the opera performers were saying but we understood the story from the acting. (Chedan Atan, personal communication, 6 April 2009 in Chan 2010).

Song debates are a common musical genre in Southeast Asian traditions, wherein "male and females alternated performing various forms of repartee, creating veritable gender wars, based on wit and double entendre" (Miller and Williams 1998, p. 6). Maznah Unyan, the head of the Mah Meri Cultural Troupe since 2005 says that her mother, Gendoi Samah Seman, and the late Mijah Sakit were well-known female singers of the village in the '70s. During weddings, Mijah Sakit, would demonstrate her song text improvisatory skills during the *pantun berbalas-balas* (poem exchange) session. During musical events, Main Jo'oh tunes were sung to improvised witty debates between villagers (Titah Tebung, personal communication, April 16, 2009). According to Rosiah Kengkeng (personal communication, March 7, 2009), Mijah Sakit said that if the people wanted to sing, they should compose their own lyrics for there is much in their surrounding forest, mangrove, and sea environment that could inspire song text improvisation. I suggest Mijah was reluctant to formally teach or impart her song texts songs because she believed in its spontaneity.

Zainuddin Unyan's father, the late Unyan Awas was a famous violin player in Kampung Sungai Bumbun in the late twentieth century. Zainuddin said he used to secretly play his father's violin whilst his father was at work. His father did not formally teach him how to play the violin and would only comment when Zainuddin wasn't playing the tunes correctly (Zainuddin Unyan, personal communication, 9 February, 2009). The late Usoi's father was very careful and strict with Usoi on the use of his much-valued violin for string replacements were not easily accessible to them (Rosiah Kengkeng personal communication, March 7, 2009). These testimonies reveal the value of detail and care the Mah Meri placed on their musical instruments and songs.

The musical activities of the Mah Meri during the twentieth century were performed in both a sacred and secular context. Their recreational song-debates, musical style, and instruments manifested some similarities with their Malay neighbors. The Mah Meri were also in contact with the Chinese communities living near across the river. The description of the Mah Meri life-style during the twentieth century showed that the Mah Meri were not isolated groups whose culture was homogenous and immune to other cultural influences. Their music, dance, language, food, and customs embodied their interaction and contact with the local communities. The transmission of music in Kampung Sungai Bumbun before the twenty first century was largely based on rote learning and auditory exposure. The Mah Meri musicians were also reluctant teachers for they wanted their young to pick up musical skills by listening, observing, and self-exploration. In many traditional systems, there were no formal lessons between a teacher and student was held at a specific place with time limitation.

Mah Meri Music During the Early Twenty First Century

During my ethnographic fieldwork in 2009, I observed that the Mah Meri children in Carey Island acquire their musical experiences mainly through—a) the mass media b) the village school c) the grassroots cultural troupe. With reference to the mass media, the television and hand phone are one of the main mediums where children get access to music from around the globe. According to Razzie bin Gali (personal communication, 2009) the hand phone is his camera and music player. Hand phones are popular multi-

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functional gadgets that connect them to the global arena. Their phones usually have a library of games, MP3s, and photographs. They use Bluetooth technology to get music from their friends or go to a telecommunications center nearby to transfer music from CDs to their hand phones. Teenagers use their hand phones less for making calls or sms (text-messages) due to their lack of income. Much of the music they downloaded is Indonesian, Malay, Orang Asli or popular Western music (Chan, 2010, p. 265).

This section examines the musical acquisition, influences, and aesthetics of the Orang Asli children. Music and singing lessons are only allocated thirty minutes a week in government primary schools. Sometimes, this period is alternated with art classes. On the 16 May 2009, the school's participation in the "Pertandingan Ko-Akademik Kebudayaan Daerah Kuala Langat 2009" was held at Dewan Sri Jugra, Perkarangan. Stadium Jugra Dewan SK Methodist involved a number of Mah Meri children in singing and dancing activities. The children's interest in music was enhanced by their music teacher's (an ethnic Malay) interest in music and dance. In the same year, the Mah Meri children won first place in an English singing contest at the regional level. The songs that the Mah Meri children memorized and sung with great enthusiasm were, "I like to Move it, Move it" from the film *Madagascar* (1994), and "I Believe I Can Fly" from the film *Space Jam* (1996). The Mah Meri children were very enthusiastic about the competition and learnt the songs with diligence and full commitment after school hours. During this competition, the Mah Meri children formally learnt music and songs beyond their village.[2] They also interacted with and were benchmarked against urban children. Although the children mainly memorized the lyrics of the songs, and perhaps had little understanding of its meaning, the competition cultivated the spirit of competition, discipline and tolerance among the children. As with many other Orang Asli childen, the Mah Meri children are shy and reserved, therefore their involvement in these competitions helps them develop a sense of competition, a trait they may need to engage in the world beyond their village.

Figure 3 Mah Meri children engrossed in a television program (photo by Clare Chan, 2009)

Figure 4 Mah Meri children performing during the "2009 School Contemporary Traditional Dancing Competition", during the Selangor Muzikal Ekstravaganza event held at Laman Budaya, Shah Alam, 2 August 2009 (photo by Clare Chan, 2009)

One of the only experiences the Mah Meri children have with their own musical heritage is during the yearly ancestral '*Ari Moyang* (Ancestral Day). During this festival, the Mah Meri cultural troupe performs their traditional Main Jo'oh songs. Many local and international tourists attend this festival held in the Mah Meri's *Rumah Moyang* (Ancestral House) in Kampung Sungai Bumbun. However, participation as musicians in the Mah Meri cultural troupe is limited to the family members of a specific *opoh*[3] (extended family). A family of musicians manages and controls the musicians and performers involved in the performance. Since the Main Jo'oh has been commoditized, the full payment for each performance is often divided among the musicians and dancers. Each performer receives a portion of the payment. Therefore, the invitation to perform is controlled by the head of the Main Jo'oh cultural troupe. The commoditization of performances has implications on the transmission and dissemination of the Main Jo'oh music and dances. Unlike the communal songs shared among villagers, a system of music and song ownership is emerging. Another issue that has emerged in song transmission is the decline in spontaneity and improvisation. Since singing was once a live tradition involving improvisation, only certain attractive poetic prose were remembered by the elders. However, the tunes of Mah Meri songs somehow remained ingrained in the memory of the Mah Meri elders. Today (2009), the Mah Meri cultural troupe have written down the remnants of the song text they remember from their ancestors and added new lyrics to traditional songs such as *Jaboi, Ganding and Tok Naning* song. This practice has objectified and solidified song text into print therefore the ability to improvise has been neglected.

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The musical acquisition of the Mah Meri children in the twenty first century manifests their gradual absorption into global trends. The nation's goal toward developing and integrating them as modern citizens is bearing fruition. The national music syllabus contains Malay and English folk tunes and some newly composed children's songs. Although the nation states continue to promote Malaysia as a multi-cultural society, there is no promotion of indigenous music or folk songs sung in school. However, Malaysia's focus and interest on the Mah Meri has rejuvenated the Mah Meri musicians to rejuvenate and reinvent their musical tradition. Education, tourism and the media play a large role in the reconstruction of Mah Meri identity, consequently their musical acquisition, aesthetic and choices.

The Musical Activities of the Semai Children

Kampung Ulu Geroh is located 12 kilometres at the hill slopes of the Titiwangsa Range, off Gopeng town. The village is interspersed between rubber, oil-palm estates, durian orchards, and forest reserves. The Rafflesia flower and Raja Brooke's birdwinged butterflies abundant in this area has popularized the area into an ecotourism site. Whitewater rafting activities at Kampar River before one reaches Kampung Ulu Geroh village on the higher hill slopes is also a main tourist attraction. The Semai of Ulu Geroh have easy access to Gopeng town. Many men and women are mobile and ride motorbikes from their village downhill to the town for work, groceries, and provisions. The villagers have accepted modernization at a more rapid speed than the Mah Meri of Kampung Sungai Bumbun in Carey Island.

Semai Music During the Twentieth Century

There is little information on the musical activities of the Semai of Ulu Geroh. Skeat and Blagden (1906) describes the musical instruments of the Sakai (Semai) of Perak such as the nose flute, drum framed with monkey skin, bamboo stampers and "bamboo harp or guitar" (Skeat and Blagden, 1906, p.134). Skeat and Blagden describe the dance of the female Sakai:

> First they clapped their hands for a few bars, in time to the beat of the drum, repeating cries that sounded like "sough, sough, sough" and then "chaep, chaep, chaep". This was repeated six to eight times at the same time they made a curtsey once to every drum-beat. Then the arms dropped to the sides, and the body was turned from side to side (from hips upwards), the arms being allowed to swing loosely with it once to every beat of the time … (Skeat and Blagden 1906, p.138)

Norlida (2003) describes various types of Sewang such as *Sewang Berubat* (healing ritual) *Sewang Kebut* (smaller healing rituals) and *Sewang Pemutus ubat*. There is also Sewang performed for childbirth, funerals, propitiating *poyang-poyang* (spirits). There is also the *Sewang Besar* (large scale Sewang) or *Sewang Bersuka Ria* (recreational Sewang). During the *Sewang Berubat*, a chorus of women stamped the *centung* (bamboo stamping tubes) and sing in "call and response" style to the *halaq's* (shaman) singing (Norlida 2003, p. 13).

Whilst singing is used to initiate the spiritguides, the Semai also play instrumental music during their leisure hours. Bah Azmi (personal communication, 26 January, 2012) says that it is taboo to play music at night. He said, "*kalau bersiul pun tak boleh, kata orang tua, nanti mata jadi buta dan anak jadi cacat*" (our elders said that if we whistled at night, we would become blind and your children will become handicapped). He states, "we used to play the *pensol* (nose flute) and *ginggong* (jew's harp) next to the river, at home while relaxing or in daydreaming. The sounds of these instruments are sweet and gentle. When we miss and long for a love one, we will play these instruments".

Ganda (personal communication, 6 June, 2011), a female Semai in her 50s, says that during celebrations, there was a *biola* (violin) player who fiddled while the Semai sung Malay *pantuns* (poem) in song-debate styles. Ngah Teroq (personal communication, 6 June, 2011) says the Semai used have lively song debates sung in Bahasa Malaysia. Besides the Sewang for healing, there was also "Sewang suka-suka" (Recreational Sewang). The interaction between some Malay and Orang Asli occur in many areas where Malay and Orang Asli villages were in close proximity with each other.

Many of the elder villagers are proficient *ronggeng, joget,* and cha-cha-cha dancers. During live band performances during weddings or festivals, these elderly folks widely participate in the dancing that lasts from dusk to dawn. This phenomenon suggests that the Semai had access to Western popular rhythms that permeate the Peninsular during the mid-twentieth century. Besides the *joget* which developed from the *branyo,* a localized dance influenced by the Portuguese dances, the Semai are adept at Western dance styles of the early '60s such as cha-cha-cha.

Semai Music During the Early Twenty-First Century

The Semai experience musical activities include: a) the mass media b) traditional *Sewang* performances for visitors 3) Christian church services 4) school 5) festivals with modern popular band music. Organizations and visitors beyond the village sometimes request traditional *Sewang* performance. *Sewang* was traditionally performed in the context of healing ceremonies. The village's *Sewang* singer, Saripah d/o Ngah sings two standard songs accompanied by the *cente* (bamboo stampers) played by female musicians. The first song was taught transmitted from the late Bah Tum, her father in law and village shaman. The song is about a spirit guide, the spirit of a princess called Wak Dayang. According to Saripah, the second song is an adaptation of the first song but with "samba" rhythm which is quicker and livelier. When asked whether there is any relationship between the Latin-American samba rhythm with the samba rhythm she used, Saripah was ambivalent. I suggest that Saripah's exposure to Western musical rhythms performed by live bands in her village since the late twentieth century has cultivated knowledge on Western rhythms. Therefore, the samba rhythm is her mode of describing a faster rhythm.

Although the children naturally move to *Sewang* music, they are only aurally exposed to the songs. They do not memorize the melody or sing it. This scene vastly differs from traditional *Sewang* where a chorus of women would overlap a male shaman's singing as he is about to end his phrases. The shaman would sing again before

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the chorus took paused for a break. Musicians and the chorus alternated to ensure a continuous flow of music throughout the night. Modern type of *Sewang* has little room for flexible inter-changing of musicians and women chorus during performances. It is designed to be short, compact, and just enough to attract a spectacle. While children do not sing or learn the song text, they still have an auditory memory of *Sewang* songs because of interest the tourism industry and organizations beyond the village.

Figure 5 Semai children of Kampung Ulu Geroh, Gopeng showing the "V" or peace sign, a popular cultural gesture. (photo by Clare Chan, 2011)

Besides *Sewang* music, Christianity has been accepted by a large group of Semai. During church services, songs of worship are sung in the Malay language. Korean missionaries who evangelized to these areas preach the bible in Bahasa Malaysia. Ironically, many Christian songs have been translated into Bahasa Malaysia, not the Semai language. According to the villagers, there are many Semai dialects in the vicinity, therefore they decided to use Bahasa Malaysia, a common language that all Semai could sing together. Songs such as "What a Friend We Have in Jesus" and many Christmas carols have been translated into Bahasa Malaysia.

As well as Christian music, I also encountered Semai children singing game chants in Bahasa Malaysia. According to the Saripah d/o Ngah (personal communication, 1 July, 2011), the children learnt these game chants from school. The titles of some of these game chants are; *Anak Kambing Patah Kaki* (Little Goat Broke its Leg), *Gogo, Aiskrim* (Ice-Cream), and *Ibu Bapa (Parents)*. These chants are sung to a skipping rope game. They educate the children in counting and alphabetical orders. The game chant "*Anak Kambing Patah Kaki*" describes the behaviour of a goat. There is a possibility that this game chant may originate from the Orang Asli because one of

the sub-villages in Ulu Geroh was previously known as *Kampung Kandang Kambing* (Goat Pen Village). This village used to be a goat-herding village. The second game chant (Song 2) below stereotypes the early Indian immigrants as uneducated, telling them to return to India. This game chant is an important historical documentation about the socialization process between the early immigrants with the indigenous people of the peninsula.[4] The origins of these game chants are unknown but I suggest that some these game chants were composed in Malaysia because the song text describes local phenomenon and interactions.

Figure 6 Semai children singing a chant to a skipping rope game at Kampung Ulu Geroh, Gopeng, Perak. (photo by Clare Chan, 2011)

Song 1 Aiskrim (Ice-cream)

Aiskrim, aiskrim	Ice cream, ice cream
Beg loyak	Old Bag
Tak Tahu	I don't know
Balik India	Go back to India-
A, B, C.	A, B, C

(Clare Chan, recorded on 30 August, 2011)

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Song 2 *Anak Kambing* Patah Kaki (Little Goat Broke its Leg)

Anak kambing patah kaki	The little goat broke its leg
Anak kambing makan rumput	The little goat eats grass
Anak kambing menari-nari	The little goat dances
Anak kambing masuk ke kandang	The little goat enters the pen

(Clare Chan, recorded on 30 August, 2011)

Music from DVDs and CDs bought from Gopeng town nearby are very popular among the teenagers and children. The Semai have taken an interest in *dangdut* from Indonesia and popular Malaysian, Indonesian and Orang Asli music. Some of the popular *dangdut* songs are "Goyang Inul" by Inul Daratista from Indonesia and Amelina from Malaysia. There is also current interest in Korean K-Pop. Many Semai villages already have televisions and many subscribe to the Astro TV Channel. Therefore, the Semai of Gopeng are gradually assimilating with the mainstream communities of Malaysia for the television provide them access to global trends and cultures. The Semai children of Ulu Geroh are integrating at a faster speed than the Mah Meri children due to their proximity and easy access to Gopeng town, multi-cultural school friends, conversion into Christianity and access to Astro TV channels (Chan 2012).

Conclusion

In this paper, I have outlined the ways in which development, modernization, school education and tourism have impacted the musical activities and acquisition of the Mah Meri and Semai children. These hegemonic powers are reshaping and reproducing their identity today. Research in the early twentieth century with the early twenty-first vastly different in human's mode of existence. The increasing exposure of a variety of ethnic groups and cultures have either enriched or deculturalized the Orang Asli. While modernization and school education assist in bridging the gap between Mah Meri and the Semai identity with mainstream communities, they tend to draw the children away from their own cultural and musical heritage. This musical heritage is symbolic of their cultural values of respect and honour to the natural and supernatural world. Compared with their musical heritage, knowledge in popular music creates the aura of being "civilized" and sophisticated. Whilst the Mah Meri and Semai traditional cultural troupe have strong desires to maintain their cultural tradition, they are also limited by their focus on earning an income for survival. The transition from a subsistent economy to one of wage labor has resulted in a struggle for their livelihood, poverty, and social problems among the youth.

Malaysia's development (modernization) and integration goals for the Orang Asli have resulted in changing identities among the children. While nationhood goals are aimed at creating a national identity, the globalisation process is pulling it into many directions. Hall (1983, p. 619) discusses three consequences of globalisation on the cultural identities:

1. National identities are being eroded as a result of the growth of cultural homogenization and the "global post-modern".
2. National and other "local" or particularistic identities are being strengthened by the resistance to globalization.
3. National identities are declining but new identities of hybridity are taking their place.

I suggest that all three of these consequences are happening at the same time. While Malaysia tries to create the "imagined community", the processes of globalization are shaping diverse identities among the Orang Asli. These diverse identities are dependent on the choices of programs favoured by each individual or family. Although there are some attempts by Orang Asli organizations by POASM (Persatuan Orang Asli Semenanjung Malaysia) or Peninsula Malaysia Orang Asli Association and JOAS (Jaringan Orang Asal SeMalaysia) or The Indigenous Peoples Network of Malaysia to revitalize the Orang Asli tradition, the second consequence is less dominant compared to the first. I posit that the third consequence is the most prevalent among the three. I conclude this paper by suggesting that the growth of heterogeneous identities among the Mah Meri and Semai groups. There is both change and retention of traditional music for national policies and the globalization process have affected the musical activities of each group in various ways. The Mah Meri are able to sustain their musical heritage due to the nation's interest in developing their tourism industry. The Semai are able to do so to a lesser extend due to an interest in Ulu Geroh as an ecotourism site. The Mah Meri remain animists in the midst of attempts to convert them, while many Semai are attracted to Christianity through singing. The Mah Meri, especially the women, are less exposed to the mass media and the urban areas due to their isolation in Carey Island, while the Semai are mobile and have easy access to Gopeng town. The Mah Meri school is homogenously Mah Meri while the Semai school is multi-cultural. The musical activities practiced and lived by these two groups are constructing and reproducing their identity today. Unlike the homogenous characteristics attributed to the sub-groups of Orang Asli during the British administration of Malaya, the Orang Asli identity today has expanded into more heterogenic identities The changing identities of the Orang Asli is dependent on the multiplicity of hegemonic power structures interacting among them today. The manners in which the Mah Meri and Semai respond to these hegemonies depend on "the multiplicity of force relations immanent in the sphere in which they operate and which constitute their own organization" (Foucault 1990, p. 92). The "tug of war" between integration, modernization, globalization and religious evangelization and indigenous resistance continues to produce and reproduce the identity of the Orang Asli today.

Endnotes

[1] A dessert made of coconut milk, strips of jelly made from rice flour and pandan leaf juice, shaved ice, and palm sugar.

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[2] Since the school is homogenously Mah Meri, the children do not interact with other children from nearby towns, therefore they have not yet developed the culture for material wealth. Toys, card or board games are less prominent. The children are happy to climb trees, roll around bushes, and play around the village after school.

[3] *Opoh* refers to the local descent group in Mah Meri society. Kampung Sungai Bumbun is further divided into three sub villages; Kampung Sungai Bumbun, Kampung Sungai Mata, and Kampung Sungai Salang. Each sub village has its own *opoh* based ancestral lineage.

[4] This game chant was collected as a part of an ongoing research (May 2011 to May 2012) sponsored by Universiti Pendidikan Sultan Idris' *Geran Penyelidikan Universiti* (GPU). Further discussions of findings may be published in the future.

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Biography

Clare Chan Suet Ching received her Ph.D. in Music in the field of Ethnomusicology from the University of Hawai`i at Manoa in 2010. Her PhD study was sponsored by a Fulbright Scholarship, the Asia–Pacific Graduate Fellowship in Ethnomusicology from University of Hawai`i at Manoa, and the East-West Center Graduate Degree Fellowship. She was the first recipient of the Sumi Makey Scholars Award for Arts and Humanities in 2008. Her research interests include issues of identity, nationalism, tourism, globalization, and modernization in Chinese, *Orang Asli* (indigenous minorities) and Malay music in Malaysia. She has written on the 24 *Jie Ling Gu* (24 Chinese Festive Drums), P. Ramlee's music, and the impact of tourism and modernization on the music of the indigenous Semelai, Mah Meri and Semai of Malaysia. Clare is now the Deputy Dean of Research and Postgraduate Studies in the Faculty of Music and Performing Arts of Sultan Idris Education University (UPSI) in Malaysia.