

## **Disciplining Rock and Identity Contestations: Hybridization, Islam and New Musical Genres in Contemporary Malaysian Popular Music**

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### **Abstract**

This essay aims to analyse how, at a particular phase in the evolution of Malaysian popular music, ‘rock’ was ‘disciplined’ to make way for the rise of other musical genres, in this case, *Balada Nusantara* and *Nasyid* pop. Taking a critical perspective, I argue that the ‘transition’ from rock to these newer musical genres occurred on a terrain involving several levels of contestation, constituted by the juxtapositions of different institutions and social actors. These include the role of the state, state actors, political parties, the mediation of Islam and national culture, and ultimately, the ‘agency’ of non-state actors—a genuine nucleus of creative artists.

**Keywords:** *Arqam*, *Balada Nusantara*, hybridity, identity contestation, Islamic revivalism, localisation, *Nasyid* pop, Malaysian popular music, postcolonial state, rock music

## Introduction

Historically, Malay(sian) popular music has always been vibrant, fluid and accommodating to outside influences. This is in part because 'localisation' or 'hybridisation' is an important characteristic of Malay identity.<sup>1</sup> As particular instances, the legendary late P. Ramlee's popular composition, *Azizah* and the internationally-acclaimed *Getaran Jiwa* are known to be elaborations derived from the nuances of Indian and Chinese music respectively. Ramlee became a household name both as a singer-songwriter and a film star (and later director), with his songs and films finding popularity in the Malayo-Indonesian world through the medium of the then-expanding and successful Malay movie industry based in Singapore.<sup>2</sup> Eventually, popular local Malay music became an integral part of the music industry, which has historically been dominated by the foreign-owned subsidiaries of the multinational giants. Initially pioneered by EMI (UK), the Malay music industry is largely controlled by such international corporations as WEA (US), BMG Pacific (Germany), Polygram (Holland), Sony and Pony Canyon (Japan). From its original base in Singapore, this industry eventually relocated to Kuala Lumpur, the current capital of Malaysia.<sup>3</sup>

In the 1960s and 1970s, Radio TV Malaysia (RTM), the government television network, became an important creative base for generating an orchestral form of modern Malay music. RTM helped pioneer new arrangements and an alternative interpretation of existing traditional Malay musical genres such as *Asli* and *Dondang Sayang*. Around the same time, another creative icon, Ahmad Nawab, seven years younger than Ramlee, moved from RTM to EMI to carve himself out a niche in the commercial world of Malay popular music. Alongside the famous Indonesian singer, Broery, Nawab elaborated the Indonesian style; while with the Malaysian singing sensation, Jamal Abdillah, he moved closer to Ramlee's blend of music by adapting a Hindustani-based flavour in his compositions for the artiste. Later on, with the legendary female singing diva, the late Sharifah Aini, he used both styles. It was apparent that the musical sub-styles that he created were tailored to the particular character and orientation of the individual singer. A similar dynamism and local adaptability existed during what is known as the '*pop yeh*

*yeh'* era which began in the mid-60s. This was the Malay answer to the explosion in the West of the electric guitar sound of such groups as the Shadows, the Dave Clark Five, the Beatles and the Rolling Stones. The *kugiran* (electric guitar band) craze lasted for almost six years; it was both emulation and adaptation, but had a distinct local flavour, with new energy, at once both popular and commercial. In this sense, the evolution of Malaysian popular music has consistently been characterized by fluidity and openness. Its current playing field accommodates almost all musical genres, ranging from rock to blues, pop, R&B, rap, hip hop to *irama Malaysia* and other traditional genres (*joget, asli, dondang sayang, dangdut*), *Nasyid* pop, and lately, Indie music.

This essay examines how at a particular phase in the evolution of Malaysian music, 'rock' was 'disciplined' to make way for the rise of other musical genres, in this case, *Irama Malaysia* (or *Balada Nusantara*) and *Nasyid* pop. Rather than perceiving this transformation as the rational outcome of a 'natural' process of change, this essay takes a critical perspective. The transition from rock to these later musical genres occurred at several levels of contestation, articulated by the juxtapositions of different institutions, organisations and social actors—including the state and state actors, political parties, the mediation of Islam and national culture, and ultimately, the 'agency' of non-state actors and a creative nucleus of musicians and songwriters. In the course of the essay, I will attempt to piece together certain musical events and literary-journalistic snippets relating to Malaysian popular music, using the concepts of identity contestations and hegemony to make sense of them. The specific focus is on the 'disciplining' of rock music in post-colonial Malaysia and the emergence of other musical genres perceived to be more in line with the state-sponsored notion of "national culture" or "national identity," especially in relation to Islam. But firstly, a brief foray into the bigger picture of the National Cultural Policy (NCP) and how it has influenced the representation of Malay culture and identity and the governance of popular music in post-colonial Malaysia.

## National Culture and National Identity in Post-Colonial Malaysia

The discourse on national identity and culture in Malaysia has been mainly driven by the grand narratives of the nation-state, which are “primarily homogenizing and essentialist,”<sup>4</sup> framed by the ‘dominant ethnic’ Malay cultural and civilizational terms of reference.<sup>5</sup> Historically, Malaysia has always been touted as an excellent example of a ‘plural society’ mediated through measured ethnic management. In this respect, the bloody racial riots of May 13, 1969 were the first indication of the fragile nature of Malaysian multiculturalism. As a solution, the state-engineered New Economic Policy or NEP (1970-1990), was launched to redress some of the economic imbalances between the Malays and the various non-Malay ethnic groups.<sup>6</sup> Parallel to this economic strategy was the formulation of the National Cultural Policy (NCP) in 1971 which represented the first official attempt to regulate multiculturalism in Malaysia. As a consequence, a state-driven National Culture Policy (NCP) was conceptualized and launched to provide an overarching “national identity” with a view to providing a ‘superstructural’ umbrella for integrating all the different ethnic/religious communities into the Malaysian nation-state. Amongst the main principles of the 1971 NCP were the following postulates:

1. The National Culture of Malaysia must be based on the cultures of the people indigenous to the region;
2. Elements from other cultures which are suitable and reasonable may be incorporated into the National Culture; and
3. Islam will be an important element in the National Culture.<sup>7</sup>

In the context of Malaysian *realpolitik*, the NCP’s representation of Malay culture and Islam as a unitary base is problematic. The UMNO (the Malay ruling party) version of Islam (which converges with the

“national”) has always been contested by the Pan Malaysian Islamic (PAS) party. In the political arena, the contestation consistently revolves around the struggle of who can claim genuine legitimacy for being the sole arbiter of Islam in Malaysia. It should be noted that in the aftermath of the 1979 Iranian revolution, some Islamic countries, including Malaysia, also had to grapple with the discourse on political Islam,<sup>8</sup> a process which also affected the traditional political contestation between the PAS and the UMNO.<sup>9</sup> During the 1999 General Elections, for instance, the rivalry was further accentuated by the ‘Anwar factor,’ leading to a further erosion of Malay support for UMNO, which in consequence shifted to the PAS and the new predominantly Malay-based opposition—*KeAdilan* (the National Justice) party led by Anwar Ibrahim. Even though *Barisan Nasional* (the ruling coalition front) was returned to power with a two-thirds majority in parliament, political analysts tended to believe that the survival of the Malay-based UMNO in the election was heavily dependent on the non-Malay votes.<sup>10</sup>

In the past, the UMNO and PAS rivalry had even led to UMNO supporters being branded as *kafir* or infidels by PAS leaders. It has also created opposing interpretations of traditional Malay culture. For this reason, the more fundamentalist PAS interpretation of what constituted ‘legitimate’ Islamic cultural practice had rendered some traditional Malay popular cultural forms no longer Islamic. An instance of this would be the banning of the traditional Malay performances of *Mak Yong* and *Wayang Kulit* in the PAS-dominated state of Kelantan since 1995. Indeed, in the 1999 General Election when the predominantly Malay-populated state of Terengganu also fell under PAS control, it was announced that another well-known Terengganu-based traditional Malay performance—*Ulik Mayang*—might come up for review as to whether or not it constituted a legitimate Islamic cultural activity.<sup>11</sup> A second example of this contestation is provided by an article entitled “Malay is not Islam, Islam is not Malay” (“*Melayu Bukan Islam, Islam Bukan Melayu*”) in the PAS-sponsored newspaper *Harakah*. In this essay, the columnist lamented what he considered to be the non-Islamic nature of the traditional Malay *adat*-based cultural practice in Sarawak of East Malaysia, known as *menimang bubu*. Apparently, the ritual, popular amongst the Sarawakian

Malay Muslim fisher-folk involved the act of worshipping spirits (*memuja semangat*).<sup>12</sup> It is obvious that Malay popular music and its ‘identity’ is subject to the same scrutiny as it seeks to re-negotiate and reposition itself vis-à-vis the identity claims of the nation-state and the central government’s on-going political contestation with PAS-style Islam.

### The Rock Craze and Identity-Making amongst Malay Youth

In April 1989, Margaret Scott, a journalist for the *Far Eastern Economic Review*, wrote an article entitled “*Kutu* Culture Clash.”<sup>13</sup> Written during the heyday of the rock craze in Malaysia and the basing itself on the reporter’s short period of ‘fieldwork,’ the article concluded that a new Malay youth subculture, associated with heavy metal rock music, was on the rise—the term *kutu* was a vernacular subcultural term; *budaya kutu* (*kutu* culture) was the term coined by Scott herself. As she suggested:

Their procession begins every Wednesday after the sun sets. Up the hill to a dusty outdoor stage behind the government television station they come by the hundreds, mostly young, mostly male, mostly Malay. They are called *kutus* and they have come to listen to loud rock music. ‘Rock is our life,’ a young man yells after the music begins. ‘This is our music.’ These Wednesday night concerts in the open air promise an escape for Kuala Lumpur’s young and restless. With the strictures of Islamic fundamentalism pressing in on one side and, on the other side, the drudgery of working or looking for work in a place where the unemployment rate is more than 35% among 15-24 year olds, rock music offers relief: membership in the club of the *kutus*, Malaysia’s version of punk rockers.

*Kutus* and their music are the flip side of the resurgence of Islamic fundamentalism, a contrast to young men in Arab-style robes and young women in veils. *Kutus* emerge as the underbelly of this revival. *Dakwah* (missionary Muslims) inhabit the universities and *kutus* inhabit the shopping malls. When being young and Malay means choosing sides between the club

and the *dakwahs* at one extreme and the clubs of the *kutus* at the other, popular culture becomes a partisan pastime. *Kutu culture*, a provocative, challenging alternative, is a convenient target for what is at the root a debate over national identity. Banishment has not worked. Despite the restrictions on concerts and television appearances, rock—particularly heavy metal—music is more popular than ever. About 12 of the 15 albums released every month are by local heavy metal rock bands. According to M. Nasir, “We are searching for what it means to be Malay in the modern world.” But why heavy metal? Because it’s loud and it’s got minor chords and it’s offensive and it’s a badge of distinction and it’s got clothes to go along with it and it’s only for young Malays and because *dakwahs* don’t like it. The popular music scene is a mirror of some of the contradictions of modern Malaysia.”<sup>14</sup> (my emphasis)

In another set of ethnography written in 1992, based on a study of group of working-class Malay youth who were rock fans (*Mat rockers*) in Singapore, Shirlene Noordin, also made strong arguments about the association between rock metal music and ‘identity’:

The *mat rock* subculture is a symbolic articulation of the alternative value system.... These Malay youths handle the problems faced by the working-class community in general ... differently from the parent culture. For example, the way they dress and behave differ greatly from the parent culture ... for the youths, rock/metal music and the style that comes with it provide them with a venue not only to assert their *difference* from the dominant culture and its values but also gives them a *separate identity* from the Malay parent culture....

But they “are not carrying out a subtle revolution against the dominant society....” They have no desire to change society or society’s perception of them. What they are doing is to show that they are different, that they do not share the same concerns as the rest of society. The main trait of the *Mat Rok* subculture is its

*unstructuredness*. Leisure becomes an important aspect of their lives, even if they end up doing nothing. This ‘doing nothing’ is seen as a form of activity in its own right. It gives them a kind of freedom because it is done by choice ... by ‘doing nothing,’ they show that they are not controlled by anybody or anything.<sup>15</sup>

The appeal to rock is because the music is not “disciplined” for rock/metal music is about “fluidity,” hence there are no boundaries for the music and the instrument. It is “such disregard for boundaries and restrictions in the musical form” that appeals to the members, indeed, the “choices of music reflect their attitude and the different values they hold” (my emphasis).<sup>16</sup>

### The Mainstream Malay Response

In *Dewan Budaya*, a mainstream literary magazine, published by the government-sponsored publishing house, *Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka*, Abu Hassan Adam wrote an essay entitled “Kutu Culture which Threatens” (“*Budaya Kutu yang Menggugat*”) that drew attention to Margaret Scott’s work for the Malay-reading public. The writer questioned why *Kutu* culture merely affected the Malays and warned of the danger of rock music. He was especially concerned that the youth might gradually grow out of touch with traditional Malay music. He cited the legendary Malay artiste, P. Ramlee, who, whilst he was also influenced by western music, always fought to champion the “purity” (*kesucian*) and “integrity” (*kemurnian*) of Malay music.<sup>17</sup>

Summarising the popular music scene in Malaysia in the late 1980s and early 1990s, Craig Lockard, the author of *Dance of Life: Popular Music and Politics in Southeast Asia* (1998)<sup>18</sup> wrote:

By the late 1980s and early 1990s, heavy metal groups had become the chief focus for expressing youth alienation from mainstream lifestyles and values, although the groups faced sporadic restrictions on their public performances. Local bands like Gersang, Headwind, Search, Ella and the Boys, and the

Singapore-based Rusty Blade produced best-selling records.... In 1989 the heavy metal tinged Search released the first music video by Malaysian musicians and also achieved success in Indonesia, their *Fenomena* album sold an astonishing 500 copies.... The success of Search came despite the arrest of several members on drug charges and the resulting departure of their lead guitarist, Hillary Ang. Heavy metal groups proliferated, playing a mix of local compositions and cover versions of western numbers, discos, staged battles of the bands, attracting enthusiastic teenage fans.... By the mid-1990s many new heavy metals groups had appeared, with names such as Silent Death, Infectious Maggots, Braindead, Deflowered, Silkhannaz, and Sludge, mostly singing in English; they offer brooding lyrics about death, hatred, and negativity. Their long hair and distinctive dress flout television codes, limiting them to live performance outlets....

Other trends are also apparent. Former Sweet Charity leader Ramli Sarip (a Singaporean) achieved stardom as a bluesy hard rocker. Known as Malaysia's *rock raja*, Ramli left Sweet Charity in 1986, after sixteen years and seven albums. Sweet Charity's style was loud, longhaired music; in the mid-1980s, they had been a necessary inclusion in any concert because of their attraction to youth.<sup>19</sup>

Lockard also touched on the Islamic position and response in the country, during the early and mid-1980s:

Religious organizations as well as the militant *dakwah* (missionary) groups and religious-based political parties brought Islam into the forefront of public discussion, generating debate on the proper role of religion in Malay life, of Islam in a plural society, and of Islamic requirements on the activities and dress of women.

By the late 1980s the major Islamic opposition party as well as some Islamic officials were calling for the banning of popular music as immoral and incompatible with any Islamic state that might develop. Hence, in 1986, the Association of Muslim

*Ulama* (religious officials) declared all forms of pop music to be *haram* (forbidden), and labelled all women who sang for a living as violating Islamic requirements for female modesty. Some villages dominated by the *Parti Islam*, which seeks to establish an Islamic state, have prohibited the distribution of newspapers and magazines carrying stories about popular music. Stage shows by pop singers, especially Malay women . . . are occasionally disrupted or protested as “morally degrading,” sometimes at universities where militant Islamic groups are influential.<sup>20</sup>

By the early 1990s, there was public outcry against the phenomenon of *lepak* (loitering) amongst Malaysian youth, especially in urban shopping complexes. This was soon linked to other “ills” including *bohsia* (the term describes urban female Malay youth with loose morals) and other “decadent” activities.<sup>21</sup> From *lepak* to *bohsia* it was not long before ‘correlations’ were made by the authorities between these “social ills” and certain kinds of pop music, especially rock concerts and rock music. In 1993, Sulaiman Noordin, an academic at one of the local universities, wrote a book entitled “Rock Music and Its Moral Values” (“*Muzik Rock dan Nilai Moralnya*”).<sup>22</sup> The following is an example of his critical analysis:

Nowadays we often read and see disturbing symptoms in both our own society and foreign countries, for example, the increase of illegitimate children born, homosexual activities between individuals, cases of rape, sodomy and child abuse by their own parents. The reasons for such decadence are numerous. Many researchers have found that “popular” music is closely related to these activities. ‘Popular music’ these days is not simply a form of entertainment free from wrongdoings (*kesalahan*): it activates free sex, drug abuse and the occult teachings. The promoters of rock music have become very serious about their trade by utilizing sophisticated scientific techniques to manipulate the taste of their audience. These include Pavlov’s psychology, subliminal techniques, backward masking and hypnosis. These techniques are actually used to attack the minds of our young generation,

our sons and daughters. Among the effective means of promoting this “New Morality” is through music, films, reading, radio, TV, concerts, cassettes and video.<sup>23</sup> (my translation)

The book makes a large number of questionable assertions, based on a very selective citation of certain writings drawn from the western experience. But the book makes very little attempt to substantiate any of these assertions through the use of empirical research.

In 1994, the proposed 50-70 series of Concert Salem Celebrations, sponsored by the major cigarette companies and held throughout the main towns of Malaysia, came under fire. The concert was seen to be in opposition to the values of the local culture and the NCP. Apart from being seen to encroach on public peace and religious sentiment, the concert was also perceived to threaten the “creation of a Malaysian young generation based on a resilient, authentic and integral culture.”<sup>24</sup> There were other reasons given for the protest—including the fear of drugs and the fact that under-18s were apparently being allowed in, with six free cigarettes given to each concert goer at the point of entry. The local vernacular press also publicized the fact that at one of the concerts that had already taken place, Salem Ella USA in Gopeng, the young concert fans were given free alcoholic drinks in addition to free cigarettes. Led by the Persatuan Kebangsaan Pelajar Islam Malaysia (the National Association of Muslim Students Malaysia or PKPIM), together with 18 other state-based associations and others from institutions of higher education, a “2 million signature” campaign to protest the concert was launched. At the meeting held at the Masjid Negara (the National Mosque) on 27 March 1994, about 300 students came to show their support.<sup>25</sup> This meeting was followed by a seminar entitled “*Serangan Budaya Hiburan “Hedonistik” menjelang Abad Ke 21*” (The Assault by Hedonistic Entertainment Culture on the Eve of the 21st Century), organised by the “Salem Watch” Committee from the PKPIM, together with BAHEIS and Dewan Bahasa & Pustaka. The objectives of the seminar were to review the major issues and implications which arose from the Salem Concert, by way of a discourse on hedonism and western entertainment culture.

### The launching of *Balada Nusantara* and the Birth of *Irama Malaysia*

Watching the beginnings of the ‘rock craze,’ the Malay composer, Manan Ngah, began to elaborate an alternative genre of music, drawing on the inspiration from his first attempt to showcase a Malaysian version of ‘world music’ during World Carnival Sports Aid 88, which was held on 12 September 1988. During this event, a live Malaysian musical showcase was presented as part of the Global TV London’s festivities.

The event started at 12:30 am and lasted for ten minutes. Manan Ngah had been elected by the Malaysian RTM TV network to be the musical director; and through his creativity, the first Malaysian genre of world music, a fusion or hybrid integrating traditional and modern popular music was ‘reinvented’ and performed by Malaysian musicians, artistes, and dancers. A year later, he publicly announced the arrival of his new genre, calling it *Balada Nusantara*.<sup>26</sup> On 24 March 1989, Manan Ngah launched *Sheqal*, the first Malaysian pop music album based on the new genre, which was then given official recognition (*pentakrifan*) by the Ministry of Culture and Tourism. The significance of *Balada Nusantara* as a contemporary Malaysian musical form was made clear by the fact that the Chairman of the Committee of Advisors on National Culture in Malaysia, Professor Tan Sri Awang Had Salleh, presided at the ceremony.<sup>27</sup>

Even before this, however, the cultural signs of the birth of a new musical genre were evident in the dominance of the pop charts and TV3 “*Muzik-Muzik*” weekly song contest by compositions such as *Sekadar Di Pinggiran* (sung by Francesca Peters) and the haunting *Merisik Kabar* (rendered by the late Sudirman). When *Balada Nusantara* was officially proclaimed, the creative effort was well-received both by the Malay fans (*peminat*) as well as the circle of Malay intellectual and cultural elites (*budayawan*). Seemingly overnight, a number of songs from *Sheqal*, such as *Cinta Nusantara* and *Zapin Rindu-Rinduan*, representative of Manan’s *Nusantara* genres, found themselves among the chart-toppers. In a written statement, Manan Ngah defined *Balada Nusantara* as a ‘hybrid’:

an original composition, the product of a synthesis or *hybrid*

generated by the influences of world music which are dominant in the cultures of nations of Asean, Southeast Asia and Asia, and which highlights the musical aesthetic values of Europe, Spain, Latin America, Arabia, India, and China which have been integrated into a Malay music base, in the context of a Malay world, *Nusantara* (my emphasis).<sup>28</sup>

In a personal interview with the author, Manan emphasized that the concept of “hybridization” was a part of the ‘old globalisation.’ He suggested:

There must be an awareness in music that we have what we have. We should be prepared to take from outside what we feel is more appropriate—we don’t have to feel superior or inferior. This is a fact which has always been with us from before. And when we look at our own history, it is evident that our forefathers then were more progressive and innovative than we are now with the existence of *Joget*, *Dondang Sayang*, *Nasyid*, and *Ghazal*, and others... In reality, our ancestors had much earlier on created a synthesis or a hybrid form as a product of integrating the aesthetic values of Hispanic, European, Arabic, Indian, and Chinese origins into Malay artistic work.<sup>29</sup>

For the thinkers among this emerging crop of music makers, there was still the nagging fear that since the contemporary music scene relied on such strong western influences, traditional Malay music would eventually be marginalized, if not wiped out altogether. For concerned maestros like Manan Ngah and M. Nasir, then, rather than allowing cultural developments to take their natural course, eventually “drown[ing] the traditional feel,” *Balada Nusantara* was seen as an attempt to “intensify” this “traditional’ feel in contemporary Malay music. For them, the act of naming the genre was not only timely but an important political act of resistance. As Manan emphasized: “It should be remembered that (for) the artistic synthesis in “*Balada Nusantara*”... what is more primary is the Malaysian values depicted in the aspects

of its melody, rhythm and harmony.”<sup>30</sup> What M. Nasir called *Muzik Nusantara* (*Nusantara* music) expressed the long overdue “need to stake a claim over our own music,” especially considering the pervasiveness of cross-cultural influences in both western and eastern music.<sup>31</sup> For this reason, Nasir believed that local composers and musicians should review again their own heritage of cultural treasures (*khazanah*) and “local knowledge”—the *Inang*, *Zapin*, *Keroncong*, *Ghazal*, *Joget*, *Dondang Sayang*, even *Dikir Barat* (traditional rap)—and make them more contemporary. Or as M. Nasir suggested in the following media statement: you simply ‘pop’ their music!

Reggae music originates from Jamaica but why has it been accepted by the west and the whole world. It is because such music has been adapted to the elements of contemporary music. If we want our traditional music to be recognized in the eyes of the world, then we just have to pop these melodies.<sup>32</sup>

Both Manan and Nasir, however, admitted that they were not the original creators of *Balada* or *Muzik Nusantara*; they were merely its propagators and ideologues. As Manan asserted: “In reality *Nusantara* music had already been in existence for a long time. A large component of the Malay songs composed in the past had characteristics of *Nusantara* music. Only the name of the music was not there.”<sup>33</sup> The act of naming had a snowballing effect. Thus both M. Nasir’s initial solo albums—*Solo* and *Saudagar Mimpi*—were already strong testimony to the genre of *Nusantara*. Special mention should be made of *Mustika*—the Javanese gamelan and *angklung*-inspired hypnotic and lyrical piece in *Solo*. The later album, *Saudagar Mimpi*, which was followed by *Canggung Mendonan* (showcasing the fusion with the *silat*-inspired rhythm award-winning song—*Mentera Semerah Padi*) and *Phoenix Bangkit* proved his status as one of the few visionary architects of modern *Nusantara* music. The last album represented an attempt by Nasir to blend contemporary Malay music with the rhythms from the Moorish Islamic world—another hybrid genre which was increasingly becoming more global. Since the late 1990s, Malaysian contemporary music has also been graced by the

arrival of Pak Ngah, who provided another *Nusantara* variant—but one which was distinctive in its blending of contemporary Malay music with traditional percussion and collective chanting. Certain big hits such as *Cindai*, sung by the very popular local artiste Siti Nurhaliza, represented a sample of this genre.

Even Ramli Sarip, the “Rock King” or Papa Rock, after leaving his band, Sweet Charity, brought out two albums. *Ehsan*, the first album, also represented a move in the same direction as M. Nasir and Manan Ngah—even if it retained Ramli’s definite personal style. His earlier solo albums such as *Perjalanan Hidup* and *Istilah* were more in the mould of rock ballads, blending folk with acoustics. Long before Raihan appeared on the scene with their blend of contemporary *Nasyid* pop, Ramli was already belting out songs with strong social and religious messages (*lagu-lagu ketuhanan*) for the young generation. His experimentation in the evergreen duet with Khadijah Ibrahim on the *Inang*-inspired track *Doa Buat kekasih* was evidence of his potential to evolve a *Nusantara*-oriented genre; his later effort—*Zaman*—was an attempt to contemporise Malay traditional rhythms such as *Asli* and *Keroncong*. Here, the title track song was a refreshing *Asli* duet with the veteran S.M. Salim. Earlier, S.M. Salim had also been riding high on the Malaysian charts after “re-inventing” himself in his comeback with his own composition of the catchy *Joget* titled *Apa nak Jadi*. He continued his successful streak with a modern upbeat rendition of another *Joget*, titled *Satu*, in which he combined forces with the younger Zainal, a well-known Roslan Aziz Production singer of chart-topper *Hijau* fame.

In light of this new musical consciousness and the move to assert a new musical genre, it came to no surprise that TV3 *Musik-Musik* also took on a pro-active role by delineating a separate category called *Irama Malaysia* (Malaysian Rhythms). This was seen as a way to recognize the *Balada Nusantara* musical genre created by Manan Ngah and M. Nasir. Using the new format, *Musik-Musik* also began to give annual recognition and awards to the winning *Nusantara* compositions. In this way, the TV show indirectly encouraged music producers and songwriters to compose songs which creatively blended new and traditional musical elements.

In the beginning, the limelight was focused on such composers as Manan Ngah, M. Nasir and Pak Ngah. Lately, however, it brought to the public's attention some interesting variants of the genre from younger composers, including Pak Pandir's *Yang Remeh Temeh*; Azman Abu Hassan's interpretation of the classic *Siti Payung*; Wan Zul's blend, *Khazanah dari Malaya*; Tok Ki's *Asli, Seni Berzaman*, and from Japan, Sandi Suzuki's rendition of Makuto's in *Ikan Kekek* and *Lenggang Kangkung*. With the adverse publicity surrounding rock music, TV3 also began to promote a more Malaysian-modulated type of rock music, by re-categorising the rock category as *balada* (ballads) in its signature *Musik-Musik* programme.

### The Call for the *Nasyid* New Era Project

In its initial confrontation with rock music, the state adopted coercive measures and regulations such as banning rock concerts, excluding groups from getting radio airplay, and preventing long-haired artists from appearing on government television. Gradually, however, the state began to think more creatively about its assertion of hegemonic influence. At one stage, the minister heading the Religious Affairs Section (BAHEIS) of the Prime Minister's office, was prepared to stage a *Dakwah* rock concert as a way of responding to the influence of rock on Malaysian youth.<sup>34</sup> By then, the Kuala Lumpur City Municipal had introduced a national annual *Dakwah* song-writing competition to encourage contemporary songwriters and musical talent to pool their creative energies to enrich the *Nasyid* repertoire and thereby creating a new *Nasyid* genre.<sup>35</sup> It was obvious that the state, via the BAHEIS of the Prime Minister's office, had been thinking about how to reformulate its *Nasyid* re-packaging through a series of national *Nasyid* seminars which it jointly organised with the Selangor State government. The second of these seminars was held in November 1992. During the seminar, a number of resolutions were passed which then became the basis of the policies implemented by *Jawatan Kuasa Kemajuan Muzik Berunsur Islam Bahagian Hal Ehwal Islam* or the Committee for Developing Music with Islamic Orientations in the Religious Affairs Section of the Prime

Minister's office. In the first national *Nasyid* Workshop held on October 24, 1994, one of the issues discussed was how to develop some working strategies to popularise *Nasyid* songs. There was much re-thinking about improving the quality of *Nasyid* in terms of its melodies, musical composition and lyrics in order to make them more socially relevant. The project was to formulate a *Nasyid* genre for the New Era (*Nasyid Era Baru*).

In addition, the strategies also touched on the issue of how to identify those *Nasyid* groups that could successfully render *Nasyid* songs effectively. According to Tan Sooi Beng, the concept of *nasyid era baru* was actualized in a live television performance at the national *nasyid* competition in 1994, and this performance was repeated at the closing night of the 1995 Qur'an Reading competition. The project was the product of a synergy between a number of local lecturers from University Teknologi Mara (UiTM) and some foreign consultants from Egypt. She noted that "The *nasyid era baru* was a total performance incorporating *nasyid* song, dance, theater, poetry, and chants including the use of costumes and props."<sup>36</sup> She then cited a UiTM lecturer, Fakhariah bt. Datuk Hj. Lokman, a producer and *nasyid* composer for the performance, who proclaimed: "The use of new media as well as digital lighting and sound systems and the use of contemporary forms of art showed Islam as dynamic and capable of adaptation and assimilation in order to survive the conditions of the modern world. The new form is universal, conveys Islamic ideals, promotes the understanding of Islam as a world-view and creates unity among all of the world's nations."<sup>37</sup> The occasion was also graced by the performance of local pop celebrities such as Fauziah Latiff, Sharifah Aini and Ning Baizura who were "clad in fashionable Islamic clothes."<sup>38</sup>

It was not long before a new commercial form of *nasyid* known as *pop nasyid* began to emerge in Malaysia. Commercial *pop nasyid* songs were sung *a capella* (in two- or three-part harmony) or with instrumental accompaniment. Its lyrics were in praise of Allah and extolling Islamic values and the teachings of The Prophet. These songs were produced and distributed to mass audiences by recording companies, with participation by both local and international labels. The latter consisted of production

houses formed by some of the leaders of the creative nucleus of the dissolved *Darul Arqam* as well as some of the *nasyid* artistes themselves. The new genre also adapted various types of Anglo-American pop music, including Westlife and the Backstreet Boys, while incorporating local rhythms and world beat. Percussion instruments from Malaysia and other parts of the world were also employed.<sup>39</sup> Hence, *Nasyid* pop is also a product of hybridization. It is also interesting to note that as *nasyid* pop became successful, *nasyid* groups were also able to entice rock icons, both singers and musicians to be a part of their recorded songs and video clips.<sup>40</sup>

The genesis of ‘*Nasyid* pop’ must be sought outside the boundary of the state prerogatives. The resurgence of *Nasyid* music, pioneered by Raihan (followed by Rabbani & Hijjaz, and others) owed its legacy to the Islamic religious sect, *Darul Arqam*, which was founded by Ashaari Mohammad in 1971. By 1975, *Darul Arqam* was operating its own communal Islamic village (Arqam village) in Sungai Penchala, near the capital city. It was an urban-based movement that attracted about 10,000 to 12,000 educated middle-class Malay followers. In 1994, it was banned by the Malaysian government. During its heyday, *Nasyid* music became an integral aspect of its cultural life and *dakwah* movement, and potential *Nasyid* singers were recruited, groomed and stringently trained for the task. *Nada Murni* became a famous household name (and indeed on many occasions was invited to sing on the government TV station, RTM) whose reach under the aegis of *Darul Arqam* was already global. When *Darul Arqam* was disbanded in 1994, it was only a matter of time before the *Nasyid* singing talent from *Arqam* were ‘released’ into the local music industry.

The former members of the Arqam-based *Nada Murni* claimed that they were part of the creators of *Nusantara Nasyid*, drawing their inspiration from a fusion of the Arab and Malay worlds, and elevating this to a contemporary form. They apparently synthesised influences from such genres as *dikir barat* (traditional Malay rap), *Melayu Asli* (traditional Malay song), and *joget* (traditional Malay dance). Over time they too evolved, with *Nada Murni* (initially known as *Putera Al-Arqam* or the Al-Arqam Princes) being frequently invited for regional,

national, and international performances. They soon began to perfect their overall creative skills with emphasis on movements (such as those adapted from Malay martial arts, the *silat*), and indeed, the whole packaging of modern show biz, including visuals, scripting and lighting, stage sets and backdrops. But notwithstanding the show-biz glitz, their songs never deviated from *dakwah*; and their spiritual make-up always maintained a balance between a disciplined mind-set (focusing on a denial of the glamour and ego that normally comes with show biz), and *ibadah* (obligatory religious practices). *Nasyid* singers were exposed to continuous religious knowledge (*ilmu*), through lectures (*ceramah*) even during their journey to their various performances. To be a chosen one, a *nasyid* singer must exhibit exemplary Islamic behavior and not simply a good voice. In *Arqam*, a cultural wing, *Madrasah Kebudayaan dan Kesenian Islam* (MAKSIS), was established as a base to facilitate the training of potential *nasyid* singers and cadres. Its leaders were confident that the *nasyid* singers who graduated from *Arqam* would have acquired the mental discipline and focus to handle the world of entertainment (*hiburan*) and that *dakwah* would always be a part of their *nasyid*. Their fears were for the new *nasyid* singers in the industry, who they felt could easily lose themselves (*terumbang ambing*) in the world of glamour, with only their recording company to take care of them.

### Going Global: *Nasyid* and Raihan as Pop Music

Towards the end of December 1997, *The Star* ran a feature article in praise of Raihan's debut *Nasyid* album. This had been a phenomenal success, selling a record-breaking half-million units.<sup>41</sup> Earlier in the year, the paper had run another article under the heading, "Raihan Goes International," disclosing that the Raihan group had been invited to perform at the prestigious Prince's Trust Royal Gala Concert in Edinburgh, an event marking the Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting in Edinburgh. Warner Music, Raihan's international label, also revealed that a deal was being finalized with the Erato label in France for a world-wide release of his multi-platinum *Puji-Pujian* album. The Erato imprint, a Warner Music International affiliate, had previously released

albums by the Three Tenors, Jose Carreras individually, and more.<sup>42</sup>

In the meantime, the standing of Raihan as a popular musical group was vying with all the best non-*Nasyid* pop artistes or groups. The group's video clips became a regular daily feature on local TV, and *Nasyid* artistes and bands became a visible entity in every major entertainment and musical award celebrations. Raihan's association with the international scene also enhanced its local standing. It was obvious that *Nasyid* pop had come to stay in the new Malay pop culture scene. *Nasyid* groups began to mushroom, giving birth to numerous other wannabe Raihans. The *Nasyid* pop success story, however, does not stop here. On 11 October 2002, The Malaysian Institute of Islamic Understanding (IKIM) started a *Nasyid* Charter IKMI.fm, for two hours, every Friday night. What is more, there are apparently plans to upgrade the current charter into a *Nasyid* Annual Competition Award format.<sup>43</sup> IKIM also began to initiate an annual musical award equivalent to the long-running TV 3 mainstream POP MUSIK-MUSIK awards for contesting *Nasyid* songs.

## Conclusion

By utilising selective multi-sited ethnographic snippets and events, this essay has attempted to situate the emergence and influence of rock music during a specific phase of the Malaysian "modernization project." But the issue is not simply about the state against rock music, as the state was involved at several levels of contestation. In the first instance, the question of agency is one of "identity-making" amongst Malay youth. From the state's perspective, such "identity-making" was perceived to deviate from and contest the core tenet of the National Culture (and 'national identity') relating to Islam. However, the state was not the sole definer of Islam, as it was always in contestation with the PAS interpretation of culture and identity. For this reason, the relationship between the state and the PAS has always been characterized by various claims and counter-claims of what constitutes 'legitimate' Malay Islamic/cultural practices. Popular music happened to be one of these sites of contestation, and this became even more problematic for the state when

de-legitimizing claims by the PAS about contemporary popular culture could no longer be repelled. Nonetheless, since the issue concerned Malay youth, rather than being about a political party, or a movement or a group of dissenters, it was not appropriate for the state to use the Internal Security Act to put the youth concerned under detention. Indeed, in the initial phase of the state's confrontation with rock music, the state did experiment with various sanctions. But these could only ever be stop-gap measures. The state realized that hegemony would have to be established in other ways. Even though the youth affected were ethnically Malays, the state realized that as a long-term strategy, it would be unwise to try to control them by force or other coercive measures. Thus, to invoke a Gramscian concept,<sup>44</sup> the state was looking for an alternative. This long-term solution was for the state to support, strategize and even intervene (or "conspire") in the creation of alternative musical genres. Equally important from the state's perspective, these alternative musical genres ought to be deemed suitable in their manifestation of the values of national identity/culture, especially in order for UMNO to head off the persistent Islamic demands coming from the PAS.

Fortunately then, in the re-creation of *Balada Nusantara* or *Nusantara* music by the likes of Manan Ngah and M. Nasir (who were subsequently followed by other friends), such a creative movement was pioneered by a voluntary spirit of artistic struggle (*semangat perjuangan seni*) to articulate a local "identity" of Malay/sian music in the face of globalization, without the overt involvement of the state. These leaders represented the creative nucleus of the local music industry; they took it upon themselves to formulate and re-formulate their art form with a strong sense of locality and history. This explains the *Nusantara* musical genre and all its hybridized variants. In the contemporary scene of Malaysian popular music, the new genre is here to stay; but analytically, it should be noted that it was borne out of agency and a political/cultural struggle located outside the state (UMNO)-PAS terrain of contestation. Nor were the members of this creative nucleus, when immersing themselves in their artistic work, consciously motivated by the grand narratives of the nation and its claims about national culture. Unwittingly, however,

the product of their creative work had contributed to the enhancing of state hegemony. In contrast, the genesis of *Nasyid* pop appeared to be borne out of conscious state engineering, especially through the work of BAHEIS, the religious and bureaucratic arm of the state. In this development, it was also ideologically supported by other groups such as PKPIM, DBP and other associations which consisted of Malay/Muslim members. Indeed some of these groups might not necessarily be aware of the machinations of the state, but in their struggle against the common enemy (such as the “Salem Celebration 94,” or the fight against “hedonistic entertainment”), they became common allies. The constant threat posed by these forms of entertainment (*hiburan*) always constituted a strong rallying point to contest and resist the “westernized/non-Islamic” negative influences perceived to encroach upon their Islamic and “national” cultural values. In the final analysis, as far as the state was concerned, the birth of the new *Nasyid* genre (*Nasyid Era Baru*) would be a strategic way of ensuring some form of hegemony, however prolonged and tedious the process would be, both culturally and ideologically, in its contestation with PAS Islam. From the viewpoint of the multinational recording companies such as Warner, EMI, BMG, and Polygram, such an alliance with the state and Islam was ideologically unproblematic, as long as *Nasyid* pop was able to bring in the profits. For the Malay/Muslim fans of popular music, the alliance would show that contemporary Malaysian popular music had some element of Islamic identity, thereby rendering it more acceptable. In hindsight, it could also be said that the birth of both popular genres, *Nusantara* music and *Nasyid* pop, went some way in disciplining rock music in post-colonial Malaysia.<sup>45</sup> In the case of *Nasyid* pop, whilst the state did initiate and exercise its hegemony, the genesis of modern *Nasyid* contains a second narrative which takes the real praxis and struggle to the agency of Nada Murni and its Darul Arqam (The empirical details of the *Nasyid* story while it was hatching in Darul Arqam will require a separate paper). It is clear here, however, that in 1979, the Iranian Revolution caught the imagination of many Muslims in the Southeast Asian region—and, in particular, the post-Iranian revolution model of Islamic governance. In Malaysia, the PAS came under its influence; towards the end of 1981, the

religious clerics of the Pas Youth went to Iran to support the revolution and their Iranian counterparts.<sup>46</sup> Hence, after Mahathir took over the political leadership of Malaysia in 1981, one of his domestic concerns was to instil Islamic values (*penerapan nilai-nilai Islam*) into the administration of the nation as a way to counter the PAS's brand of Islam, as well as to accelerate the co-option and mainstreaming of the *Dakwah* (Renewed Commitment to Religion) movement, prevalent at universities and mediated by organisations such as the National Association of Muslim Youth.<sup>47</sup> It was also under Mahathir that Darul Arqam was banned by the Malaysian government on the charge that it was a deviant Islamic sect.<sup>48</sup> It also came to no surprise that in 1992, the Ministry under the Prime Minister's department, heading the BAHEIS, through the Committee for Developing Music with Islamic Orientations in the Religious Affairs Section, that started to brainstorm and initiate the idea of '*Nasyid Era Baru* (of the New Era).' From the state's perspective, one of the ways to contest 'political Islam' (especially the threat of the PAS) was to engineer an Islamic agenda in popular culture, which would simultaneously serve to discipline Malay rock music. Ironically the origins of new *Nasyid* can be traced to Darul Arqam, the very organization that the government had banned. As described by Ahmad Fauzi Abdul Hamid on the role of Darul Arqam:

There is wide acceptance that *Darul Arqam*, via its main *nasyeed* Nada Murni and the Zikr, was chiefly responsible for popularizing *nasyeed* as a modern musical genre in Malaysia since the mid-1980s. *Darul Arqam* cultural performances were distinctive for integrating contemporary musical instruments, such as the use of percussion and modern instruments, with the classical *nasyeed* melody as inherited from its Sufi origins. All three most popular *nasyeed* groups in contemporary Malaysia, viz. Raihan, Rabbani and Hijjaz, trace their originsto *Darul Arqam*'s multiple cultural troupes.<sup>49</sup>

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Many studies on popular culture have recognised 'localisation' and 'hybridisation' as logical processes in which recipient cultures appropriate and rework oncoming external or 'global' cultural forms to make them their 'own' or imprint upon them with a local identity. See Siti Zanariah Ahmad Ishak, "Cultural Hybridity: Adapting and Filtering of Popular Culture in Malaysian Television programmes," *Malaysian Journal of Media Studies* 13, no. 1 (2011): 1-15; Eirlys E Davies and Abdelali Bentahila, "Code switching and the globalisation of popular music: The case of North African rai and rap," *Multilingua—Journal of Cross-Cultural and Interlanguage Communication* 25, no. 4 (2008): 367-92; Chan Kwok-bun, Jan W. Walls, and David Hayward, eds., *East-West Identities: Globalization, Localization, and Hybridization* (Leiden: Brill, 2007).

<sup>2</sup> On Malay cinema, see Hatta Azzad Khan, *The Malay Cinema* (Bangi: Penerbit Universiti Kebangsaan, 1977).

<sup>3</sup> See Zawawi Ibrahim, *Popular Culture at the Crossroads: Malay Contemporary Music* (Kuala Lumpur: Universiti Malaya Press, 1995), 26-27.

<sup>4</sup> Zawawi Ibrahim, "Contesting 'Nation': Renegotiating Identity and Multiculturalism in the New Malaysian Cinema," in *Pop Culture Formations across East Asia*, ed. Doobo Shim, Ariel Heryanto, and Ubonrat Siriyuvasak (Seoul: Jimoondang, 2010), 87.

<sup>5</sup> Sumit Mandal, "The National Cultural Policy and Contestation over Malaysian Identity," in *Globalisation and National Autonomy: The Experience of Malaysia*, ed. Joan M. Melson, Jacob Meerman, and Abdul Rahman Embong (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2008). For a review of the original compilation of the papers presented at this historical event, see Kementerian Kebudayaan Belia dan Sukan, *Asas Kebudayaan Kebangsaan* (Kuala Lumpur: Kementerian Kebudayaan dan Sukan, 1973).

<sup>6</sup> See Terence Gomez and Johan Saravanamuttu, *The New Economic Policy in Malaysia: Affirmative Action, Ethnic Inequalities and Social Justice* (Singapore: National University of Singapore Press, 2012). Also, Halim Salleh, "Globalisation and the Challenge to Malay Nationalism: on the Essence of Malaysian Nationalism," in *Nationalism and Globalisation: East and West*, ed. Leo Suryadinata (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2000); Loh Kok Wah, "Developmentalism and the Limits of Democratic Discourse," in *Democracy in Malaysia: Discourses and Practice*, ed. Loh, Kok Wah and Khoo Boo Teik (Richmond: Curzon, 2002).

<sup>7</sup> Aziz Deraman, *Tamadun Melayu dan Pembinaan Bangsa Malaysia* (Kuala Lumpur: Arena Ilmu, 1992), 112; also see Zawawi Ibrahim, "Anthropologising 'National Culture' in Malaysia: Representing and Contesting Culture in the Age of Fragmentation," *Soumen Antropologi (Journal of the Finnish Anthropological Society)* 25, no. 2 (2000).

<sup>8</sup> Mohamed Nawab bin Mohamed Osman, "Transnational Radical Islamism and its Impact in Indonesia and Malaysia," *The Middle East Review of International Affairs* 18, no. 3 (2014).

<sup>9</sup> For analyses of the traditional political contestation between UMNO and PAS, see Clive Kessler, *Islam and Politics in a Malay State, Kelantan* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1978); also John Funston, *Malay Politics in Malaysia: A Study of United Malays National Organisation and Party Islam* (Kuala Lumpur: Heinemann, 1980).

<sup>10</sup> See Shamsul Akmar, "It's Time for Malays to Take Stock," *The Star*, Dec. 23, 1999, 23; Also, Zainuddin Maidin, "Menangani Undi Protes," *Utusan Malaysia*, Dec. 2, 1999, 6, 12-14; Zainah Anwar, "Is an Islamic State Possible?" *New Straits Times*, Dec. 22, 1999, 12-14.

<sup>11</sup> See "No Decision Yet on 'Ulik Mayang'—Exco Man," *New Straits Times*, Dec. 31, 1999, 16.

<sup>12</sup> Lanh, "Melayu Bukan Islam, Islam Bukan Melayu," *Harakah*, Dec. 20, 1999.

<sup>13</sup> Margaret Scott, "Kutu Culture Clash," *Far Eastern Economic Review*, Apr. 13, 1989, 36-37.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>15</sup> Shirlene Noordin, "Mat Rokers: An Insight into a Malay Youth Subculture" (Unpublished Academic Exercise, National University of Singapore, 1992), 58.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 47.

<sup>17</sup> Abu Hassan Adam, "Budaya Kutu yang Menggugat," *Dewan Budaya* (1989), 43.

<sup>18</sup> Craig A. Lockard, *Dance of Life: Popular Music and Politics in Southeast Asia* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1998).

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 256-57.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 248.

<sup>21</sup> See, for instance, the research reports and publications prepared during this period, including Amariah Buang, "*Tindakan Terhadap Isu masalah Sosial- Moral Di Kalangan Remaja Malaysia*" (report prepared for Datin Sri Wan Azizah Wan Ismail, 1997); Also, Shamsudin A. Rahim, *Tingkah Laku Lepak Di Kalangan Remaja* (Bangi: Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, 1994).

<sup>22</sup> Sulaiman Noordin, *Muzik Rock dan Nilai Moralnya* (Bangi: Pusat Pengajian Umum, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, 1993).

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

<sup>24</sup> Sulaiman Noordin, *Warta PKPIM* no.2 (1993): 6.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.

<sup>26</sup> "Manan Ngah Perkenal Muzik Balada Nusantara," *Berita Minggu*, Dec. 3, 1989.

<sup>27</sup> See the programme of the official launching of *Balada Nusantara & Sheqal* at the auditorium of Arkib Negara, Jalan Duta, Kuala Lumpur, on March 14, 1990.

<sup>28</sup> An excerpt from the text of the official launching of *Balada Nusantara & Sheqal*.

<sup>29</sup> Cited in Zawawi Ibrahim, *Popular Culture at the Crossroads: Malay Contemporary Music* (Kuala Lumpur: Universiti Malaya, 1995), 5.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 18.

<sup>31</sup> *New Straits Times*, Dec. 14, 1989, 10.

<sup>32</sup> *Utusan Melayu*, Dec. 13, 1989, 15.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>34</sup> *Berita Harian*, July 13, 1992, 1S.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.* The term *nasyid* originates from the word *ansyada* meaning “cantillation of poetry,” and it was apparently a *nasyid* song that was sung by the people of Medina when greeting Prophet Muhammad’s first entry into Medina from Mecca. Today, *nasyid* refers to a type of Islamic devotional song with texts praising Allah or incorporating other religious themes, such as universal love, good morals, or brotherhood in Islam. It was claimed that In Malaysia, *nasyid* was first performed informally by Islamic teachers and students as interludes during Qur’an reading sessions prior to World War II. *Nasyid* songs also became an important aspect of *dakwah*, i.e. to spread the teachings of Islam and Prophet Muhammad, and instil Islamic morals and practice. *Nasyid* songs were traditionally sung *acapella* or accompanied by Malay frame drums such as the *rebana* or *kompang*. Malay gradually replaced the Arabic lyrics which were used initially. In the 1950s and 1960s, the Religious Department at both the state and national level began to organise and encourage *nasyid* performances at schools and at Qu’an reading competitions. As Islam was an integral component of the Malaysian national culture policy, *nasyid* was also promoted by the government through contests organised at schools and universities, and these were given national television coverage. *Nasyid* songs were sung in to emphasise development through Islam as well as the usual messages for followers to serve Allah and abide by the Qur’an. See Tan Sooi Beng, “Singing Islamic Modernity: Recreating Nasyid in Malaysia,” *Kyoto Review of Southeast Asia* 8, no. 9 (2007).

<sup>36</sup> See Tan Sooi Beng, “Singing Islamic Modernity: Recreating Nasyid in Malaysia,” *Kyoto Review of Southeast Asia* 8, no. 9 (2007), accessed January 8, 2016, <http://kyotoreview.org/issue-8-9/singing-islamic-modernity-recreating-nasyid-in-malaysia/>.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*; *New Straits Times*, Feb. 12, 1994.

<sup>39</sup> Tan Sooi Beng.

<sup>40</sup> For example, the video clip of the song ‘*Dari Tuhan*’ (From God), the lyrics of which are in praise of God, represents a subtle appropriation of rock by *nasyid* pop both musically and visually. The song was sung by the *nasyid* group Raihan, but featured Awie, the iconic lead singer from the popular rock band ‘Wings’ as a guest singer. The background music is hybridized with the inevitable rock solo inflections played by none other than Man Kidal, the legendary left-handed rock guitarist from the infamous rock band ‘Left-Handed.’ The video clip deliberately lingers on Man Kidal’s guitar playing and locks to emphasise his identity as a rock musician contributing to the *nasyid* genre, which is intermittently combined with shots of a long-haired Awie (clad in a traditional loose white top but without wearing the male Islamic headgear, the *songkok*) and Raihan members, who are uniformly attired in white but wearing black *songkok* on their heads.

<sup>41</sup> See Jason Cheah, "Remarkable Raihan," *The Star*, Dec. 31, 1997, 25.

<sup>42</sup> Daryl Goh, "Raihan Goes International," *The Star*, Aug. 11, 1997, 21.

<sup>43</sup> See "Carta Nasyid IKIM.fm., Makin Popular," *Berita Harian*, Sep., 2003, C9.

<sup>44</sup> In the context of the article, this means that the Malaysian state is able to consciously think in discursive ways in 'disciplining' rock without recourse to 'punishment' and coercion, as a way of actualising hegemony, although initially it did resort to the latter. It shows that even without 'reading' Gramsci, the Malaysian state, through its various 'think-tanks,' or ideological and bureaucratic (read: 'repressive') apparatus, is capable in strategizing and planning to engineer *Nasyid* as an Islamic musical genre to replace rock, rather than continue in 'punishing' rock followers.

<sup>45</sup> This perspective may differ slightly from the approach taken by Tan Sooi Beng. The notion of 'disciplining' rock is obviously inspired by Foucault's work on 'discipline and punish.' Although the latter refers to the specificity of the 'prison' in which the individual is subjected to a system of continuous control and surveillance, Foucault also argues that discipline technologies arise in different sites - such as prisons, schools and asylum—a notion of 'governmentality'—to produce what he calls 'docile bodies.' Discipline involves the organisation of the subject by bringing together knowledge, power and control. Discipline produces subjects by categorising and naming them in a hierarchical order and in this way they are produced and classified as particular kinds of people. Ultimately, classificatory systems are essential to the process of normalisation and the production of a range of subjects. Hence, in the context of 'disciplining rock' in the above article, a crucial objective of the state is to 'normalise' rockers, initially via 'punish,' and later, via 're-classification,' i.e. by putting into place 'nasyid,' as a genre that is deemed by the state to be more 'suitable' for the Malaysian 'national culture' discourse. For analysis of Foucault, see Jeff Lewis, *Cultural Studies* (London: Sage, 2008), 133-34; Chris Baker, *Cultural Studies: Theory and Practice* (London: Sage, 2006), 229-30.

<sup>46</sup> See Mohamed Nawab bin Mohamed Osman, "Transnational Radical Islamism and its impact in Indonesia and Malaysia," *The Middle East Review of International Affairs* 18, no. 3 (2014).

<sup>47</sup> See Sylva Frisk, *Submitting to God: Women and Islam in Urban Malaysia* (Copenhagen: NIAS Press, 2009), 48.

<sup>48</sup> Ahmad Fauzi Abdul Hamid, "The Banning of Arqam in Malaysia," *Review of Indonesian and Malaysian Affairs* 39, no. 1 (2005): 87-128.

<sup>49</sup> Ahmad Fauzi Abdul Hamid, "Contestations and Peace Building between the State and Autonomous Islam," in *Building Bridges, Crossing Boundaries: Everyday Forms of Inter-ethnic Peace Building in Malaysia*, ed. Francis Loh Kok Wah (Petaling Jaya: PSSM, 2010).