CHAPTER TWELVE

MODERNIZING SONGS OF THE FOREST: INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES NEGOTIATE TENSIONS OF CHANGE IN MALAYSIA

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‘World music’¹ or ‘world beat’ are marketing terms referring to music which combines the Anglo-American pop music idiom with musical elements from other parts of the world primarily Africa, the Caribbean, and Latin America. World beat emerged in the 1980s ‘specifically to cultivate and nurture the appetites of the North for exotic new sounds of the South’ (Pacini Hernandez 1993:49–50). Some American and European folk music and musics of indigenous peoples of other parts of the world have also been brought to the concert stage, recorded commercially, and promoted as world music.² To the outside international audience, the appeal is the ‘exotic’ or ‘ethnic’ sounds and rhythms of the music.

World music brings into the foreground the dialectics between the local and the global and the tensions between cultural homogenization and heterogenization (Hall 1991:62; Appadurai 1990:2–3, 5). On the one hand, world music has been criticized for exoticising the ‘other’, engaging the audience in visual spectacle and stereotyping ‘traditions’. It promotes musical ‘cut and paste’ and appropriates rhythms and melodies from their social contexts. As Veit Erlmann writes, ‘even though the products of the global entertainment industry purport to represent local tradition and

¹ The term ‘world music’ has been used in ethnomusicology to refer to the indigenous music of people from different parts of the world. The term contests Eurocentrism and promotes musical diversity. However, today ‘world music’ commonly refers to the marketing label employed by the global music industry.

² World music includes Jamaican reggae, Raï music of Algeria, Ghanaian Highlife, Nigerian Afrobeat and Juju, Mbaquanga from South Africa, Qawwali from Pakistan, Zouk from Antilles, Soca from Trinidad, Salsa from New York, and Bhangra and Ghazal which are popular among Anglo Indians. The first musicians from the South who established themselves as world beat musicians were Bob Marley (Jamaica) and King Sunny Adé (Nigeria) who introduced reggae and African pop respectively to the world. The exposure of African-derived musics was given impetus through mega events such as Sun City, the Mandela Concerts, and the multi-cultural WOMAD (World of Music and Dance).

authenticity, 'world music', in this reading, would appear as the soundscape of a universe which, underneath all the rhetoric of 'roots' has forgotten its own genesis' (Erlmann 1993:7). On the other hand, others argue that 'local musicians, fans, and entrepreneurs take over hegemonic pop forms for themselves...with remarkable skill, vigour, and imagination' (Frith 1989:5). They indigenize the global idioms to create transculturated forms with local content and concerns (Hannerz 1991; Malm and Wallis 1992).

Critics such as Feld (1994 a and b, 2000) and Meintjes (1990) have drawn attention to issues of 'ownership' and 'cultural equity' in world music. Pop artists supported by transnational recording companies 'appropriate' the performance styles, beats, and genres of musicians from other parts of the world but the ultimate recording belongs to the pop artist. In the *Graceland* record, for instance, Paul Simon employs South African musicians to perform but sings over their music with his own lyrics. However, the credit on the record jacket reads 'Words and Music by Paul Simon' and the collaborative role of the musicians is not highlighted. At the same time, many critics also acknowledge that world music encourages dialogue and participation especially among the younger generation in developing countries and could lead to cultural revitalization (Taylor 1997; Feld 2000).

Local Malaysian musicians began to respond to world music in the 1990s. Using the global pop idiom, local musicians experiment with African and Latin American rhythms as well as their own Malay, Chinese, Indian, and Middle Eastern musics. World music festivals such as the annual Sarawak Rainforest World Music Festival have been attracting local and foreign performers and audiences.

Many of the issues regarding homogeneity/heterogeneity and ownership/cultural equity apply to the local variants of world music in Malaysia. Local music has not been appropriated by foreign singers supported by transnational recording companies. Rather, various forms of local music have been taken out of their social contexts and packaged as world music for state cultural shows and for foreign tourists. Nevertheless, world music has increased rather than decreased musical diversity in Malaysian pop. As I have shown in an earlier article, world beat musicians from various ethnic backgrounds attempt to portray their diverse modern identities by incorporating a variety of local instruments (especially drums), rhythms, singing styles, and forms. For instance, Zainal Abidin combines Malay, Indian, Latin American, and African drumming. Noraniza Idris and Siti Nurhaliza juxtapose Malay rhythms such as *asli*, *zapin*, and *joget* over

Anglo-American pop while the BM Boys adapt Malay texts and folk songs in their Teochew and Mandarin songs. Raihan sings Islamic devotional song or *nasyid* with the accompaniment of Malay and Latin American percussion. By mixing diverse musical styles and instruments, these musicians are indirectly contesting the integrated national identity promoted by the government as stated in the national culture policy (see Tan Sooi Beng 2002).

This chapter illustrates that world music has had a positive effect of validating musicians and musics of the indigenous communities in Malaysia who have been marginalized and are trying to survive under precarious conditions. Despite the contradictions arising from commodification, appropriation, and detachment from social contexts, modernizing and concertizing music of the indigenous people as well as commercial recordings have generated a new interest and cultural revitalization among the younger generation. World music has helped to raise the self-esteem and dignity of the indigenous people as others become more aware of and show an interest in their music and lives. Through the new music, the indigenous people are able to articulate the anxieties they face as aggressive development agendas impact on their survival in the forest. As case studies, this article looks at the music of Akar Umbi, a musical group comprising indigenous and non-indigenous people based in Pertak, Selangor and the musical presentations/workshops at the Rainforest World Music Festival in Sarawak.³

Songs of the Dragon: The Temuan Sing About Indigenous Identity

The *orang asli* (meaning 'original people') are the indigenous minority people of Peninsular Malaysia whose ancestors inhabited the peninsula before the Malay kingdoms were established. They comprise 19 different groups which make up 0.5 % of the total population of 21.9 million. While a few have become professionals and businessmen and some work in factories in urban areas, the majority still live in the forest and forest-fringed areas. They depend on swiddening, hunting, gathering, fishing,

³ For a discussion of issues of cultural ownership, copyright and how aboriginal music has been incorporated into world music in Taiwan, see Tan Shyr Ee (2008 and 2012). She has looked at the history and trends of how aboriginal songs have been 'recontextualized' to cater to the world music market and are sung by karaoke singers. Unlike Taiwan where aboriginal singers and bands have made it to the mainstream media, Malaysian world music recordings by indigenous people are mainly small DIY projects.

and trading in forest products for survival. To bring development, the government has adopted a policy of integrating and assimilating the *orang asli* with mainstream society, more specifically Malay society and the adoption of Islam.⁴ The Jabatan Hal Ehwal Orang Asli (JHEOA) or the Department of Orang Asli Affairs has been assigned this task.⁴ Assimilation together with increased deforestation and dislocation (as a result of logging and development projects) have threatened to cut the *orang asli* off from their ancestral lands, source of livelihood, and cultures.

The *orang asli* have responded to the state's goal of 'integration with the mainstream' and the appropriation of their ancestral lands by uniting, lobbying politicians, and bringing their cases to the court. They formed organizations such as the Peninsular Malaysian Orang Asli Association (set up in 1976) and the Indigenous Peoples' Network of Malaysia, a network of indigenous peoples' organizations in Sabah, Sarawak, and the Peninsula. The *orang asli* began to claim an 'indigenous identity' to 'regain their cultural symbols' and to counter control by the state (Nicholas 2000:173).⁵ One of the ways to assert this identity was to set up cultural troupes (involving old and young people of the *orang asli* communities) to perform indigenous music and dance and their own versions of popular music. The various *orang asli* groups come together to perform and exhibit their handicraft in the annual International Indigenous People's Day events.

Akar Umbi (meaning 'Tap root') is an example of a cultural group of the Temuan, one of the indigenous *orang asli* groups living in Pertak, a forest reserve just outside of Kuala Kubu Baru (KKB). Akar Umbi is a musical collaboration which was initiated by Antares and Rafique Rashid, two musicians who moved to KKB in 1992. These two musicians encountered the rich culture of the Temuan⁶ and have been documenting the oral

⁴ The precursor of JHEOA is the Department of Aborigines which was first set up in 1950 by the British to take care of the needs of the *orang asli*. The name was changed after Malaysia received its independence in 1957.

⁵ For an indepth discussion of the *orang asli* and the effects of the state policy of 'integration with the mainstream', see Nicholas (2000: chapter 1). Nicholas looks at how the *orang asli* have responded to state intervention and control in chapter 8. In particular, he writes that the *orang asli* have 'realized that an assertion of their indigenous identity is a prerequisite for their survival.' There is a need to 'assert both their personal and collective identity in order to counter the power of 'outsiders', particularly the state.' Nicholas also stresses that not all *orang asli* contest state control. Some prefer to take the 'development path of the state' (Nicholas 2000:13, 17).

⁶ The Temuan live in the states of Selangor, Pahang, and Negri Sembilan. They speak the Temuan language and Malay. Many still depend on jungle products such as durian, *petai*, bamboo, and *rotan* for survival. The Temuan have great reverence for the mountains,

traditions, stories, and music of the Temuan which are in danger of disappearing.⁷

Since its formation, Akar Umbi has presented live renditions of the songs of Mak Minah Anggong, a Temuan ceremonial singer who lived in Kampung Orang Asli Pertak. Mak Minah sang her songs at various concerts including the Second Rainforest World Music Festival in Kuching before she passed away unexpectedly on 21 September, 1999. To pay a special tribute to Mak Minah and to share her passionate love for the rainforest with others, Antares and Rafique assembled a CD of 10 tracks using whatever material that has been recorded at rehearsals and performances. The CD is entitled *Songs of the dragon* (2002) as the dragon refers to Mak Minah's clan lineage whose totem is the *Naga* (the spirit guardians of rivers). The tracks include traditional Temuan songs with contemporary musical arrangements as well as healing ritual songs (*sawai*) with *buluh limbong* (pairs of bamboo instruments struck on a long block of wood) accompaniment.⁸

In the CD, Mak Minah Anggong is the lead singer while Mak Awa, Mak Nai, and Mak Indah perform their traditional sacred songs on the *buluh limbong*. The Temuan women who sing in the Temuan language, are accompanied by other Malay, Chinese, Indian, and Eurasian musicians performing on guitars, keyboards, and percussion. According to Antares, the music 'breaks through traditional cultural barriers'.⁹ Not only are the musicians multi-ethnic, the music is 'a musical fusion' (personal communication, Antares, 23 Feb. 2002).

rivers, and forests. They believe that rivers are guarded by dragons which will cause chaos if their homes are destroyed.

⁷ The video documentary, *Guardians of the forest*, documents how the indigenous people of Malaysia are struggling to retain their traditional ways of life in a rapidly developing nation. The video focuses on the Temuan who are about to be displaced by the Selangor dam project. Antares (who is married to a Temuan) and has been living with the Temuan for the past ten years initiated 'Magick River', a 'rainbow alliance of individuals with diverse talents to promote ecospiritual activities and community arts projects that involve the Temuan' (www.xlibris.de/magickriver/akarumbi.htm, last accessed 22-09-2005). Magick River has become the centre of a national campaign to halt the Selangor Dam project.

⁸ Bamboo tubes stamped on blocks of wood are used by the various groups of *orang asli* to accompany healing rituals (*sewang* or *sawai*) as well as for entertainment. In the healing ritual, the shaman sings melodies which are taught to him through dreams. He is answered by a chorus playing the bamboo tubes. For an analysis of the healing ritual music, see Roseman (1991).

⁹ Information on Akar Umbi is mainly from personal communication with Antares and from his informative website <http://www.xlibris.de/magickriver/akarumbi.htm>, last accessed 22-09-2005.

In *Hutan manao* (Akar Umbi 2002), for instance, Mak Minah sings in the Temuan language using the traditional style of singing with a narrow vocal tension. She is accompanied by the alternating rhythms of the *buluh limbong*, consisting of a longer lower-sounding tube known as 'father' and a shorter higher-pitched tube known as 'mother' which are both struck on a long block of wood. The two tubes are pitched approximately a minor third apart. Although the keyboard and electric guitars play western chords, they emphasize the minor 3rd interval and the rhythms of the bamboo stampers, thereby keeping harmony to a minimum.¹⁰ The bamboo flute and electric guitar are also given melodic interludes. The song describes the joys and hardships of roaming the forest for days in search of jungle cane (*manao*) for the furniture stores.

Akar Umbi performed *Hutan manao* live at the Benefit Concert for Bosnia at the Shah Alam Stadium on 16 September, 1994 and a series of other songs at the Second Sarawak Rainforest World Music Festival (August 28 & 29, 1999). Since the Shah Alam concert which had an audience of 42,000 and was broadcast live on national television, Mak Minah has become a 'cultural representative' for the marginalized *orang asli* community.

Mak Minah's songs portray the love the indigenous people feel for the forest, river, and mountains that surround them.¹¹ Indirectly, Mak Minah's songs advocate the cultural autonomy of the *orang asli* at a time when two Temuan villages were to be relocated and Temuan sacred sites and ancestral heartland flooded to make way for a 400 feet high dam across the Selangor River. Mak Minah opposed the building of the dam strongly. The Temuan believe that they were placed on earth to be guardians of the rainforest. Legend says that 'when the *orang asli* are no longer visible, the world will end.'¹² Experts have emphasized that the wetlands and the famous firefly colony near Kuala Selangor would be affected by the dam project. Despite protests, work on the dam began in February 2000. Logging and rock blasting have begun but Temuan families living in Pertak and Gerachi have not been properly resettled.

Sungai Makao (River Makao) is a lyrical song with Minah Anggong on vocals, Rafique on acoustic guitar, and Antares on Balinese flute. Mak Minah sings about the Makao River which flows through Pertak Village

¹⁰ Analyses and examples of songs are based on the CD *Akar Umbi, Songs of the dragon* (2002).

¹¹ See www.xlibris.de/magickriver/minah.htm, last accessed 22-09-2005.

¹² See www.xlibris.de/magickriver/dam.htm, last accessed 22-09-2005.

12.1. Mak Minah on the cover of the Akar Umbi album.

where she was born. The Temuan believe that the Makao River has its source in Gunung Raja, the sacred mountain, and regard it as the symbol of abundance and good health. Mak Minah incorporates into the lyrics a reproof against the destructive logging activities at the Temuan reserve.

In *Kuda lari* (Running horse), Minah Anggong warns those who intend to disturb the spirit guardians of the river that some mishap might occur. *Kuda Lari* is a Temuan nursery rhyme and a humorous account of how Cecil Ranking, the first magistrate and revenue collector of Kuala Kubu Baru, fell off his horse and had to chase it all the way to Pahang. According to legend, Ranking attempted to kill a crocodile *penunggu* or sacred guardian of the river in 1883. This may have triggered a dam disaster which killed Ranking and flooded the town of Kuala Kubu Baru.

<i>Lari, lari, kuda lari</i>	Run, run, horse run
<i>Belang, belang, kuda belang</i>	Stripe, stripe, striped, horse
<i>Lari, lari, kuda lari</i>	Run, run, horse run
<i>Pahang, Pahang, pergi Pahang.</i>	Pahang, Pahang, go to Pahang.

Songs of the dragon has been produced the DIY way¹³ so that Akar Umbi has complete control over the production and distribution of the CD. Some of the tracks such as *Burung Meniyun* were recorded by Rafique in his home studio, using a four track cassette, MIDI sequencers, and a programmable drum machine. Other tracks featuring traditional bamboo ritual music, such as *Raja perahu*, were recorded on a portable digital audio tape (DAT) during rehearsals at Antares' house at KKB with a relaxed ambience. Additional tracks featuring the voice of Awa Anak Lahai (sister of Mak Minah who has taken over the lead singing) were recorded at a private studio. Antares has been raising funds from friends and private funding agencies to pay for studio time, musicians, and other aspects of album production. Distribution is being done mainly through the website and through friends in the music world.

The CD has helped 'to keep Mak Minah's memory alive through her beautiful songs, and encourage the younger generation of *orang asli* to cherish and value their traditional songs'. Through the album, 'the Temuan in particular and *orang asli* in general have begun to feel a sense of pride in seeing one of their own become a singing celebrity... The overwhelming response of the crowd to Mak Minah's singing at the benefit concert for Bosnia at the Shah Alam Stadium on 16 September, 1994, has shown the Temuan that other people do value their traditions and believe there is much to learn from their culture' (personal communication, Antares, 23 Feb. 2002).

By presenting the songs in a modern setting, younger Temuan have been inspired to learn these songs and play them at weddings and other festivities. Using modern instruments such as the guitar and keyboard and the world music idiom also helps the younger generation to connect and engage with modernity. Ten per cent of the proceeds from the sale of

¹³ Pop music in Malaysia is dominated by global mainstream pop which includes the latest releases from the USA, Europe, Japan, Korea, or Hong Kong. Local musicians who sign up with major recording companies sing mainly chart-oriented commercial pop. Nevertheless, the DIY philosophy has empowered a small number of musicians to compose non-commercial music that is not promoted by the government or music industry. Most bands who practise the DIY ethic (such as the metal and alternative music bands) do not get airplay on national radio or television.

the CD go towards a Mak Minah memorial fund for children, widows, and old folks of Pertak Village. Antares says that part of the memorial fund will be used to help young *orang asli* with athletic or music potential. He is convinced that helping individuals achieve something in the field of culture and sports is the most effective way of raising the *orang asli's* self-esteem. This is in contrast to the officers of the state Jabatan Hal Ehwal Orang Asli who seem 'obsessed with assimilating *orang asli* into modern Malay society by destroying their natural habitat and their spiritual links to the land.'

Through their own version of world music, Akar Umbi has generated an awareness that the survival of Temuan culture is dependent on the forests, rivers, and land around them. The Akar Umbi performances and CD have stimulated concern about the destruction of ancestral land and environment of the Temuan due to the construction of the Selangor Dam and action on their behalf.¹⁴ The Temuan songs assert that Temuan identity and the intimate relationship of the people with the natural resources of the forest are the basis of the continued existence of present and future generations. World music speaks to the dynamism of the modern world and has inspired the younger generation *orang asli* to be proud of their traditions. However, the mainstream media in Malaysia has not given air time to the songs which are deemed critical of government policies and agencies pertaining to *orang asli* and do not conform to the easy-listening and non-controversial musical styles promoted by the market and local media. Nevertheless, other *orang asli* musical groups such as the Mah Meri of Carey Island and *orang asli* rock bands such as Jelno!, Seniroi and Sarihan have been created and they perform regularly at the World Indigenous People's Day Celebrations (Nicholas 2000:194–5).

We now move to the second case study which is set in Sarawak on the island of Borneo.

¹⁴ The Temuan have also resorted to legal recourse to fight for their rights over their ancestral land. In 1996, when their land in Kampung Bukit Tampoi, Dengkil, Selangor, was acquired to build the Kuala Lumpur-Nilai Highway for the Kuala Lumpur International Airport (KLIA), seven Temuan sued the Federal and State governments, United Engineers (M) Bhd, and the Malaysian Highway Authority for the loss of their land and dwellings. In a landmark decision the High Court ruled that the *orang asli* have a proprietary interest in customary and traditional lands occupied by them and they have the right to use and derive profit from the land. The court also ruled that eviction was unlawful and that compensation must be paid according to the rates prescribed under the Land Acquisition Act (*New Straits Times*, 21-04-2002).

The Sarawak Rainforest World Music Festival (RWMF)

Sarawak joined the Federation of Malaysia in 1963 after it gained independence from the British. Although security and financial affairs come under the jurisdiction of the Federal Government, the state government controls matters related to land tenure and the utilization of forest resources. Sarawak has 35 indigenous ethnic communities including the Iban (the largest group), Bidayuh, Melanau, and Orang Ulu (Kayan, Kenyah, Kajang, Penan etc). These communities are involved in swidden agriculture, hunting, gathering, and fishing and maintain a close relationship with the forest. Unlike the case of the *orang asli* of Peninsular Malaysia, there is no policy of assimilation and integration with Malay society. Nevertheless, the indigenous groups are increasingly being cut off from their traditional cultures and source of livelihood due to relocation to make way for development projects (such as hydroelectric dams), deforestation through logging activities,¹⁵ and the conversion of forest land into agricultural plantations. The state government justifies development projects by claiming that the indigenous people need to come into the 'mainstream of development' (Hong 1987).

In their study of the music of the Orang Ulu, Langub and Khoo Khay Jin (1997:5) emphasize that social change has brought about the demise of traditional musical instruments (such as the jaw's harp, nose flute, mouth organ, and the lute) in the long houses. Belawing and Khoo Khay Jin (1997:25) suggest that Orang Ulu children who go to boarding schools away from their longhouses (community dwellings) do not grow up learning their musical culture. They do not 'appreciate' or 'value' their musical traditions and often 'see the music and instruments of the Orang Ulu as somehow primitive, simple, backward, if not downright boring....Coupled with the presence of contemporary popular music, almost invariably guitar-based, as well as the legitimization given to the guitar in the context of Christian religious worship,¹⁶ it is then hardly surprising that the

¹⁵ The forestry sector is crucial in Sarawak's economy. Timber concessions granted by the state government as part of political patronage and the destruction of land claimed as Native Customary Rights by indigenous communities have been well documented. Very often, private companies and the state government bulldoze lands and longhouses without consultation. Those who try to protect their land are arrested. For an analysis of the law regarding Native Customary Rights, the dislocation of indigenous peoples due to logging, oil palm plantations, tree plantations, development projects, and their effects on the indigenous people, see IDEAL (1999) and Hong (1987).

¹⁶ Except for the Melanau and Malays who are Muslims, the other indigenous groups in Sarawak such as the Iban, Bidayuh, Kayan, Kenyah and Kajang mainly practise Christianity

instrument of choice for the young is indeed the guitar. It is modern and it is seen as having a wider musical range.'

To revive interest among the younger generation, the state government (specifically the Sarawak Tourism Board and the Minister of Tourism himself) as well as some urban cultural enthusiasts have advocated that local traditions need to be contemporized as in world music so as to resonate with the modern world. The Minister of Tourism, Datuk Abang Johari Tun Openg told reporters that 'the country's ethnic music should be explored within contemporary culture. We should seek ways to widen the participation of music students in new environments while exploring new technologies and different art forms...It is therefore imperative for composers, performers, teachers, and artistic leaders who have the skills, confidence, imagination, and vision to create live and innovative approaches...Sarawak's traditional music could attract worldwide music fans if creatively infused with modern music elements' (*Sarawak Tribune*, 9 July 2003). World music is seen as a way to remove the image of 'backwardness' in the ritual music of the longhouses.

Efforts to contemporize traditional music were initiated in 1998 with the organization of the first Sarawak Rainforest World Music Festival (RWMF). The festival was established as a platform for new innovative ensembles creating new sounds from Sarawakian sources to play alongside international world music artists and perhaps gain recognition internationally.¹⁷ The RWMF was also a means to promote tourism by inculcating interest in the musical traditions of Sarawak. Held at the Sarawak Cultural Village annually (where visitors are introduced to the longhouses and cultural traditions of the main indigenous groups of Sarawak), the festival attracts about 10,000 local and foreign participants.

During the day, local and foreign musicians conduct concurrent workshops held at various long houses. They introduce their instruments and music, jam, and blend with others to create new music. At night, performances take place on the main stage set up in the grounds of the Cultural

or traditional animist religions. Christianity was brought by the missionaries as early as the colonial period and is widespread among the indigenous communities.

¹⁷ In conjunction with RWMF 2003, the Sarawak Borneo International Ethnic Music Conference with the theme 'Repositioning the Ethnic Music of Sarawak Borneo in a Global Soundscape', was organized by the Sarawak Tourism Board and the Sarawak Development Institute to explore ways on how to inculcate interest and participation in indigenous music especially among the young. This conference brought together musicians and academics from Malaysia (including myself), Asia, the United States, Europe, Africa, and other parts of the world to discuss and exchange experiences about the preservation of traditional music and instruments (*Star*, 09-07-2003).

12.2. Amplified *sape* at the Rainforest World Music Festival, Sarawak 2003. (photo by author)

Village. Each evening performance begins with selected local groups performing traditional acts. They are followed by international and local fusion groups.¹⁸

The 2003 festival which I attended highlighted Omar Pene (Senegalese master musician who interweaves popular M'balax groove with jazz and blues); Tarika (Madagascar's fusion group committed to social activism), B'net Marrakech (five female Berber singers from Marrakech, Morocco, accompanied by various drums and percussion instruments), Huun Huur

¹⁸ Gorkinski (n.d.) discusses the frictions that arose as a result of different ideas of what constitutes world music among the organizing committee of the RWMF in the formative years of the festival (1998–1999). The Majlis Adat Istiadat (Council on Custom and Tradition) advocated the performances of traditional forms as a means of preservation, the Sarawak Tourism Board and other representatives from Universiti Malaysia Sarawak and the Sarawak Cultural Village promoted the mixing of traditions with the global pop idiom while the Canadian consultant, Randy Raine-Reusch, agreed to both definitions. After six years, the parties seem to have reached a compromise. At the 2003 RWMF, traditional forms of music from Sarawak and other parts of Malaysia were presented at the afternoon workshops and at the beginning of the night performances. The main international groups were fusion-oriented. The traditional musicians were also given the chance to talk about their instruments and music in the afternoon workshops.

Tu and Malerija (throat singers of Russia), Ensemble Kaboul (exiled folk musicians of Afghanistan), Valeri Dimchev Quartet (Bulgarian folk music), La Volee D'Castors (dancing band from Quebec, Canada), Habana Son Club (Cuban rhythms and music), and *Krakatau* (Indonesian jazz fusion music).

Local groups included Lan-E-Tuyang who opened the festival with Orang Ulu songs played on the *sape*; Belaga Asap Group singing *parap* songs of love, happiness, loneliness, and anger; Bisayah Gong Orchestra performing traditional music on gongs; Anak Adik Rurum Kelabit (Kelabit children) singing and dancing songs about the hornbill; the Mah Meri, one of the *orang asli* groups of Carey Island, Peninsular Malaysia performing their ritual and entertainment songs and dances using the bamboo stamping tubes; and the Bedok Drum Ensemble of the Sarawak Cultural Village combining the drums of various indigenous groups.

Three fusion bands have emerged since the festival was initiated. They are Tuku' Kame' of the Sarawak Cultural Village, MITRA (Muzik TRAdisional) of the Ministry of Social Development, and Sayu Ateng of Ibraco House Development Co. These groups combine various types of traditional music and instruments to portray a harmonious image of Sarawak. Texts portray aspects of life in Sarawak, celebrate the splendour of the rainforest, mountains, and rivers, and remind listeners to respect nature.

In the disc jacket of their album *Echoes of Borneo, Mystical music from the rainforest of Sarawak*, Sayu Ateng writes about their mission to revive traditional music as 'many master craftsmen and musicians are too old to continue their work and urban migration brings great change across the land. Sarawak's antique musical instruments are seldom heard nowadays except at cultural venues and they may be seen displayed, mute, in our museums.' The members compose original pieces using 'traditional Borneo brass gongs, a unique string instrument, the *sape*, and a series of traditional drums blended with contemporary string and percussion. Some African drums and rain-sticks from Chile have been included and no doubt more instruments will be added in time for after all, world music knows no barriers. Sayu Ateng's sound is new but the thread of Sarawak's fascinating story is beautifully woven throughout their music' (Sayu Ateng n.d.).

Lagenda gunung mitos (The legendary mountain of mitos) is based on the story of a legendary mountain at the heart of Borneo. Early literature about Sarawak mentions the sighting of this mountain but it was never found. Through the text, the song welcomes travelers who respect the

mountain's wealth, peace, and tranquility but warns those who seek the 'rare blue orchid' which grows there. The song begins with sounds of birds of the forest. This is followed by a short melodic motif played by the *engkeromong* (gong chime) before the *sape* (plucked lute), *ketebong* (long drum), electric guitar, and electric bass (which plays a variation of the *engkeromong* motif) enter.

Rintihan suara sungai (Cries of the river) laments the pollution of rivers. 'Rivers have always been the life-blood of Borneo. Pollution of the rivers cannot be tolerated by all creatures who are nurtured by them' (Sayu Ateng n.d.). The song begins with two *engkeromong* playing counter-melodies to portray running water. They are joined by electric guitars and drumming.

Other songs in the album include *Kuntau* (a type of martial arts of the Iban community); *Soraya* (a song about the arrival of Islam); *Ulat mulong* (a type of sago palm tree worm which is a delicacy among the Melanau); *Gemilang* (a song regarding the splendour of the rainforest growing wild and free); and *Puteri Kayangan* (about the Mythical Princess, the guardian of Gunung Mitos who sings of the beauty and stillness of the virgin forest).

Besides providing the platform for new fusion music, the RWMF has also acted as a 'venue for local and indigenous musicians around the world, professionals and amateurs, to play together in a natural environment' (*NST*, 27 September 1999). The workshops, in particular, evoke an experience of communication, of exchange between musicians from Sarawak, Malaysia, and other parts of the world who have never met before. Yeoh Jun Lin, the festival's program director, says in an interview that the 'workshops are the soul' of the festival. 'We hope there will be a real exchange of musical ideas' with workshop themes like 'Of Buluh and Wood' (wooden and bamboo instruments from the rainforest), 'Drums in the Jungle' (different types of drums from all the groups), 'Highly Strung' (lutes and zithers of all shapes and sizes), 'Fiddlesticks' (bowed stringed instruments), 'Metallica' (gongs and gamelan), 'Rhythm and Not the Blues' (percussion workshop) and 'Hot Air' (the coming together of wind instruments).

As a consequence of jamming at the RWMF workshops in 2001, two musicians Rajery from Madagascar and Jerry Kamit from Sarawak went on to record a CD entitled *Valiha-Sape* (2001). Rajery plays the *valiha* (a bamboo zither with 18, 20 and 21 strings which is the national instrument of Madagascar). Jerry Kamit performs the *sape* (plucked lute with 2–4 strings of the Orang Ulu of Sarawak) which has been electrified. Jerry has

performed the electric *sape* at other international festivals and is known for his unorthodox style of playing such as standing up rather than sitting cross-legged on the floor and sometimes including antics such as playing the *sape* backwards on his shoulders.¹⁹

The two musicians from different parts of the world have attempted to create new music by mixing their own styles and instruments so as to promote inter-ethnic communication. Composed by Rajery, *Tsara be Sarawak* (Beautiful Sarawak) is inspired by Rajery's impression of beautiful Sarawak from the aeroplane. African-style singing and percussion is juxtaposed with *valiha* and *sape* improvisations and the words '*hijau*' meaning '*green*' in the Malay language. *Datun Julud* is based on a traditional tune of the Orang Ulu played on the *sape* to accompany dances. Rajery and Jerry improvise *Datun Julud* in the pentatonic scale and harmonize the melody with African style singing.

It is interesting to note that Rajery and Jerry Kamit also performed together for the disabled at the Sarawak Cheshire Home. Rajery himself one-handed wanted to provide inspiration to the disabled and show that he can also become a good musician. Part of the profits from the sale of the CD goes to the charity for the disabled.

As in the case of other world music festivals, critics of the RWMF and world music have emphasized that the traditional performances of music and dance as well as the indigenous instruments and forms employed in new creations of Sarawak musicians are detached from the longhouse and divorced from their ritual contexts. The traditions have been recreated as spectacles for tourists. Furthermore, it is the international artists and urban musicians of Sarawak who are able to jam and blend to create new music. Most of the traditional musicians from the longhouses of Sarawak have never experimented with foreign musicians and often look bewildered when asked to blend with others. Although world music is given much prominence in the local media, it is only popular among the minority in the urban areas who still prefer mainstream pop. Nevertheless, for the past six years, the RWMF has been able to introduce selected forms of indigenous music to local and foreign audiences in the cities, promote new fusion music based on indigenous sources, and provide a platform to bridge music from across the globe to this region. The RWMF has promoted a new interest in and excitement about indigenous music and its revitalization among some of the younger generation. As my

¹⁹ *Sape* musicians especially those in the cities are beginning to electrify their instruments so that the sound can be heard.

colleagues, friends, and students who attended the 2003 festival testify, 'participating in the workshops was enjoyable and educational. We could try out instruments from Sarawak and other parts of the world as well as try out dance steps and movements related to the music.' The teachers who attended the festival workshops were enthusiastic about showing their students what they learnt and what they recorded on video.

Conclusion

In Malaysia, there are tensions between those who advocate that traditions must be preserved with minimal change and those who regard musical transformation as inevitable. The latter tries to modernize traditional music by adapting to global pop and new media to attract the interests of the younger generation. Both processes are important to keep the music scene alive.

As the culturescape of the indigenous people of Peninsular Malaysia and Sarawak change, it is inevitable that the musicscape will also have to change. The younger generation who wish to be modern often consider their own musical culture as 'backward' and belonging to the past. Bringing indigenous music to the concert stage and mixing the local music with global popular styles may be seen as efforts to transform local traditions so that they are in tune with the modern world. Synthesizing musical elements from indigenous and global sources help the younger generation to connect with modernity.

Through the new fusion music, the indigenous people are able to address and negotiate the tensions of change. They are able to express their concerns about the future. The indigenous people are not against development. However, they do not want their ancestral lands to be taken from them and their environment destroyed by logging and oil palm companies or for the construction of dams. They want to live with dignity and maintain their indigenous culture which is linked closely to the forests and rivers. The musicians are using the past (in their poetry and music) to assert their indigenous identity and to create an awareness of their survival. Recordings, concerts, and festivals such as the RWMF allow their voices to be heard and action to be taken. As a consequence, there seems to be a resurgence of interest in indigenous music and some young people are once again rediscovering the music and dance of their own community as well as other communities.

I am not suggesting that world music is the way to revive traditions but world music has the potential to create interest and pride in local cultures. It plays an active role in the formulation of modern identities and promotes inter-ethnic communication. The crossover aesthetic appeals to broader audiences and cuts across ethnic boundaries. Rajery and Jerry Kamit's CD is testimony of how music can bridge people from different countries and cultures. Sayu Ateng's songs about Sarawak's mountains, forests, and rivers using instruments from various indigenous groups have generated a renewed interest in diverse types of indigenous music among some of the younger generation. Even though CD sales are not high, Mak Minah's Temuan ceremonial songs sung to the accompaniment of bamboo stampers, guitars, and drums have reached some non-orang asli audiences. Mak Minah and the other Temuan singers who sang about their loss in view of the construction of the Selangor Dam as well as other songs were hits at the 1999 RWMF.

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