



Advocating for The Sustainability of Semai Indigenous Music Through The Collaborative Creation of New Traditional Music: A Participatory Action Research (PAR) Methodology

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Abstract

This article provides a critical reflection on the participatory approach methodology and the collaborative creation approach used in an advocacy project to sustain the musical heritage of the indigenous Semai community in Malaysia. These approaches were examined through the medium of an advocacy project that aimed to stimulate the interest of Semai youth in traditional music through relevance, engagement, and connection with their current musical interest and skills. The intention of the project was to also co-create new traditional music with the Semai youth through live musical interaction, improvisation and jam sessions with the research team. This article explored the research team's use of the "Participatory Action Research" (PAR) method, which involved planning, action, observation, reflection, and revision during the initial stages of our advocacy project. Our findings suggest a narrative style in discussing advocacy processes because they occur in a lateral than the linear or cyclical format used in current action research models. Findings also reveal that any attempts to advocate change in the community would firstly require an established relationship of trust, respect, and belief in the research team. The research team would have to have had prior involvement, commitment, and dedication to the community before members of the team could influence change among the community. A self-review of the research team's effort to co-create new traditional music with Semai youth led to the conclusion that co-creation between musicians of different musical training would require a "new" compositional method that negotiates Western musical composition techniques with the oral tradition of creating music.

Keywords: applied ethnomusicology, *orang asli*, participatory approach, participatory action research, Semai, *sewang*, music sustainability

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INTRODUCTION

The Semai music band comprising Western and Semai musical instruments renders the basic rhythmic pattern of a *jenulak*, a traditional Semai song sung during *sewang*. Bah Kang a/1 (son of) Bah

Mat, the elderly *pawang* (shaman) of the village, swoops up the microphone and sings a *jenulak* to this accompaniment. He is a musical and versatile musician who is keen on exploring new musical styles.

When our research team first approached Bah Kang a/1 (son of) Bah Mat on

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the idea of singing traditional *jenulak* in a musical style popular with the Semai youth, he presented us with the performance described above, during our following visit. Performing songs sung to the accompaniment of a typical four-piece band including a drum set, bass guitar, lead guitar and vocals has replaced *jenulak* as a form of entertainment during festive events. These music bands perform Thai, Hindustani, Indonesian, Malay and Western songs that are popular among Semai children, teenagers, adults, and even the village elders (Chan, 2012).

Bah Kang's versatility, spontaneity, and openness to merging traditional and new musical styles, and his family's adeptness as self-taught musicians encouraged the research team to explore the idea of musical sustainability through relevance and current interest. Motivated by the nation's National Heritage Act 2005, No. 645, our research team explored a collaborative approach in co-creating new *jenulak* arrangements with Bah Kang's family. Through spontaneous improvisations, jam sessions, and interactive exploration of musical ideas with the Semai musicians, we hoped that new versions of *jenulak* that would interest the Semai community and beyond would emerge.

Jenulak refers to songs that are sung during *sewang*, a singing and dancing tradition that accompanies healing rituals or festive celebrations among the indigenous Semai communities of Malaysia. The singing is led by the *halaq* (shaman) and repeated by the *centong* (bamboo stamping tubes) chorus. *Sewang* has become a generic term that refers to the singing and dancing tradition of the Orang Asli. It occurs in two different contexts—1) festive celebrations and recreation, or 2) healing ceremonies. *Sewang* for festivities occur during harvest celebrations or rites of passage. Healing ceremonies are conducted when the causes of illness are believed to be related to the supernatural world (Mohd Jalaludin & Abdullah, 2020). The Semai believe that the breach of *tulah* (rules) between the human realm and the supernatural realm will

incur malaise and catastrophes. Concepts such as *pehunan* (unfulfillment), *hoin* (to be sated) and *gernhaq* (unwillingness to share) maintain social justice and peace among the communities (Nicholas, Chopil, & Sabak, 2010). Over the past decades, the Semai came to rely more on Western medicine for the treatment of illnesses. Even though Western medicine is preferred, there are illnesses in the community that still cannot be resolved by Western medicine. Therefore, healing rituals are still carried out at a smaller scale in these villages. Today, *jenulak* survives as songs that accompany *sewang* for tourism events (Figure 1).



Figure 1. Bah Kang and his extended family performing for tourists at the Selangor International Arts Festival (29 July 2017)

At the local level, *sewang* represents the Semai ethnic identity as distinct from other Orang Asli communities. At the international level, *sewang* presents the Orang Asli as a homogenized indigenous group in Malaysia. As *sewang* evolves from a communal activity to a commodity, Semai children and youth become less acquainted with *jenulak* as part of the soundscape of their villages. Today, *jenulak* has been replaced by popular music rendered by Semai musicians as Western music bands.

As popular music replaces *jenulak* and Western medicine replaces healing rituals, competency in singing *jenulak* also declines. Many Semai youth are millennials and Generation Z born in the age of

familiarity with the Internet and digital technology. Traditional Semai music is losing its appeal to the Orang Asli youth generation who are more interested in popular music and global popular culture. Their musical interests, aesthetics and exposure are largely dependent on their individual interests.

Inspiration to Advocacy Project

The research team needs to state their initial reasons for conducting this advocacy project in order to avoid any misperception that will lead to criticism of top-down directives or other forms of coloniality on the part of research team members.

The research team is comprised of academicians who are passionate about the musical heritage of Malaysia. They are also involved with traditional and popular musical compositions at their own universities. While traditional music is sustained at the university level, the research team engages in projects of musical innovation with their students to facilitate their entry into the creative industry. The research team is well aware that adaptation and change in traditions are important means of heritage sustainability.

The adaptation of indigenous music to world music has sparked much controversy and critique in the academic world due to issues revolving around cultural imperialism, authenticity and appropriation. World music composed for commercial and tourism purposes often positions indigenous music as having been appropriated by Western music composers. However, Nettl (1983) notes that the ways in which world cultures adapt and change to achieve some kind of survival marks the uniqueness of each culture (p. 436). These changes present the real, live social-cultural situations these cultures engage in at specific points of time.

Our research team is inclined to agree with Nettl's view that music is enriched when different cultures come into contact with each other. This value is the driving principle that leads us to engage in this advocacy project. We are passiona-

te about the beauty and aesthetics in each cultural group's traditional music, yet open to addressing new approaches to sustain indigenous heritage in adaptation to the current situation. Some pioneers have already for example In the next section, and we present a literature review from audio-visual recordings that have inspired the research team on ideas for musical sustainability.

In 2002, an album titled *Akar Umbi: Songs of the Dragon* combined the songs of the Temuan of Pertak community in Kuala Kubu Baru with instrumental music performed by contemporary Malaysian musicians (Antares, 2002; Mohd Jalaludin, 2003). Songs presented in a modern setting and using instruments such as the keyboard, guitar, and World Music idioms helps the younger generation to connect and engage with modernity (Tan, 2005). The online accessibility of this album today promotes visibility and accessibility to Temuan musical heritage. The memory of Mak Minah and her mesmerising voice is "kept alive through her beautiful songs, which encourages the younger generation of Orang Asli to cherish and value their traditional songs" (Tan, 2014).

In the 'Asia Got Talent' contest in 2015, Sada Borneo, a group of young musicians from Sabah integrated music from *sape* (plucked lute) and instruments that produced sounds from the rainforest such as frog croaking, birds chirping, and thunder roaring with music from the Western acoustic, bass guitar, and a percussion box. Their performance received a grand applause from the audience and positive feedback from the judges including Anggun, David Foster, Melanie C, and Vanness Wu.¹ The leader of Sada Borneo stated, "Our journey is to let people know about Borneo traditional music and to appreciate it especially the young generation" (Asia's Got Talent, 2015).

Much research related to the Semai focuses on examining the meaning, symbolism and processes in conducting *sewang*. Mohd Jalaludin (2020) states that the Baj Luj group performs *sewang* as a cultu-

ral performance during government, private and corporate functions (p. 1). Chan and Saidon (2019) published a songbook that documents the music notation, song text and meaning of *jenulak*. Both of these research efforts document the *sewang* ritual and *jenulak* in writing via music scores but they do not advocate its sustainability through practical and applied approaches. There is an urgency for applied approaches to sustaining musical heritage. This urgency to sustain musical heritage spurred our project.

Statement of Problem

This research delves into two problems involving methodology, 1) participatory approach methodology used to convince Semai youth that integrating traditional with popular music is a means toward refreshed interest in *jenulak*, a potential for revenue generation, and the sustainability of their musical heritage, and 2) our methods in facilitating the creation of new music through a collaborative approach. One of the biggest challenges for academicians involved in applied ethnomusicology through advocacy projects is the bridging of understanding between the research team and their community. This problem is noted by Cancian (1993), who states that academicians who undertake participatory and action-oriented research must bridge “two conflicting social worlds” (p. 92). The academicians’ exposure to different approaches to sustainability may not be shared by the community. Members of the indigenous community might also not have a desire to sustain their musical heritage. Their musical heritage has evolved naturally through the years. Sustainability is often an outsider’s desire; therefore, advocacy projects seen as being conducted within the scheme of government policies are denoted as “top down” approaches that seek to change the cultural heritage of the community

The second problem that the research team did not realise it would encounter is the issue of, “How do two differently trained musical groups co-create

new traditional music?” Members of the research team are formally trained in Western art music and have some knowledge of World music traditions, while Semai youth learned music through the oral tradition. Their skills were acquired by learning through listening and observing, and they are also adept at improvising.

Objectives of the Research

This research aims to critically reflect upon the research team’s approaches to the participatory approach and collaborative creation method of new traditional music used in an advocacy project to sustain the musical heritage of the Semai community. These approaches were examined through the medium of the advocacy project conducted to stimulate interest of the Semai youth in traditional music through relevance, engagement and connection with their musical interest and skills, and to co-create new *jenulak* through live musical interactions, improvisation and jam sessions with the research team. We hoped to excite the young musicians about the possibilities of *jenulak* becoming popular and appealing to the nation and beyond. Producing a musical style that was unique and new would position the Semai to having a more competitive advantage especially during music band competitions.

METHOD

Participatory Approach in Applied Ethnomusicology

The project advocated the “participatory approach” that cultivated ownership of creative work and a “bottom up” approach to musical sustainability. The Participatory Action Research (PAR) involves planning, action, observation, and reflection, a novel approach to applied ethnomusicology, and was utilised to monitor our methodology.

In recent decades, ethnomusicologists have engaged in advocating the sustainability of traditional music through education, empowerment and encouragement. Some ethnomusicologists have

moved from being “shadows in the field” (Cooley & Barz, 2015) to actors or cultural advocates in their own research areas on music. The ethnomusicologists’ involvements and perspectives bring potential strengths and unexpected insights to the field. (Schippers & Grant, 2016). Today, applied ethnomusicology has paved a path for researchers to advocate for the sustainability of traditional musical forms on the verge of decline.

As outsiders to the tradition, the ethnomusicologists’ role is to motivate and inspire culture bearers to sustain their musical tradition in creative ways (Bendrup, 2019; Pettan & Titon, 2019; Summit, 2015). While conventional ethnomusicology methods that involve fieldwork, data collection and analysis and reports continue as important ways of documentation, social intervention requires participatory approaches to nurture the self-esteem, confidence, self-expression, interaction and involvement of stakeholders (Tan, 2019, p. 127). The current trend in “applied ethnomusicology” raises the involvement of researchers with the communities in rejuvenating the cultural heritages of indigenous communities.

This research utilised the “participatory approach” in advocating the sustainability of *jenulak*. This is an approach used in applied ethnomusicology whereby ethnomusicologists and other stakeholders collaborate with communities toward producing creative works that “empower communities to make transformation in their own lives” (Tan, 2019, p. 110). The participatory approach involves an empowerment through a “bottom up” approach, cultivation of ownership of musical heritage and a sense of inclusivity. Inclusion enables stakeholders to feel that they are proactive agents of cultural sustainability. Hence, a feeling of “ownership” is engendered (Tan, 2019, p. 118). This is emphasised by Tan (2019) who states that there is a need to: democratise research and to promote collaboration between the researcher and the community in the planning, training, research, mapping of issues, ana-

lysis, and presentation, so that the community is engaged and empowered in the entire process for change and is enabled to take ownership of the project. (Tan, 2019, p. 111).

In applied ethnomusicology, ethnomusicologists act as facilitators or catalysts, providing tools for participatory research, spaces, a forum for dialogue and methods for capacity building.

Participatory Action Research (PAR)

There are two different terms used in the following discussion—participatory approach and Participatory Action Research (PAR). The participatory approach is commonly used in applied ethnomusicology. However, the use of Participatory Action Research (PAR) is still novel in this field. Our research team used the Participatory Action Research (PAR) approach in advocating the sustainability of traditional music through new musical arrangements created from live musical interactions, reflection and discussions. While many research projects present findings, this research shares the complex issues faced by the research team during the advocacy process using the Participatory Action Research methodology. We believe that it is important to share our experiences and critical evaluation of our approaches as knowledge for future advocates.

PAR involves three components: 1) active participation of researchers and participants in the co-construction of knowledge, 2) the promotion of self and critical awareness, 3) building of alliances between researchers and participants in the planning, implementation, and dissemination of outcomes (McIntyre, 2008, p. ix). McIntyre’s model is based on a recursive or cyclic process of questioning, reflecting, investigating, developing, implementing and refining (McIntyre, 2008, p. 7). Researchers conducting PAR have to constantly negotiate between their status as outsiders with different ideas about sustainability different from sustainability ideas of their participants. PAR provides a framework to assist researchers when they come to

crossroads, dilemmas, and uncertainty over responses required during the advocacy process.

The application of PAR in different communities and regions has its own complications, challenges, unpredictability and inconclusive results (Cooke & Kothari, 2001; Greenwood, 2002). The PAR approach enables transparency by revealing the complexities and frustrations interjected with moments of enlightenment, revelation, and resolution during the advocacy processes. Sharing these processes helps other advocates understand their own challenges, conflicts, unsuccessful attempts and so on (McIntyre, 2008).

Our research team encountered our own set of problems with encouraging a participatory approach to the advocacy project. We did not receive much support from the Semai youth and community in our aims to sustain their musical heritage through a collaborative approach.

Our Participant Action Research (PAR) Model

Many PAR methodology models describe a systematic cyclical process of planning, acting, observing and reflecting. We found it difficult to group our actions into these four categories. Our actions did not occur in a systematic linear or cyclic process but a more lateral process. An observation could skip reflection and be followed by action, or a reflection could lead to action before planning. Planning could also come together with observing and reflecting at the same time. These actions occurred singly and even simultaneously and in different sequences. Therefore, we present our PAR during the advocacy projects in a narrative style making references to actions through words such as “we observed...”, “after some reflection...”, “our plans to...”, “we implemented...” in order to describe the PAR processes. This article discusses our PAR approaches during our *recci* trip, initial fieldwork observations and three advocacy workshops.

The Research Team And The Young Semai Musicians

This research project was conducted among a family of musicians known as the Bah Luj Musical Group. They live in Kampung Orang Asli Bukit Terang, in the town of Kampar located in the state of Perak (Figure 2).



Figure 2. Location of research project: Kampung Bukit Terang, Kampar, Perak (near Kampung Batu Berangkai) in Perak.

The research team was comprised of three music lecturers and a student assistant from a university in Malaysia. The lecturers' areas of expertise were ethnomusicology, music education and guitar performance, while the student was studying for a master's degree in music technology.

There were seven Semai participants in our project who were self-taught musicians on Western musical instruments such as the acoustic guitar, bass guitar and drum set. Throughout the remainder of this article we refer to the participants as 'young musicians'. The young musicians were Sallynie, Ebby, Bah Yasri, Halsis, Saiful, Endiayana and Jofressemo. Their ages ranged from 17-30 years old. These young musicians have full-time and part-time jobs. Halsis, Saiful and Jofressemo are self-taught guitarists and are competent at improvising *jenulak* on an acoustic guitar. Ebby and Bah Yaris played the traditional *centong* (bamboo stamping tubes) while Sallynie and Endiayana sang as part of the *centong* chorus.

The following section provides an

overview of the competency of singing *jenulak* among three Semai generations in Bah Kang's family involved in our advocacy project.

Bah Kang a/l (son of) Bah Mat

Bah Kang, aged 81, is recognised as a *pawang*, a shaman of the highest rank in his village, after the rank of *halaq* and *bomoh*.

The *bomoh* is a shaman who can only conjure spells. But the *halaq* is different from the *bomoh*, the spirit can enter the *halaq*... the *pawang* is of higher status, they have more power, they can request for things from those we cannot see (Bah Kang a/l Bah Mat, personal communication, July 17, 2018)

A *pawang* acts as an intermediary between the human and spiritual world and is able to summon his/her *guniq* (spirit guides) through *jenulak* to "combat evil spirits, cure illnesses and strengthen the morale of the group" (Nicholas, Chopil & Sabak, 2010, p. 48). Bah Kang allowed the research team to record, learn and sing four of the *jenulak* he learned from his *guniq*. During our fieldwork sessions, Bah Kang also demonstrated skills on singing Semai folk songs and self-accompanying himself on a *kereb* (plucked bamboo zither). In addition, he played the harmonica to tunes from songs popular in the 1960s such as "Nona Singapura", "Terang Bulan" and "Joget Pahang" (Chan, Saidon & Mustafa, 2018). He is a versatile musician who is able to adapt his singing to current musical trends and styles.

Bah Kang's Children

Bah Kang has ten children between the ages of 40 and 60. His children's musical interests were founded on Western musical traditions inspired by the mass media. They formed Western music bands that performed music from popular songs from the radio, cassette tapes and compact discs circulated for sale at nearby towns. Among his children, only Alang was interested in playing the *pensol* (nose-flute) (Alang Bah Kang, personal communication, January 14, 2017). Bah Kang's children

grew up performing *sewang* for tourist events organised by government cultural organisations. They learned *jenulak* when Bah Kang and their community sang during healing rituals and festivals. As emphasized by Irawati (2019) and Phattanaphraiwan & Fairfield (2019) – listening, watching and imitating were the ways the traditional communities learned and internalised their community's songs.

Bah Kang's Grandchildren

In the last decades, Bah Kang's children have passed on the task of performing *sewang* during tourism events to their children (Bah Kang's grandchildren) who are between the ages of 17 to 30 years old. Unlike their parents who were surrounded by the frequent singing of *jenulak*, these grandchildren have less of an enculturative experience of *jenulak* through the oral tradition. As the sounds of *jenulak* in the village environment is replaced by popular songs, the Semai younger generation become less acquainted with *jenulak*. Bah Kang's grandchildren are also self-taught musicians on the acoustic guitar, bass guitar and drum set. They like to listen to popular songs transmitted via radio, television and especially through the Internet and that they listen to through their handphones (Chan, 2012). They are interested in musical styles such as *kugiran*, slow rock, *joget*, *dangdut* musical styles and have formed bands to compete in music band competitions such as the 'Battle of the Bands' held during the 'Hari Orang Asal 2019' event in Tapah, Perak (HD Black RV, 2019).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Recci Trip

The aims of the *recci* trip were to discuss the potential of our ideas on musical sustainability and obtain feedback from the members of a Semai musician family on the level of their interest in our ideas. On 18 December 2016, the research team met with Bah Kang and his family and discussed the idea of giving a "fresh take" to their *jenulak* by adapting it to the

Semai youth's musical interest and adeptness at the musical instruments of their choice. As outsiders of the tradition, we expressed our interest in the Semai's rich musical heritage and its potential to be popularised to the public. Alang, Bah Kang's son said that our research project was an opportunity to develop their traditional music for the public (Alang a/l Bah Kang, personal communication, 18 December, 2016). Alang informed us that some of Bah Kang's children, aged between 35-55, had formed their own music bands and they work in towns beyond the village such as Gopeng, Tapah, Cameron Highlands and Kuala Lumpur. However, it would not be easy to gather all of them on the same days and times for consistent workshops and compensate them for the loss of work income. After some reflection, we agreed that the most appropriate participants would be Bah Kang's grandchildren (aged 17-30) as they lived in the village.

While Bah Kang nodded in agreement, we observed that his grandchildren remained silent and compliant. In applied ethnomusicology there is a "delicate relationship between empowerment of the community and the role of the ethnomusicologist researcher... a balance between the ethnomusicologists' needs and the needs of the community needs to be established (Tan, 2019, p. 128). Upon reflection, the members of our research team reminded ourselves to nurture an environment that encouraged Bah Kang's grandchildren to speak their opinions.

Preliminary Workshop

On the 14 January 2017, we began our preliminary workshop with the aim of observing the level of complexity of Bah Kang's *jenulak* and the young musician's competency of performing *jenulak*. Bah Kang sang four *jenulak* – "Wak Genamun", "Sangkut Dipulai yang Debor", "Wak Jenudi" and "Tok Barat" (Chan & Saidon, 2019). The young musicians who attended the session – Sallynie, Endiayana, Ebby, Bah Yasri and Halsis repeated each line of text after Bah Kang finished his line of

singing. Ebby and Bah Yasri sang while stamping specific rhythm patterns on the *centong*

We observed that the young musicians were familiar only with the song text to "Sangkut di Pulai yang Debor". The research team's prior knowledge of *jenulak* was that the *centong* chorus, which is usually comprised of women, were skilful at 'singing in overlap' with the *halaq* (shaman) toward the ending of his phrases. This overlap would create a heterophonic texture in the singing of the *centong* chorus and *halaq*. The young musicians did not present this technique of singing as they sang only after Bah Kang ended his phrases. The young musicians informed us that they have heard their elders perform these *jenulak* and that they were relatively new to performing them.

In order for the research team to expedite the teaching and learning of *jenulak*, we thought it would be best that we learn these *jenulak*. Therefore, we asked Bah Kang for permission to record, document, transcribe and sing his *jenulak*. Bah Kang granted us permission and stated that he would inform the respective *guniq* (spirit guides) that we had *berguru* (studied) under him, so that the *guniq* would not be *hairan* (curious) when we sang these *jenulak*. Most importantly, he said that we were performing *jenulak* in the context of education, re-creation and sustainability of Semai musical heritage. We asked the same question on several occasions and his answer was usually:

Boleh... dari saya lah tu, kebenaran saya, terbuka, dia orang tak hairan.

It is permissible... with permission from me, I am open, the *guniq* will not be surprised. (Bah Kang a/l Bah Mat, personal communication, July 29, 2017)

Reflecting on our first fieldwork visit with this family, the research team felt that we were still unable to convince the young musicians of the potential of rearranging *jenulak* to a musical style that could potentially attract a wider audience. Therefore, we still needed to work hard on cultivating

the “bottom up” approach.

Analysing the music transcription, we discovered that the song text of the two *jenulak* that the young musicians could not remember were complicated as they involved nonsensical syllables, melismatic singing style, a wide vocal range and inconsistent melodic phrasing. On reflection, we decided to focus on only one *jenulak* – “Sangkut di Pulau yang Debor”. We shared our transcription of the music and song text as a guide for the young musicians (Figure 3). The research team blended the oral tradition and literary approach to learning the song text of *jenulak*.

Second, we observed that the *centong* players exhibited only a few problems with stamping the rhythm for each *jenulak*. However, they were not able to sing while stamping the *centong*. Traditional Semai *centong* players were skilled in singing and stamping the *centong* simultaneously. Upon reflection, we believe this was due to the infrequency of opportunities to perform *sewang*.

During the workshops, we noticed that Sallynie had a good voice and that she had inherited the Semai style of singing *jenulak*. We encouraged Sallynie to take the lead as a soloist in the group but she remained shy even though Bah Kang encouraged her to lead. We decided to continuously coax and persuade her Sallynie in the following workshops.

As performed by:
Bah Kang son of Bah Mat

♩ = 75

Voice

Sang-kut di pu-lai yang de bor Sang-kut di be-dok hod de

Centong

(repeats throughout)

8
bor...Cip cip yang de bor lor hik Cip cip yang de... bor de hik Cip cip a-

17
bor...Nong le nong... e lei...lei lei Cip cip yang de bor lor... hik Cip

26
cip yang de... bor de hik Cip cip a - bor... Sang - kut di pu - lai yang de

..

Figure 3. Excerpt from “Sangkut di Pulau yang Debor” (Chan & Saidon, 2019)

Interviews With The Young Musicians

Concerned that the young Semai musicians were not actually speaking up about what they would like to happen to their musical heritage, we decided to interview them. Among their responses, here are a few excerpts:

Kalau boleh, lebih menarik lagi, macam alat muzik centong, rangot, kereb and gendang, kalau boleh end itu kena ada. If possible, it should be more catchy, include musical instruments such as *centong*, *rangot*, *kereb* and *gendang*. (Note: these are mainly Semai music instruments) (Halsis bin Long, personal communication, May 6, 2017)

Tak kira rock ke, rap ke, rock ke, dangdut ke, tak kira la, asalkan lagu ini lebih menarik dan lebih seronok didengar oleh orang muda, terutama orang muda. It does not matter whether it is rock or rap or *dangdut*...as long as the younger generation find it attractive and good to listen to. (Sallynie a/p Buleng, personal communication, May 6, 2017)

The interviews with the young musicians revealed that they would like *jenulak* to be more interesting and attractive to the younger generation. They envisioned it to include some traditional Semai instruments such as the *suling* (flute), *rangot* (jew’s harp) and *centong* (bamboo stamping tubes). The young musicians also appear to be open to integrating rap, reggae, rock or *dangdut* songs with *jenulak*.

Summary of Reflection Of Preliminary Workshop.

From this workshop we observed that the young musicians preferred to remain in the role of follower rather than lead. Even though Bah Kang encouraged his grandchildren to lead, they were reticent. We realised that the shaman is the beholder of the *jenulak*. Halsis said they were afraid to take the lead as they were unfamiliar with the world of shamanism. They still depended on their grandfather, the *halaq*, to negotiate situations with the

spiritual realm. It was ironic that Bah Kang had given permission to the research team to learn and teach his *jenulak* to the public, but his grandchildren were very reluctant to perform *jenulak* without him. This was a situation that we could not solve at this point of time. We could only control our side of the advocacy project by ensuring Bah Kang that granted us permission to perform his *jenulak*.

We also observed one subtle but interesting phenomenon that unintentionally emerged during ethnographic observation. The young musicians took agency in learning their musical tradition by video recording Bah Kang's singing on their hand phones. From this observation, we realised that younger musicians were developing ways to sustain their musical heritage through current technology. We realised that we did not put much emphasis on the young musicians' interest during the research period. However on reflection, we felt that we could have brought some of the younger music students from our faculty for jam sessions with the young musicians, using the musical styles mentioned in the interview.

Creative Improvisation Workshop 1

In our second advocacy workshop, the research team began to initiate the young musicians into collaborating with each other in rearranging *jenulak* to their musical interests and within the level of competency on musical instruments of their choice.

Cultivating Arrangement And Improvisation Skills

The same five members Ebby, Bah Yasri, Sallynie, Endiayana and Halsis attended this session with Daiful, an additional participant. In traditional *jenulak*, the *centong* chorus usually plays the same rhythmic pattern simultaneously. During this workshop we asked one of the two *centong* players to play a rhythm that is different from the original rhythm pattern of *jenulak* "Sangkut di pulai yang debor" (Fi-

gure 4). Self-taught guitarists, Halsis and Saiful, improvised the melody and strummed the chords to "Sangkut di pulai yang debor" on the acoustic and electric guitar respectively (Figure 5).

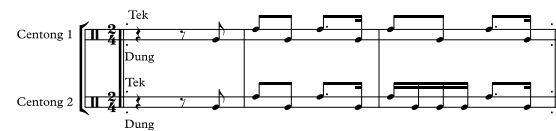


Figure 4. Diversifying the rhythm for "Sangkut di pulai yang debor"

Summary Reflection On Creative Workshop 1

The participatory action research yielded some success in cultivating a "bottom up" approach whereby Semai musicians began to develop their song arrangements, taking ownership of developing their music. The young musicians contributed their improvisation skills on the guitar and created rhythm variations on the *centong*. Since "Sangkut di Pulai yang debor" is about the *siamang*, a black-handed gibbon from the rainforest, Bah Kang imitates the animal by adding the vocables "mong mong mong".

♩ = 80

Percussion 2 Bar Intro

Electric Guitar

Acoustic Guitar

Centong

E. Gtr.

A. Gtr.

Centong

E. Gtr.

A. Gtr.

Centong

Figure 5. Improvisation of melody between electric and acoustic guitar



Figure 6. Young musician playing the *rebana* (frame drum), *centong* (bamboo stamping tubes) and recorder.

Creative Improvisation Workshop 2

During this workshop on 19 August 2019, the research team continued cultivating live arrangement and improvisation skills. Bah Kang and four young musicians, Sallynie, Endiayana, Ebby and Bah Yasri attended this workshop but Halsis and Saiful, the two guitarists, had to work and could not attend. Therefore, we had to restart the entire creative process. After some thought, Sallynie brought out a recorder that she had learned to play during her primary school days. One of our research team members showed her how to play the tune to “Sangkut Dipulai yang Debor” and wrote down the pitches in alphabet letters for her. Instead of using the notes, Sallynie videoed the researcher playing the recorder with her handphone. In addition, Ebby brought a *rebana* (frame drum) to accompany us (Figure 6).

Although our personal interests are to promote Semai musical instruments in the new arrangements, the young musicians were not familiar with playing any of the Semai music instruments, namely, the *rangot* (jew’s harp), *kereb* (bamboo zither) and *pensol* (nose flute). We decided to capitalise on their current knowledge on musical instruments at this point in time. Since we were working in collaboration, one of the research team members attempted to play the *rangot* (jew’s harp) as inspiration to the young musicians.

Summary Reflection on Creative Improvisation

We experienced difficulty in assembling the same young musicians together for continuous progress in the development of the new arrangements. These musicians were away on the Saturdays, the days that we could take time off from our work schedules and their job schedules were not entirely fixed. This affected our aim to cultivate a participatory action research and “bottom up” approach to the musical arrangement.

Sallynie’s move to record our recorder demonstration rather than refer to the notes written down, showed that she and perhaps the others prefer to learn from listening and observing, or through the oral tradition. This workshop also showed us that technology is significant in the young musician’s approach to mobilising Semai musical sustainability. These are subtle ways the young musicians are taking agency in sustaining the continuity of their own musical heritage. Secondly, although using the recorder occurred through the research team’s provocation, the young musicians themselves initiated ornamentations to the melody of the *jenulak* that they played. The “bottom up” approach and sense of ownership showed some progress during this workshop.

Creative Improvisation Workshop 3

Sallynie, Endiayana and Bah Yasri did not attend our final workshop on 26 August 2019. Nyah, Bah Kang’s wife and an elder experienced *centong* player, volunteered to join the workshop. The family called for Jofressemo who happened to be home on a holiday from work. He was a first-time participant to our workshop and a self-taught guitarist. Jofressemo improvised the melody to “Sangkut di Pulai yang Debor” and our student assistant spontaneously strummed the guitar in accompaniment to his plucking. Bah Kang added the cries of the *siamang* during the introduction. Nyah stamped the *centong* and sang while Ebby alternated between playing the *rebana* (frame drum) and the

recorder while a research team member plucked the *rangot* (jew's harp). We arranged the sequence for the entry of each musical instrument during this session. The piece ended with each instrument 'staggering off' and the diminishing plucking of the *rangot*.

Summary Reflection on Creative Improvisation Workshop 3

On reflection, we realised that it would be difficult to get the same level of cooperation of all the young musicians as they had different priorities. The lack of consistent attendance by family members affected the progress of the new arrangement that we wanted to refine and enhance for recording. The final workshop produced an intergenerational arrangement of *jenulak* that combined the current musical competency of the elder and younger musicians. It was not an arrangement composed by a single composer but emerged from a collaborative effort. The final recorded arrangement belonged to the Semai and research team.

CONCLUSION

The strength of PAR is that it enabled us to understand some of the reasons behind the Semai youths' half-hearted participation in our project. The cyclic process of planning, action, reflection and revision of the PAR is problematic because many issues occurred randomly during the project. Some issues can be solved spontaneously without too much reflection or planning. Thus, a lateral process would be more realistic. This makes documentation of PAR via writing a challenge.

From our advocacy project with the Semai young musicians, we observed two significant phenomena. Firstly, the Semai young musicians were occupied with part-time jobs in order to earn income after high school. Upon reflection, we believe that this age group would not be the most appropriate group for our advocacy project. Secondly, the Semai youth have good improvisation skills in music, are flexible

in embracing new musical styles and are using technology such as their phones to learn traditional music. Their musical talents can be nurtured and guided toward a fruitful direction through talent management during the early years of school.

We recommend that future musical sustainability projects that involve collaboration with the indigenous community should be conducted among Semai children either at the community level or as part of the primary school music education curriculum. Creativity and performance in music are skills that require a longer period to develop. These skills have to be developed at a young age. Combining the knowledge of traditional and Western music, performance and composition skills will equip the Semai children with knowledge to create and develop new musical compositions in the future.

On the part of the research team, we believe that our partial success toward achieving our research aims lie in our approach to the participatory methodology and collaborative creations. We believe that prior to attempting to influence the Semai communities with our ideas for sustainability and revenue generation, we must begin with a lengthy period of active engagement on behalf of the community's welfare. The researcher team will have to commit to the social well-being of the community. Our entry into the community through some acquaintance from previous research efforts was not adequate in building trust. Therefore, the Semai youth were not fully engaged with our project.

Problems can occur with attempting to create an understanding between the academician and the community and their respective, different views. While we on the research team were consciously reminding ourselves to trigger the "bottom up" and participatory approach, we still encountered problems with lack of responses as researchers may still be perceived as outsiders who are not necessarily championing the Semai cause. Our aims may be noble but it may be perceived otherwise. This problem has been experienced by ot-

her researchers who used this participatory approach—“... far from circumventing power, participatory approaches (even when done ‘properly’/deeply) are themselves forms of power which differs little from other externally imposed forms of research (Cooke and Koltari, 2001, Kesby, Kindle and Pain, 2007, p. 19). Therefore, as long as there is no mutual understanding on the reasons and purposes for the advocacy projects through development of trust, it will be difficult to achieve success.

Secondly, we discovered that co-creation of new *jenulak* between musicians of different musical training would require a compositional method that negotiates Western music composition techniques with the oral tradition of creating music. This co-creation needs to be carefully planned through a discussion with the Semai community on compositional concept, style, form and others. The research team should also involve a composer who understands the needs of co-creation and who is open to experimenting with a different method in creating new music. Currently, there is very little work conducted in this area of applied ethnomusicology.

Lastly, the most important component to achieving some level of success in this project lies in the reasons behind the research team’s intention to conduct this project. Advocacy projects require lengthy periods of dialogue with Semai and other indigenous people and can be a lifetime project. It would require much commitment and dedicated involvement. A full-time job comprising teaching, researching, publishing and consulting already requires tremendous commitment. Therefore, the research team must re-evaluate their aims toward this project before attempting to further pursue their own recommendations.

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