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UNISONANCE IN SINGING MALAYSIAN POPULAR PATRIOTIC SONGS: BRIDGING COLLECTIVE INTEGRATION THROUGH MUSIC

The line between popular and nationalist music is hazy because any musical style or repertoire has the potential to express nationalism given the right environment and circumstances. Yet, singing and listening to it never misses its aim because the language of song is the most widespread way in which music signifies the nation.¹ The unified singing of anthems and patriotic songs done together by a group of people usually not known to each other is called 'unisonance'² and can result in an emotionally overwhelming feeling of collective cohesion. Focus group discussions on local popular music listening were conducted in 2019 throughout Kota Kinabalu, Kuching and Klang Valley. This paper discusses findings surrounding data drawn from this research focusing on respondent's reactions towards patriotic songs. Findings suggest that Malaysians enjoy listening to and singing patriotic songs individually and more importantly, in concert, as they are a verbal way of manifesting love for the country. Of paramount point here is it creates a moment of unisonance for them, a simultaneous and unanimous acknowledgment of the common symbol, that is the song – over and above any racial or cultural trait – that signifies belonging and begets collective emotional commitment.

Keywords: Patriotic songs, national songs, unisonance, national integration, singing.

Introduction

Malaysians only begun learning the importance of singing together once *Negaraku* was arranged and made as the national anthem for the Federation of Malaya in 1957. Alongside *Negaraku*, several other symbols were created, among them the national flag now known as *Jalur Gemilang*, newspapers like *Malaya Merdeka*, the Merdeka Stadium and the Malaysian coat of arms with the motto “Bersekutu Bertambah Mutu” which was adopted in 1965. They become used as tools of national symbolism for celebrations through the eventual eras of governance. These symbols, which were never important before the existence of colonials in Malaya, are invented for the purpose of mobilizing nationalism in a modern state to strengthen communities and provide citizens with symbols of an imagined nation.³

Above all, singing together was made compulsory – every citizen must be taught how to sing the national anthem; and that is how to sing it together. Soon after the declaration of independence, Radio Malaya⁴ was given the responsibility of teaching the national anthem to every citizen through radio broadcast as it was the only form of public dissemination then. Everyday at 5 in the afternoon, with the help of Alfonsio Soliano on the piano keyboards, Jamaluddin Alias will be singing the lyrics to *Negaraku*, word for word.⁵ The teaching version of *Negaraku* was done for the citizens who, prior to the formation of the state, never knew what a national anthem was, what more singing of it in concert. The country was at the dawn of an important, albeit complex, journey towards modernisation – an arduous and long-time pursuit at constructing symbols of national identity for a post-colonial state steadily brimming with multi-ethnic communities.⁶ This echoes, in essence, the very concept argued by Gellner,⁷ that nationalism only became a sociological necessity in the modern world.⁸

In this article, I bring about a discussion on how official and ‘unofficial’ anthems conjure moments of unisonance for Malaysians when they are listened to and on occasions when they are performed in concert. These occasions offer people a collective experience of national integration and patriotism which is primarily the desired effect of composing national music. In a recent scholarship by Adil Johan and Shazlin A. Hamzah⁹ on Malaysian popular music, it is asserted that the field of research is expanding with promise¹⁰ yet there remains a lacuna surrounding the song’s broader role in the promotion of national integration. The discussion in this article aims to bridge this epistemological gap in the study of popular music.

The Development of Malaysian Music and National Identity

At the birth of independence, there was an urgent need for the government to come up with ways to construct a collective national identity for the local *ethnie* as well as internationally. Various efforts were initiated to brand this independent nation which included among them competitions for people to take part in such as creating a national flag as well as a national anthem. An event called *Pesta* was held in 1956 at the Lake Gardens, Kuala Lumpur for three days in a row in anticipation of the independence.¹¹ Songs, in abundance, and cultural performances of various sorts were performed and held as invited guests came from all over the country including those from overseas. On the eve of the independence day, for the first time the national anthem *Negaraku* was performed by the Band of the Royal Federation of Malaya Police led by A. W. Croft in front of the Sultan Abdul Samad building in Kuala Lumpur.¹² The Union Jack flag was slowly brought down as the band played God Save the Queen as a final gesture of respect.¹³

Music intertwines with nationalism to represent and construct the national identity in many ways. Music and songs not only symbolize nationalism, they also participate in the formation of it. The modern nation-state most powerfully comes into being when its citizens sing together, embodying what Benedict Anderson termed as unisonance.¹⁴ The singing of patriotic songs have become an integral component of ceremonial initiatives linked to nation building efforts especially for multi-ethnic states and such approaches are deemed to contribute to the strengthening of communities.¹⁵ When combined with sentiments of nationalism which embody the meaning of a nation, these songs inspire and resonate with every individual in a community not unlike a religious movement. The chorus of a national song has the capacity to serve as a simulacrum for the nation and this is particularly powerful as it positions the nation on a pedestal in the collective imagination of citizens. In Malaysia, during performances at national celebrations such as the Merdeka Day and Citrawarna to name a few, a diverse cast of characters gather to give voice to music and nationalism. This inevitably means various people are taking part and performing together while those watching from the comfort of their homes through television may also be listening and singing along; in essence, sharing the moment collectively.

This research draws on data collected from several focus group discussions touching on the topic of local popular music and how they are consumed by Malaysians across Borneo and Klang Valley. Notably, Malaysians of various ages and demographic backgrounds have their own idiosyncratic preferences as to how they consume popular music. The sample of songs chosen to be played in the listening section B, are, though randomly selected, the more popular nationalistic songs in the country composed between 1960-1990s. It was of no surprise that the radio waves were intermittently filled with these songs as the respondents attested to it. Short sections between radio programs and especially the few minutes before and after news would be filled with these songs. Nonetheless, there are also certain popular local songs that have attained a, so to say, 'Malaysian brand' to it like for example Sheila Majid's song *Sinaran*, Alleycat's *Andainya Aku Pergi Dulu*, Sudirman's *Balik Kampung* and P. Ramlee's *Getaran Jiwa*, all of which are listed in the section B of the Listening Session. These songs have literally reached the level of 'unofficial anthem' for providing a collective sense of belonging effect for local Malaysians. What follows from here is a brief review of literature revolving music and musicians, unisonance and 'unofficial anthems'. This will be continued with a description of the methodology approach and eventually findings before the article is concluded.

Contemporary Discourse on Music and Identity

The state is constantly creating symbols and identification for people to associate themselves with to feel the 'imagined community'. Anderson¹⁶ emphasized how newspapers are crucial for the definition of these imagined communities because they provide readers with a shared stock of common national referents. Furthermore, radio and television are critical in situating individuals within a national imagined community.¹⁷ For Malaysia, Radio Malaya that began broadcasting in 1946 steadily became the arm for the propagation of 'authority-defined'¹⁸ and government approved messages through music. When television was introduced, Radio Television Malaysia (RTM) was established in 1963 and this national network began broadcasting locally composed and arranged music to keep within and promote the national culture.¹⁹ Songs, much like newspapers and any other media content, are similar to stories and these stories help create a 'collective imagination' of a group. They form a narrative for the individuals in a society to locate themselves. Chopyak stressed further that music is an important cultural marker in Malaysia and as a result, musicians find themselves in the forefront of nation building. Music and musicians in Malaysia are expected to play an important role in the process of building and defining their nation. As much as *Negaraku* was commissioned to be composed as a national anthem, individuals too were compelled to come up with their own personal compositions amidst the fervour of symbol constructions post the independence year. The likes of Ahmad C.B., in 1957, and Ahmad Merican in 1960 both composed *Tanggal 31* and *Tanah Pusaka* which are until today, sung and listened to in a collective manner. Zubir Said too, was a prominent songwriter and music teacher who passionately attempted to arrange compositions when he was invited to compose the national anthem.²⁰ Despite being rejected, it must be understood that he made every effort, as a musician himself, to take part in the nation building process, all for the eventual sake of a collective community.

Musicians have a prominent role in sustaining social ties and in galvanizing new collectivities. Music is portable, malleable and available for easy production and thus it can deeply implicate multiple domains of experiences in a society. Turino²¹ argues that music draws together inner life, reasoning and emotion in ways that rational thought cannot, emphasizing the particularly prominent role of indexical and iconic signs which form the basis for feeling direct empathic connection. This is because music is vital and central in the lives of people. Recording has allowed music to become a ubiquitous but seemingly vapid element of marketing, entertainment and daily life, but the experience and social significance of this is seldom explored. He is clearly a strong advocate for the social power of music and for the need to analyze music not in isolation but within the contexts in which it arises and becomes meaningful. Music often impels the formation of collectivities

by the strength of its ability to communicate to listeners. It carries emotional meaning and establishes what have been termed “audible entanglements” rendering “audible and visible specific constituencies, and imaginations of longing, belonging and exclusion”. Shelemay²² emphasized how most aspects of musical experience cannot be studied without considering different modalities of collective experience. She went on further to emphasize how literature is permeated with studies of collectivities of the past and present yet there is a dearth in discussion about concepts of community in musical scholarship. Turino’s work is mentioned by Shelemay²³ in her article for focusing on meanings of musical performances as conveyed and experienced through presentation, participation, or technological medication. He insisted on emphasizing that music, dance, festivals, and other public expressive cultural practices are a primary way that people articulate the collective identities that are fundamental to forming and sustaining social groups, which are basic for survival. Music and its performance serve to catalyze and subsequently define different groups in different ways, whether to bring groups together or to reaffirm the boundaries that divide them.²⁴

For Anderson,²⁵ nations inspire love and usually it is the self-sacrificing kind. Various cultural products of nationalism such as poetry, prose fiction, music and arts portray this love in thousands of different styles. Also, it is particularly abnormal for these national products, songs in particular, to be tainted with hate or loathness. There is a special kind of contemporaneous community that is being suggested in songs that can be performed together. A national anthem may be banal and mediocre in terms of its melody yet the experience of singing it together provides a moment of unity and simultaneity. At these moments, people wholly unknown to each other utter the same verses to the same melody and this phenomena is what Anderson termed as ‘unisonance’ – the echoed physical realization of an imagined community. Singing the anthems *Marseille*, *Waltzing Matilda*, *Indonesia Raya* and *Negaraku* (my emphasis) provide for occasions of unisonality. In addition, so does listening and chiming in a recitation of a ceremonial poetry. This is a selfless moment of unity when people become aware that others are singing the same song together yet have no idea where they are singing or who they may be.

Unofficial national anthems, on another note, serve all the functions of a national anthem, but they do not have the top down sanction to represent the nation beyond its borders. The unofficial anthem enjoys a specific and wide range of ritual functions, stretching from performance at the beginning of athletic events to the marking of national crises (for example: “God Bless America” was more widely sung than “The Star Spangled Banner” after the September 11, 2001 attacks). Unofficial anthems also may demonstrate even greater national unisonance than their official cousins, perhaps because they have more immediate historical or modern relevance, or even because they

are easier to sing as a collective. Sanctioned to represent the nation or not, unofficial anthems usually contain particularly powerful historical narratives – the narrative of nationalism. The fact that they are an unofficial anthems has never prevented them from retaining public appeal from the moment they became popular until present. Songs like “Standing in the Eyes of the World” by Ella or recently *Gemuruh Jiwa* by Faizal Tahir for example, until today still makes audiences rise to their feet, clap their hands and even well up. The continuous use of these ‘unofficial anthems’ only helps to intensify their nationalist significance and justify their continued presence as the unofficial Malaysian anthem until today.

A similar research was conducted by Mock²⁶ who studied the function of commercials and it was found to have similar effects to songs. What commercials do is re-enact a ritual of almost religious function: a reaffirmation of the national group’s agreement to be in a group. The ritual bears many of the traits sociologists observe as characteristic of ‘primitive’ religion. These are 1) centrality of the theme sacrifice – the ways, both extraordinary and mundane, that members of the group are expected to surrender their individual drives to the group; 2) the importance of unanimity, of the simultaneous performance of the same action, especially acts normally considered outside the boundaries of ordinary behavior; and 3) the projection of exclusivity, assertion that the symbols belongs to the group, rather than containing any ambition toward reflecting a universal value.

According to Mock,²⁷ symbols in the commercial, just like songs (my emphasis) serve as a national ‘totem’, an empty signifier like a flag whose primary meaning lies in its status as emblem of the group, recognized in common by members of the group as encapsulating and organizing the otherwise heterogenous assortment of myths, symbols, and values that constitute group identity. In a recent study by Shazlin A. Hamzah and Adil Johan,²⁸ Malaysia during its independence was in the process of becoming a modern nation and therefore require ‘modern totems’ to bind its society together under the imagined nation-of-intent²⁹ intended by the government of the day. Music in the form of national anthem and patriotic songs remain essential components of these totems as they are mobilized by the state to foster a sense of national cohesion and collective identity. According to Mock³⁰ what these commercials do is re-enact a ritual of almost religious function in which the national group reaffirms its agreement to be a group by unanimously experiencing the same emotion over the same object.

Methodology

Taking a qualitative approach, this article is based on a research done using focus group discussions (FGDs) as the data collection method. From March until April 2019, a total of 12 FGDs were conducted in Kuching, Kota

Kinabalu and the Klang Valley. 81 informants were interviewed in an effort to understand how they consume local popular music – popular songs and popular patriotic songs. They were categorized into four groups them being a) youths of ages between 19 through 39 years old, b) business owners and/ entrepreneurs of various ages, c) professionals of various ages, and d) arts practitioners and musicians (see Table 1). Each group had between four to ten respondents. These groups were demographically multi-ethnic since the study is interested in seeing how members respond in contexts where respondents come from a mixed background. The focus group interviews were divided into three main sections and were repeated in the same manner in all three venues – Kuching, Kota Kinabalu and Petaling Jaya. The sections are: 1) Popular Music and National Identity; 2) Accessing and Consuming Popular Music and 3) Listening Session (two sections: A - popular songs and B - patriotic songs).

Table 1: Focus group discussion respondents by demographic groups

Focus Groups	Kuching	Kota Kinabalu	Klang Valley	Total
1. Youths	6	7	8	21
2. Business / Entrepreneurs	4	7	8	19
3. Professionals	6	5	10	21
4. Arts and Music	6	5	9	20
TOTAL				81

This article is based on the data extracted from Section B of the Listening Session. In this session, informants were polled on their recognition and preferences of songs from a selected playlist of Malaysian songs, which are all patriotic, government commissioned and/or national ones. These are popular patriotic songs that were broadcasted on government radio between the years 1960 through 1998. Six song samples are played in this section, each of which were edited to short 30-second samples (see Table 2). They featured only significant moments of a certain song, such as a chorus, refrain or opening verse. Nevertheless, it must be made clear that this session ensued Section A which listed ten pop songs that were considered popular because of the frequency of airtime it gets on national radio. It was observed that the listening Section A made an impact on the respondents and considerably influenced how they responded to the poll for listening Section B. The FGD members would listen to the samples played and after each they would respond as to whether or not they knew or liked the songs. For a song that is liked, respondents must state reasons why in order to understand personal associations and/or other experiences they might have with the song.

Table 2: Song list for Listening Session B (Patriotic Songs)

No.	Song	Composer	Performer	Lyrics	Year
B1	<i>Tanah Pusaka</i>	Ahmad Merican	Bing Slamet	Wan Ahmad Kamal	1964
B2	<i>31 Ogos (Tanggal 31)</i>	Ahmad C.B.	Sudirman Hj. Arshad	Ahmad C.B.	1957
B3	<i>Sejahtera Malaysia</i>	Mohamed Rahmat	Fauziah Ahmad Daud, Rohana Jalil, Elaine Kang, Azlina Aziz.	Mohamed Rahmat	1990
B4	<i>Setia</i>	Ahmad Dassilah Mohd Yusoff	Francisca Peter	Mohamed Rahmat	1987
B5	Standing in the Eyes of the World	David Gates & Wah Idris	Nor Zila Aminuddin (Ella)	Habsah Hassan	1998
B6	<i>Perajurit Tanahair</i>	Saiful Bahri	Jamaluddin Alias	Saiful Bahri	1960

Music enables long standing historical myths to be narrated and transformed into accepted beliefs at the national level. Songs above all, because they contain language in the lyrics, can become border markers; mobilizing efforts of inclusion and exclusion in a state.³¹ Music can help enhance the qualities of a nation while simultaneously making people forget selected chunks of history.³² The songs listed in Section B are only but a few of the more popular ones to help us understand this phenomena and thus an exploration of the rest is beyond the purpose of this article. As per the FGDs conducted, these songs were generally accepted and recognized by all the respondents in each venue. The following is a description of song B1 (*Tanah Pusaka*).

Tanah Pusaka is a song composed by Ahmad Merican in 1964 with lyrics written by Wan Ahmad Kamal. It was first sang by a Dutch Indonesian singer named Sandra Reemers accompanied by Frans Kerkhof Bossanova orchestra. Eventually other artists also recorded the song including Jamaluddin Alias, Samad Haroun and Julie Sudiro. This is specifically a song that extols on the ‘beauty of the *gemeinschaft*’ – people’s connection to what ties them naturally like the kinship to the motherland or that of home (*tanah air*). According to Anderson³³ these are natural and not chosen – nation-ness is assimilated to skin colour, gender, parentage and birth era, all of the things no one can help. And in these ‘natural ties’ there is a halo of disinterestedness that people cannot help but love. Below are the lyrics to the song:

Tanah Pusaka³⁴

<i>Sungguh gemilang negri-ku</i>	So brilliant is my country
<i>Yang ku puja oh Tanah Melayu</i>	The one I worship oh Tanah Melayu
<i>Di-merata dunia</i>	All around the world
<i>Harum semerbak nama mu oh</i>	Your name fragrantly sweet oh
<i>Malaysia</i>	Malaysia

<i>Aman ma'mur kaya raya</i>	Safe, prosperous and rich
<i>Sudah lama hidup maju jaya</i>	You've been peaceful and rich for a long time

<i>Ohh tanah pusaka</i>	Ohh my inherited soil
<i>Negaraku yang berdaulat dan merdeka</i>	My sovereign and independent nation

<i>Tanah pusaka bertuah</i>	Such rich inheritance
<i>Berbagai bangsa di-dalam-nya</i>	In it people of various backgrounds
<i>Hidup aman dan berjasa</i>	Living in peace and good deeds
<i>Bertekun kerja untok M'aysia</i>	Working diligently for Malaysia

<i>Musoh melanggar ku gempur</i>	Enemies I shall attack
<i>Sungguh rela ku gugor kerana</i>	And I shall die willingly
<i>Kau tanah pusaka</i>	For you my homeland
<i>Biar puteh tulang jangan puteh mata</i>	Lest I regret not sacrificing

“Standing in the Eyes of the World” is a song composed by David Gates and Wah Idris, with lyrics written by Habsah Hassan. It was composed for the Commonwealth Games held in Malaysia in 1998 and has hitherto become an ‘unofficial anthem’ for almost any event alike this original grandness it was made for. Ella, or her real name Nor Zila Aminuddin delivered the song with such zeal and I must admit to choking up every time listening to her rendition of it as it was again used for another international sports event, this time the 2017 Southeast Asian Games held here in Kuala Lumpur. During the closing ceremony of the game, a game which Malaysia turned out champion after 16 years with a total of 145 golds, 92 silver and 86 bronze medals³⁵ the song reverberated with vigour at Stadium Bukit Jalil with everyone in the stadium singing in concert to every line sung by Ella. Everytime Ella says “Malaysia come on! *Silakan!* (Please!)”, the stadium echoed with people singing together and in that very moment, everyone, even those at home, knew that they all recognized the song. The lyrics to the song are as follows:

Standing in the Eyes of the World³⁶

*Pahit getir hidup...
 Dan pengorbanan
 Terpaksa dihadapi
 Demi kejayaan
 Terdidik sejak mula
 Tabah berusaha
 Tanpa cuba melangkah
 Tak kemana
 Di mana kau berada
 Pencapaian tak tiba dengan mudah*

The trials and tribulations of life
 Those sacrifices
 Must be endured
 For the sake of success
 We have all been raised since the beginning
 To try resiliently
 To make every step in our way
 A meaningful one and not desultory
 No matter where you may be
 Success is never easy

*Kini "Standing In The Eyes Of The World"
 Hanyalah selangkah dari nyata*

Now we are standing in the eyes of the world
 Just a mere step to reality

*Keazaman membara dijiwa
 Menanti saat bebas merdeka
 Tiba masa kau melangkah gagah
 Bersemangat ke arah matlamat sedaya upaya
 Engkau terunggul
 Wajah "Standing In The Eyes Of The World"*

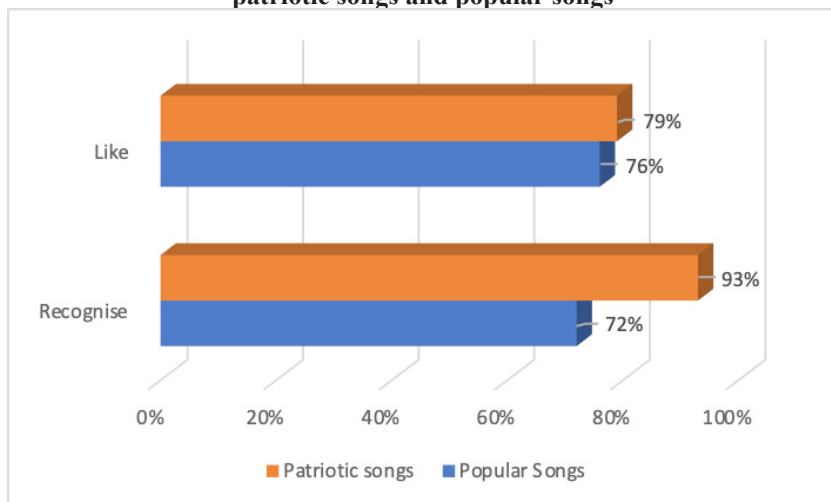
Our determinations firing our souls
 As we await the moment of freedom
 This is the time we walk courageously
 In spirit we toil towards our goals
 You are esteemed
 Faces of us now standing in the eyes of the world

*Harapan yang pernah terkulai layu
 Kembali segar mekar bawah bayanganmu
 Setiap manusia ingin berjaya
 Namun tak semua miliki tuah
 Engkau menghampirinya
 Kesempatan telah pun tiba...*

Our hopes have never droop withered
 Always crisp beneath your shadow
 Everyone wants to triumph
 Yet not everybody is fortunate enough
 You have come this far
 The time has come

Findings and discussion

Figure 1: The percentage of likability and recognisability between patriotic songs and popular songs



This paper is a discussion of findings from Section B (patriotic songs) of the Listening Session. It takes into consideration the fact that group members of the FGDs responded to songs played in Section A prior to listening to the Section B ones. It was observed that this had an effect on the opinions they had of the songs in Section B. Details of the study that presented preliminary findings of the FGD member's responses to Malaysian popular songs as well as their music consumption habits have been written elsewhere.³⁷ As can be seen in Figure 1, in terms of comparison between patriotic songs and popular songs, it is observed that 93% of the former were recognised compared to 72% of the popular songs. This was evident when respondents were asked, "Do you know this song?" to each of the songs played. In addition, 79% of patriotic songs were liked as opposed to 76% of the popular songs. This becomes an interesting phenomenon because it suggests that Malaysian patriotic songs are more liked and recognised than popular songs. In the interest of time during the FGD sessions, the list of patriotic songs had lesser songs than did the popular ones. This unfortunately, may have obscured the findings of the research. However, notwithstanding that, it is the reaction towards the patriotic songs that was also more so observed during the sessions.

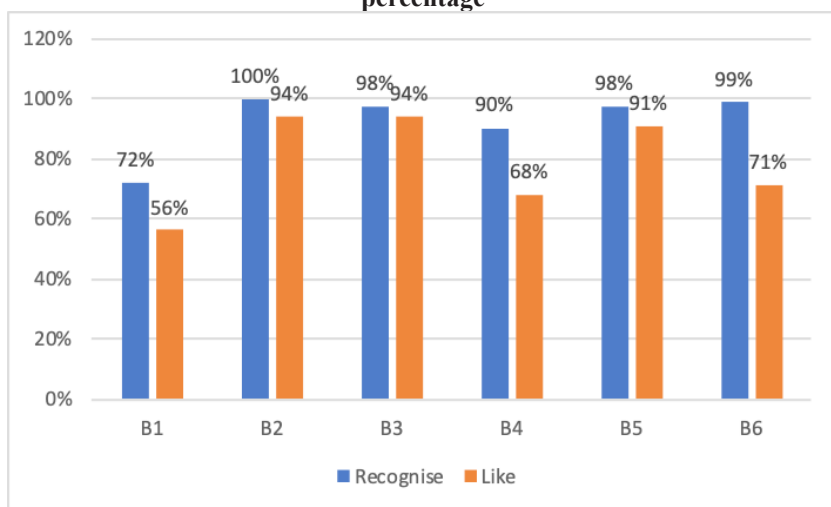
The song *31 Ogos* (B2) sung by Sudirman (originally *Tanggal 31* by Ahmad C.B. in 1957) was the most recognised and liked patriotic song of all that was listed in the section (see Figure 2). This is an example of a commercially-produced popular song carrying a patriotic message or theme. When Ahmad C.B. wrote the song, the year was 1957 and everyone was in a furor about the Federation of Malaya achieving independence.³⁸ Songs are similar to stories and these stories help create a 'collective imagination' of a group. They form a narrative for the individuals in a society to locate themselves. As a result of the importance of music as a cultural marker, some musicians find themselves at the forefront of nation building. This according to Chopyak³⁹, is not a theoretical situation, but rather a practical one which music and musicians in Malaysia are expected to deal with on a regular basis. They find themselves in the forefront of nation building. Music and musicians in Malaysia are expected to play an important role in the process of building and defining their nation.

The second and third most recognised and liked patriotic song is *Sejahtera Malaysia* (B3) and *Standing in the Eyes of the World* (B5). Interestingly *Standing in the Eyes of the World* (B5) is highly recognized and liked thus likely suggesting that the song have propelled itself to an 'unofficial anthem' level among all the other popular songs in Malaysia. *Sejahtera Malaysia* (B3) that was composed by the then (1990) Minister of Information Mohamed Rahmat for a political campaign called SEMARAK (abbreviation for *Setia Bersama Rakyat*)⁴⁰ and produced for nationwide-broadcast by Radio Televisyen Malaysia (RTM). Similar to these songs are *Setia* (B4), and *Perajurit Tanah Air* (B6), which were written and commissioned as

nationalistic propaganda songs, produced and broadcasted by RTM as well. Nevertheless, while most of these government-sanctioned songs are well-recognised, not all are equally liked. *Setia* (B4), while well-recognised (90%) was not as well-liked (68%). This can be compared to a very similar style of song, *Sejahtera Malaysia* (B3) that was easily recognised (98%) and almost equally appreciated (94%) by focus group members.

It was observed that *Tanah Pusaka* (B1) was not really recognised nor liked. This is believed to be because the song is rather dated and have less been aired over the radio or used in any event or political campaign. Nonetheless, the respondents who knew the song really liked it because of the melody and the fact that the song takes them to a particular memorable space and time perhaps with a family or a loved one.

Figure 2: Patriotic songs recognised and liked by respondents in percentage



The following is a discussion on selected responses to the patriotic songs. The responses are drawn from members of three (out of twelve) focus groups conducted across Malaysia: 1) Kuching Entrepreneurs (KE); 2) Kota Kinabalu Professionals (KKP) and 3) Klang Valley Professionals (KVP). Individual respondents cited are marked by numbered codes (e.g. KE3, KKP5, KVP1). Most respondents find that the lyrical content of *Sejahtera Malaysia* (B3) intimates an inclusivist message of multi-ethnic diversity, while *Setia* (B4) is about loyalty to figures and institutions of authority in the country. More prominently, for most FGDs conducted across Malaysia, members relate these two songs to their schooling days:

Comment	Translation	Respondent
<i>Ni lagu masa orang sekolah ni</i>	This is a song from my schooling years.	KER 5
It just reminds me of like school choir and everybody wears that same batik baju and then sing on the stage.		KPV 6
It reminds me of school, standing under the hot sun, singing this.		KPV 4

Some of the members from the groups had neutral and somewhat negative memories of these official patriotic songs, and such memories were related to government-school activities that had KVP 4 ‘standing under the hot sun’ while singing these songs. However, there were also positive associations related to these songs and songs of similar styles from the 1990s:

Comment	Translation	Respondent
<i>Saya suka semua versi lagu ni. Tapi saya paling suka yang versi Francissa Peter punya. Version dia. Masa zaman ni, tak silap ada pertandingan lagu-lagu patriotik tau. Yang semua lagu sedap. Ada beberapa lagulah.</i>	I love all the versions of this song. But the one I love most is one sang by Francissca Peters. During this era, if I am not mistaken, there was a competition for patriotic songs. There were quite a number of them and all those songs were nice.	KER 2

It is observed that KER 2 recognizes the fact that there are several versions of this song that have been broadcasted over the years. This is an indication that the 1990s was a period when many memorable patriotic-themed songs were broadcasted via the national radio and television. There were also members who may have been neutral about the song personally but associated it with a positive memory, such as the one below about *Sejahtera Malaysia*:

Comment	Translation	Respondent
So it took me back to a time where it was just... me, my mum and my sister and my mum and my sister could sing this song, so they had a good time, while singing this song, so I was like OK, it was a good time in the house. They were belting (it)... they enjoyed this (song).		KVP 9

Perajurit Tanahair (B6) is particularly very militaristic because it was composed during the confrontation period between Malaysia and Indonesia in 1960 by Saiful Bahri (Shazlin A. Hamzah 2016b). During the FGD, it was the second most recognised patriotic song (99%) but was not proportionately well-liked (71%). More men than women were vocal about their preference for this song. The men cited national pride and positive associations with the Malaysian military. Women on the other hand, were drawn to the aesthetic and message and marching melody of the song. A rather chauvinistic response was expressed in a humorous manner by a male member from Kuching:

Comment	Translation	Respondent
<i>Siapa tak tahu kita tembak je. Tembak dia (semua ketawa). Siapa yang belum lahir masa dekat Sabah jala kan. Dulunya masa dengan adik main-main senapang. Tahu tak guna penyapu jak.</i>	Those who don't know this song should be shot. Shoot them (everyone laughs). Perhaps to those who were not born yet then. During those days I was playing rifles with my siblings, well we were only using brooms.	(KE 1)

For respondents in Kota Kinabalu who have seen more frequent border disputes and terrorist activity, the song seemed more relevant to them. A comment from a respondent are as per below:

Comment	Translation	Respondent
<i>Lagu tentera ini yang bersemangat, pernah dengar, lagu ini banyak maksud ni, berbeza rentak dengan Standing in The Eyes tadi, motivasi juga lagu ini, melambangkan bersatu, macam dulu kes Lahad Datu, lagu ni guna la bagi naik semangat tentera waktu itu.</i>	This is a military song that gives you so much courage. It has so much meanings. It is different compared to Standing in the Eyes we heard previously. This is also a song that motivate(s) us, a call for us to unite. Like the case in Lahad Datu, this was the song that gave the military their might then.	KKP5

Respondents in Klang Valley reflected on the historical narrative of struggle that was represented in the song. He specifically found the song to be “deep and rather haunting ... to a certain extent” (KVP 9). The song was said to conjure specific memories of relatives who directly involved in the confrontation years of the 1960s with Indonesia:

Comment	Translation	Respondent
It reminds me of my uncle when he joined the army and (he used to tell us) about his friends dying... when you hear this song it's like, oh, so sad... so many people died, so many of his friends died.		KVP 6

What struck as the most interesting finding in the Listening Session polls was the 100% recognition by focus group members of two songs performed and recorded by Sudirman Arshad. *31 Ogos* (B2) is well recognized and liked by all members of the FGDs possibly as a result of its frequent repetition on national media especially for the Merdeka (independence) day festivities day every year. The song is a rearranged and newer version of Ahmad C.B.'s original *Tanggal 31* composed in 1957. It is made popular again by Sudirman in his album *Abadi*, which was released in 1982.

The most prominent finding from the listening session polls can be seen in the 100% recognition by focus group members of two songs performed and recorded by Sudirman Arshad. "31 Ogos" (B2) was well-recognised and well-liked perhaps due to its repeated circulation on the airwaves in conjunction with Malaysia's Independence (*Merdeka*) Day. The song, originally composed and performed by Ahmad C.B. in 1957, was popularised by Sudirman's version released in his 1982 album, *Abadi*. It has since been the main theme song for Merdeka celebrations, broadcasted on Malaysian mass media and sung in public schools across the country.

Comment	Translation	Respondent
<i>Dengar aja sudah rasa di Dataran Merdeka. Ramai orang berbaris (semua ketawa). Imagine dah pakai baju Malaysia. Dengan topi yang besar. Elok tersusun macam-macam topi</i>	It sure feels like I am already on Dataran Merdeka just listening to this song. I'm already imagining wearing the national costume with hats. There would be various hats all lined up.	KE 1
<i>Lagu ini paling popular ini, kalau hari kebangsaan, anak-anak di sekolah nyanyi ini waktu perhimpunan macam tu. semua lagu Sudirman ini banyak meaningful la bagi saya.</i>	This is the most popular song especially for the national day. Children in school also sing this song during their gatherings. All Sudirman songs are very meaningful to me. KKP 1	KKP 1
Reminds me of Merdeka Day and then there's that parade that you do. It reminds me of that.		KVP 6

This is a song that reminds the group members of positive images and memories related to Merdeka Day celebrations in Malaysia. The line '*Tanggal tiga puluh satu, bulan lapan, lima puluh tujuh* (the thirty first of the eighth month [year of] fifty seven)' that refers specifically to the date of independence for the Federation of Malaya did not bother the Borneo based respondents at all even though it does not speak for them. Sabah and Sarawak only joined the Federation of Malaya in 1963 to become Malaysia. A crucial reason why this song is elevated as an 'unofficial anthem' as such is due to the positive associations attached to it. One member said it reminded him of being on 'holiday' (KVP 8) and this solicited much laughter from the group, while another member noted that there was 'always fun attached to this song' (KVP 2).

Conclusion

Drawing from these responses, it can be summarized that overall, people have positive associations to patriotic and nationalistic songs, both official and non-official, due to the feelgood emotions it provides, the jovial melody as well as its lyrical content that speaks of love and loyalty for the country. Essentially, all these reactions and responses are emotions felt and recognised together for these group members because these songs created for them unisonality. More so, unisonance, as Anderson⁴¹ asserted is not just about singing together but also about listening and even chiming together. What is important is the understanding and acknowledgement that one is singing in chorus with the rest – creating the feeling of collective cohesion.

Ella's Standing in the Eyes of the World is a good example of an effective unofficial anthem. It was a key anthem for the Commonwealth Games (1998) and eventually every other sports event in Malaysia including the recent SEA Games that was hosted here in 2017. As mentioned by McGuire,⁴² unofficial anthems are important manifestations of transnational identities and this can be seen as true for Malaysia with its ever evolving, overlapping and coalescing identities as a result of constant migration, inter-ethnic marriages and other forms of social mobilities. There is constant fracturing of a sense of belonging and the perpetual formation of imagined communities.⁴³ Regardless, these anthems can serve and create unisonance that speaks to and for these communities with an enduring effect and appeal.

The closing ceremony was held on the eve of the country's national day and one can imagine the various events lined up in anticipation of the clock striking 12 midnight, yet Ella's song stole the show. It was a moment of unisonance for Malaysians, a simultaneous and unanimous acknowledgment of the common symbol, and that is the song – over and above any racial or cultural trait – as Mock⁴⁴ emphasised, that signifies belonging and engenders emotional commitment on the part of this otherwise very diverse community.

Endnotes

1. Bohlman, Philip, "Music and nationalism." In Stone, J. et al (ed.) *The Wiley Blackwell Encyclopedia of Race, Ethnicity, and Nationalism*, Chicago: John Wiley & Sons, Ltd., 2016. p. 82-83
2. Anderson, Benedict, *Imagined Communities: Reflection on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. London, Verso, 1983, p. 145.
3. Shazlin A. Hamzah, "Negaraku: The National Anthem Binding Malaysians in Integration." *UKM Ethnic Studies Paper Series, No. 59*, (December). ISSN 2180-1193, 2018.
4. In terms of broadcasting, Radio Malaya is the first national air-waves station responsible for the dissemination of news, information and entertainment before the advent of television in Malaysia. It must be stressed here the importance of documenting this as part of the history and make-up of the national identity. As argued by Lee Kuok Tiong and Mohd Safar Hasim, the mass media in Malaysia since the country's independence, has played its role as the government's arm to articulate various historical issues. These include the spirit of nationalism that eventually moved the country to independence, nuggets of historical news element that encourages and promotes tolerance and unity, information that is relevant to help garner people towards becoming a more democratic and liberal society come the year 2020 as well as elements in inculcating peace and harmony for the multi-ethnic community in Malaysia. Refer to Lee Kuok Tiong and Mohd Safar Hasim, "Articulation of History Issues in Malaysian Mass Media", *Malaysian Journal of History, Politics & Strategic Studies (JEBAT)*, 43(1), 2016, p. 1-18.
5. Shazlin A. Hamzah, *Penjenamaan Bangsa: Lagu-lagu Patriotik Popular dan Pembentukan Jenama Malaysia*. Doctoral Thesis, Institute of Ethnic Studies (KITA), Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, 2016.
6. It is useful to note that this article is based on data from across Klang Valley and Sabah as well as Sarawak. Evidently this means that the members of the respective focus group discussions may originate and have lineage of families from all-around South-East Asia. Guido Benny and Ravichandran Moorthy argued, in a recent study, of the importance of collective opinions from these multi-ethnic communities within this region when it comes to the formation of national policies. Public opinion is important when measuring acceptance of the ASEAN community. This relates very well with how it is also pertinent to understand people's acceptance towards symbols seen as significant in nation-building for the collective community be them in the form of national songs. Refer to Benny,

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 8. Umut Ozkirimli, *Theories of Nationalism: A Critical Introduction*. Palgrave Macmillan: New York, 2010, p. 98.
 9. Adil Johan and Shazlin A. Hamzah, “Malaysian Popular Music and Social Cohesion: A Focus Group Study Conducted in Kuching, Kota Kinabalu and Klang Valley”, *Kajian Malaysia* 37(2), 2019, p. 173-195.
 10. The few profound literature on this include Boyle, James, *Putera Puteri: The Music and Legacy of Jimmy Boyle*. ASWARA, 2013. Barendregt, Bart, (Ed.), *Sonic Modernities in the Malay World: A History of Popular Music, Social Distinction and Novel Lifestyles (1930s—2000s)*. Leiden: Brill, 2014, Adil Johan, “Disquieting Degeneracy: Policing Malaysian and Singaporean Popular Music Culture From the Mid-1960s to Early-1970s.” In *Sonic Modernities in the Malay World: A History of Popular Music, Social Distinction and Novel Lifestyles (1930s – 2000s)*, in Barendregt, Bart, (ed.), Leiden: Brill, 2014, pp. 136–61, Adil Johan, *Cosmopolitan Intimacies: Malay Film Music from the Independence Era*, Singapore: NUS Press, 2018, Adil Johan, “Cosmopolitan Sounds and Intimate Narratives in P. Ramlee’s Film Music”, *Journal of Intercultural Studies*, 40(4), 2019, p. 474-490, Augustin, Paul and Lochhead, James, *Just For the Love of It: Popular Music in Penang, 1930s – 1960s*, Penang: SIRDC Petaling Jaya, 2015, Zawawi Ibrahim, Disciplining rock and identity contestations: Hybridization, Islam and new musical genres in contemporary Malaysian popular music. *Situations*, 9(1), 2016, p. 21–47), Weintraub, Andrew and Barendregt, Bart, (Eds.), *Vamping the Stage: Female Voices of Asian Modernities*. Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2017, Barendregt, Bart, Keppy, Peter, and Nordholt, Henk Schulte, *Popular Music in Southeast Asia: Banal Beats, Muted Histories*. Amsterdam University Press, 2017, Saidah Rastam, *Rosalie and Other Love Songs*. Petaling Jaya: Strategic Information and Research Development Centre (SIRD), 2017, Adil Johan & Shazlin A. Hamzah, Malaysian popular music and social cohesion: A focus group study conducted in Kuching, Kota Kinabalu and Klang Valley. *Kajian Malaysia*. Vol .37(2), 2019, p. 173-195, Shazlin A. Hamzah, *Penjenamaan Bangsa: Lagu-lagu Patriotik Populer dan Pembentukan Jenama Malaysia*. Doctoral Thesis, Institute of Ethnic Studies (KITA), Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, 2016, Shazlin A.

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11. This is according to an interview with key informant En. Mohammad Hashim done in 2014 and Shazlin A. Hamzah, *Penjenamaan Bangsa: Lagu-lagu Patriotik Populer dan Pembentukan Jenama Malaysia*. Doctoral Thesis, Institute of Ethnic Studies (KITA), Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, 2016, and Shazlin A. Hamzah, "Negaraku: The National Anthem Binding Malaysians in Integration." *UKM Ethnic Studies Paper Series, No. 59*, (December). ISSN 2180-1193, 2018.
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21. de Wolf, Jan wrote this in a review of the book *Music as Social life: The Politics of Participation*, *European Association of Social Anthropologies*, 2010. p. 501–502 by Thomas Turino.
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26. Mock, Steven J., “‘Whose Game They’re Playing’: Nation and Emotion in Canadian TV Advertising during the 2010 Winter Olympics”, *Studies in Ethnicity and Nationalism*, 12(1), 2012, p. 206–226.
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37. Adil Johan and Shazlin A. Hamzah, “Malaysian Popular Music and Social Cohesion: A Focus Group Study Conducted in Kuching, Kota Kinabalu and Klang Valley”, *Kajian Malaysia* 37(2), 2019, p. 173-195.
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40. Andrew Sia, The truth emerges, *The Star Online*, 25 October, 2009.
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43. At this juncture, I am interested in drawing some points from an article written by Richard Ian Wright on theories for international relations and the potential for an alternative image of the state. He concurred that individuals form collectives to pursue shared ideas through coordinated actions. Therefore the actions of states are always “peopled” actions since states are incapable of having autonomous goals, fears, desires or rational interests, as only embodied individuals have these traits. He suggests for an alternative state model that would be pluralistic in the sense of being comprised of key national components and these national components would be aggregates of individuals as opposed to reified collective units with autonomous agency and interests. Refer to Richard Ian Wright, “The Philosophical Turn: Examining the Foundational Presuppositions of International

- Relations Theory and the Potential for an Alternative Image of the State“, *Malaysian Journal of History, Politics & Strategic Studies (JEBAT)*, 46(2), 2019, p. 196-219.
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