

Sarawak Indigenous Music, Unity and Belonging: A Thematic Analysis

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Abstract: *Numerous studies have shown that indigenous popular music promotes a sense of unity and belonging among people. The study presented in this article extends this line of inquiry by examining visions of unity and belonging among contemporary Sarawakians shaped by their exposure to popular Iban songs. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 13 participants from the southern, central and northern regions of Sarawak to capture their views on the famous Iban pop song Biar Bekikis Bulu Betis and how it helped construct their sense of unity and belonging. The findings revealed several themes that emerged from the interviews: 1) A fun, familiar, and imperative song for events and festivals, 2) A dancey, catchy, and sing-along song for the people, 3) A song that transcends ethnicity and fosters unity and (4) A song of meaningful lyrics and iconic rhythm. The results also show that the Iban pop song promotes a sense of unity and belonging among Sarawakians. The study has implications for future research as it draws attention to the need to consider the role of indigenous popular music of Malaysia in creating a sense of belonging among the people in this multilingual, multiethnic and multicultural country.*

Keywords: Unity, Sarawak, Identity, Social Cohesion, Popular Music, Iban Pop Song, Belonging, Indigenous music

1. Introduction

Indigenous music is different from other music because indigenous music is the traditional music of the world's indigenous peoples. In other words, this music is the music of indigenous ethnic groups that inhabit any geographical area along with immigrants. The term depends on the political role such as region, race, history, and so on. played by the ethnic group and not on the characteristics of the music. Indigenous music is very important for indigenous culture because this music is used to express the culture that is part of ceremonies, storytelling, celebrations, mourning, gathering, and recounting events in indigenous life. Indigenous musicians use a variety of instruments such as didgeridoo, guitar, drums, piano, and saxophone. This fascinating original music fully embraces a wide range of styles and forms of music such as country and western pop forms, disco, rap, rhythm, blues, opera, and techno (Quiggin, 2002).

Despite the significant amount of research conducted on indigenous popular music. There has been a lack of study that considers the responses and perceptions of Sarawak citizens toward Iban popular music and how such music elicits the sense of unity and belonging among the Sarawakians in a diverse multicultural nation. Does Iban pop song play a role in constructing the vision of unity in Sarawak? How can a non-patriotic, joget-mejeng based song 'unite'