

THE ROLE OF RADIO MALAYA IN THE CONSUMPTION OF POPULAR MUSIC THROUGH RADIO REQUEST CARDS FROM THE 1950s TO THE 1960s

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ABSTRACT

This article investigates the pivotal role played by Radio Malaya in shaping the consumption patterns of popular music during the transformative period from the 1950s to the 1960s. Focusing on the unique phenomenon of radio request cards, the study delves into the ways in which audiences engaged with and simultaneously influenced the programming of popular music through their song requests. By employing archival research and qualitative analysis, we explore the sociocultural implications of this interaction, shedding light on the diverse tastes and preferences of the listening public. The study investigates the role of Radio Malaya in fostering a sense of community among its listeners through the shared experience of requesting and listening to favourite songs. By analysing the content of these requests and the subsequent playlist selections, we aim to discern patterns that reflect the evolving cultural identity and musical tastes of the era. In essence, we aim to make an initial attempt to uncover the factors that shaped the popular music landscape of the time. This article hopes to contribute to the understanding of the historical significance of Radio Malaya as a cultural institution and explores the agency of its listeners in shaping the popular music

landscape. By examining the radio request cards from the 1950s to the 1960s, we gain insight into the intricate interplay between media, culture and audience participation during a transformative period in the history of Malaysia.

Keywords: Radio Malaya, request cards, popular music, music taste, popular culture

INTRODUCTION

In the decade following independence of the Federation of Malaya, radios could be heard in every home, shop and street corner. The challenge of bringing together a diverse population of linguistic and religious communities into one nation was closely tied to the country's social and economic progress. Reforming the country's economic, social and cultural fabric was essential in order to establish a cohesive political entity based on democratic and secular ideals. The Federal Constitution of Malaysia, which became operational in 1957 as the Constitution of the Federation of Malaya, promulgated and proclaimed for the country to be, among others, a modern, progressive society with public education, gender and class equality, self-sufficiency in agricultural production, and rapid industrial development (Shamsul and Sity 2012).

State-controlled broadcast media is a tool employed to educate citizens regarding national issues, mobilise them to contribute to the nation's development, and ward off external threats by disseminating dominant ideas throughout the entire country. For instance, when the independent Federation of Malaya held its first elections in 1959, the Election Commission used Radio Malaya to educate the public about the constitution, adult suffrage, voter registration and the electoral process. The immense voter turnout and the conduct of a free and fair election made it evident that these efforts were successful. The songs *Mari Mengundi* and *Undilah Kita Semua* by Zainal Alam were broadcasted as part of the election campaign to inspire voters to cast their ballots, in addition to news and information (RTM 2010).

The primary objective of national broadcasting and transmissions was to highlight local artists and cultural traditions as markers of inclusivity. In order to encourage a national ethos and culture, it was necessary to ensure that the programmes were understandable, entertaining, educational, and informative. People listened to radio broadcasts regardless of their desire to do so because they were so ubiquitous. Newscasts and commentaries were interspersed in between the entertainment programming. However, the same programmes were broadcasted everywhere since there was only one station. During emergency situations,

conflicts, or natural disasters, the Prime Minister would broadcast live on Radio Malaya, reaching every ear in the country.

Radio programming for Radio Malaya included a significant amount of music. Up until the 1950s and 1960s, music programmes featured popular local film music, traditional vocal and instrumental music from Malay, Chinese and Tamil communities, as well as sporadic broadcasts of popular and classical Western music. The music industry was significantly impacted by radio (Shazlin 2022; RTM 2010).

After being introduced in the 1950s, Radio Malaya's radio request cards gained popularity quickly among the general public. If the songs they requested were played on the radio, it would make anyone's day extra special. The option to request specific songs they wanted to hear was available to listeners.

The following objectives are addressed in this article:

1. To study how the radio request cards depicted listening habits and tastes in music between the 1950s and 1960s;
2. To identify the genres comprising the greater proportion of songs that were requested via the radio; and
3. To demonstrate that radio request cards provided listeners autonomy as they had the power to select the songs they wanted to hear.

Brief History of Radio Malaya

The age of radio in Malaya began when the first radio set was introduced to the country in 1921 by an electrical engineer who served as a government official in Johor, named A. L. Birch (RTM 2010). By 1923, he had become the chief electrical engineer in Johor and successfully established the Johor Wireless Association. This effort by Birch marks the first radio broadcast in Malaya. The Penang Wireless Association was established in 1925 followed by the Malayan Amateur Radio Society in 1929 with the aim of expanding radio services. The main focus of broadcasts in this era was music from phonograph records (RTM 2010).

In 1937, the High Commissioner of Malaya established the British Malayan Broadcasting Corporation (BMBC). Broadcasting began using a transmitter on Caldecott Hill, Singapore. It primarily focused on disseminating propaganda and information about the British forces fighting in the Second World War in Europe.

In 1940, BMBC was taken over by the Straits Settlements, and thus, it continued to be part of the British Ministry of Information, which was then known as the Malayan Broadcasting Corporation (RTM 2010).

During the Japanese occupation in 1942, radio broadcasting stopped. This was due to the Japanese's concern that the allied victory would be broadcast. The Japanese took control of all radio stations throughout Malaya, including those in Penang, Melaka, Kuala Lumpur, Seremban and Singapore. These stations were all used for the purpose of spreading their ideological propaganda. Locals were prohibited from owning radios, as this meant they could receive BBC transmissions. The Japanese will attack homes suspected of possessing radios. Those arrested for having a radio were severely punished or killed (Wan 1988).

The Radio Broadcasting Department in Singapore was established on 1 April 1946. As a national radio broadcasting station, Radio Malaya broadcasted news, announcements, public information and world news, songs, documentaries, interviews and quizzes (RTM 2010). Radio Malaya featured songs performed by local music groups on special programmes, in addition to music and songs from phonograph records. The most significant announcement made over the radio in this era was the declaration of independence of Malaya in 1957. The independence saw Kuala Lumpur made as the capital and main administrative centre for the Federation of Malaya. It also marked the point of separation between Radio Singapura and Radio Malaya in Kuala Lumpur. In 1959, Radio Malaya moved to Kuala Lumpur and began functioning from the Federal House (RTM 2010). News and programmes were aired in four main languages, with these being Malay, English, Mandarin and Tamil. Radio services in Sabah and Sarawak began in stages, namely in Sarawak in 1954 and Sabah in 1955.

Radio Malaya and the Imagined Community

When it began broadcasting, Radio Malaya gradually developed into a vehicle for disseminating “authority-defined” (Shamsul 1996a; 1996b; Shazlin 2019) and officially sanctioned messages. Radio Televisyen Malaysia (RTM) played a key role in preserving and promoting national culture by broadcasting locally composed and orchestrated music. Originally established as Radio Malaya on 1 April 1946, it was renamed Radio Malaysia after the formation of Malaysia on 16 September 1963. Songs are like stories, and these stories add to a group's “collective imagination” in the same way as newspapers and other media (Anderson 1983, 141–146). They create a narrative that helps members of a society understand their place within it. Chopyak (1987) emphasised further that since music is a significant cultural element in Malaysia, musicians are at the

forefront of initiatives aimed at developing the country. In Malaysia, it is expected that music and musicians will have a significant impact on the process of forming and defining the country. This makes cultivating social relations important tasks for musicians. Due to its portability, adaptability, and ease of manufacture, music has the power to profoundly influence various societal spheres. Turino (2008) contends that music connects inner life, thought, and emotion in a fashion that rational mind cannot, highlighting the particularly important function symbols play in providing the foundation for experiencing direct empathic connection. This is due to the significance of music in people's life. Given its ability to effectively communicate with listeners, music often encourages the formation of collectives. It evokes strong emotional responses and creates what have been referred to as audible entanglements, making certain constituencies, as well as ideas of longing, belonging, and exclusion, audible and apparent (Shazlin 2020a; 2020b; Turino 2008, 24; Adil and Shazlin 2019). He insisted on emphasising how individuals express their collective identities, which are essential for creating and maintaining social groups. These are necessary for our survival, and they are achieved through music, dancing, festivals and other forms of public expression. It is through music and the performance of it that collective identities of various groups are "imagined" and extended through the negotiation of these boundaries.

The song request cards gradually appeared around the 1950s, a pivotal period when the state and its citizens were especially preoccupied and concerned with establishing their own identity. As asserted by Anderson (1983), print-capitalism enabled a steadily growing number of people to think of themselves in fundamentally different ways. Throughout the 1950s, people began to think of themselves as citizens of an independent nation in an unprecedented way. The interaction of a system of production and productive relations (capitalism), communications technology (print), and the inevitable human diversity was what permitted the gestation of new communities (Özkırmılı 2010). The Radio Malaya song request cards reflected what Anderson (1983, 35) claimed as "the simultaneous imagining of a performance done in privacy yet each communicant is well aware that the ceremony he performs is being replicated simultaneously by others, of whose identity he has not the slightest notion".

Broadcasting the Nation through Radio

Technological developments of communication, especially from the 1880s to the 1920s, created complementary forms and versions of networks on a global scale, exemplified by the Eastern Telegraph Company and its incorporation into Marconi Wireless and Imperial and International Communications Ltd in 1929. The advent of wireless communications precipitated the deployment of radio and broadcasting

as a potential tool to transmit sound, overcoming geographical, political and social borders (Chua 2012, 168–169).

Radio's ability to unify and allow for disparate notions of identity to coalesce around the nation has been expounded in considerable scholarship, especially in America (Hilmes 1997), Britain (Potter 2008; 2013) and transnationally (Pasler 2015). Simon Potter's *Broadcasting Empire* highlighted an important aspect that the BBC had with the British world. Despite envisioning broadcasting to be a tool of enculturation, the outcome demonstrated a unilateral instead of reciprocal establishment, as programmes were seen to be emanating largely from London to the colonies and dominions in the Empire (Potter 2012, 13). Despite imperial decline with many of the British colonies gaining independence by the 1960s, the projection of Britishness and imperial identity overseas were unsuccessful regardless of its original intentions (Potter 2012, 43). In America, Hilmes examined the sociocultural influences of radio as an early documentary of the national narratives that shaped the imagined consciousness of the United States. Through radio, the nation was projected not as a homogenous, "consensus-shaped, and unproblematic reflection of a pluralistic society", but as one that intended to uncover the many "conflicting and often competing" voices that made up the aural image of the nation (Hilmes 1997, xvii).

Much of the history in Southeast Asia has been documented and narrated through written records (Andaya 2018, 1–3). Such processes of documentation were often presented through Westernised and imperialist lenses, thus neglecting how sound – recorded and disseminated through radio can voice issues of identity. Barbara Watson Andaya's paper highlighted how the auralities and soundscapes of Southeast Asia played a significant role in the cultural and social demography of the region especially pertaining to what Schafer termed as a "soundmark" and identity of a particular ethnic community (Andaya 2018, 4–5).

While the history of broadcasting in Malay(si)a has been generally scattered, documented information has often been sourced and retold from the perspective of how radio in the colonies and dominions were modelled after the BBC. It is not unusual for broadcasting in the empire to be employed as a cultural tool of propaganda, dominance and control in a more imperialistic manner. Yet, the BBC's focus on the British Empire in early 20th century is largely on its "white-settler" dominions such as South Africa, Canada, Australia and New Zealand. The dominions were self-governed apart from areas of trade, defence and foreign relations. The Empire Service in 1932 was set up to serve a notion of "Britannic" identity overseas, which was made more apparent during the interwar years (Teer-Tomaselli 2015). This perspective ignores the multiplicity of ethnic, linguistic and

cultural identities that made up the Straits Settlement of Malaya and Singapore. The history of broadcasting in Malaya is often led by local grassroots efforts, instead of a top-down initiative that was mostly concerned with imperialistic and nationalistic endeavours. For example, the Kuala Lumpur Amateur Wireless Society and the Penang Wireless Society were directed by 75 members of Asian descent, with about 80% of the members being Chinese, including its vice president.

Nonetheless, the history of broadcasting in Malaysia has been underexplored. Apart from Drew O McDaniel's *Broadcasting in the Malay World* (McDaniel 1994) and Chua Ai Lin's "The Modern Magic Carpet": *Wireless Radio in Interwar Colonial Singapore* (Chua 2012), there has been a lacuna in how national identity, especially in the transitional process of Malaya to Malaysia has been shaped by radio. Chopyak's article written in 1987 was one of the earliest to examine music's role in mass media post-independence Malaya and how it constituted a national culture. According to Chopyak (1987), it was only after 1957 that a concerted effort was launched through Radio Malaya as an integral process of nation building. The formation of a "truly Malaysian style of music" that is unique to the newly developed nation was crucial towards interethnic unity. While construction of a national identity was of utmost priority, Chopyak also highlighted mass media's role in having to negotiate diverse musical styles and tastes delineated through linguistical and ethnic lines. Saidah Rastam's book, *Rosalie and Other Love Songs*, illustrates a rich chapter in the history of Radio Malaya, featuring engaging anecdotes about the various personnel involved as the business of broadcasting radio transitioned to local stakeholders and produced more local talents (Saidah 2017). Yet, this only accounts for one chapter of the book, which examined the personnel, singers, music directors and members of the Orkes Radio Malaya from pre-independent Malaya in 1946 to after Radio Singapura separated from Radio Malaya in 1959. Although information is also included in the repertoire and song selections of these radio broadcasts, Saidah's account primarily documents Malay songs and the Malay section of Radio Malaya. Yet, broadcasting in Malaya, then later Malaysia is supposed to be a multi-cultural affair with separate English, Mandarin and Tamil sections catering to the wide-ranging demands of radio listeners in Malay(si)a.

Song Request Cards of Radio Malaya

While radio broadcasting in Malaysia has undergone considerable changes throughout its historical trajectory, it continues to exert significant influence, notwithstanding various technological advancements and refinements. Radio served as this region's primary source of news and entertainment from the 1950s to the 1960s. Even though radio sets were afforded only by a few, those who

did would turn theirs on loudly for the benefit of their neighbours (Mohammad Hashim, pers. comm. 19 October 2023).

Creative radio request cards with blanks for listeners to fill in started to appear by the middle of the 1950s. The recipient radio station's address was printed on the front side of the request cards, while information such as the song's title, the sender's name, and a dedication or message were handwritten on the back. The practice of sending radio request cards persisted into the 1990s, but by this time, many of them were subsequently typewritten. These radio request cards were available in four different languages—English, Malay, Indian and Chinese—at roadside shops, sundry stores and bookshops. Eventually, changes in the development of entertainment via television and entertainment magazines had an impact on the popularity of radio request cards. According to Augustin (2022), the following steps are involved in using radio request cards:

1. **Accessibility:** Radio request cards were widely available and were sold to listeners.
2. **Song selection:** Listeners chose songs by writing the title and artist of their choices on the request cards. A succinct dedication or personal message could also be included.
3. **Submission:** After completion, the request cards are mailed to the radio station.
4. **Review:** The radio station examines the request cards that are sent to make sure that they adhere to the rules or requirements that have been put in place.
5. **Airplay:** This refers to the scheduled times during which the chosen requests are played on the radio. To give credit and interact with the audience, radio DJs may read out the listener's name and dedication before playing the requested song.

Through radio request cards, Radio Malaya received requests for songs and dedications to loved ones, distant admirers, friends, family, and even the listeners themselves for their own enjoyment. All of the song request cards observed and selected for analysis in this research are deposited at the Penang House of Music (PHoM) in Penang. The PHoM Resource Centre serves as a hub for musicians, scholars, students, and other parties interested in local entertainment history while also broadening the network of organisations that recognise the country's rich heritage. Currently, PHoM has accumulated and archived a variety of musical materials, including print images of local musicians, newspaper clippings,

entertainment magazines (dating back to the 1940s). Other music artefacts include old and antique radios, microphones, musical instruments, cassette/reel players, record players, and a collection of shellac 78 rpm records, vinyl records, cassettes, CDs, books, songbooks, magazines, old newspapers, posters, flyers, cinema slides, photographs (Paul Augustin, pers. comm. 2 February 2023).

METHODOLOGY

A collection of 149 radio request cards, dating from 1951 to 1969, was sorted through with the help of the PHoM. Using a thematic approach, cards from the Malay Section were analysed to observe the changes in popular music consumption by the listeners through the decade studied (the 1950s to 1960s). This time period was chosen because it contained the most significant request cards at PHoM.

The Beginnings of Radio Malaya's Segments of Popular Songs for the Armed Forces and Songs from Films

The thematic analysis technique primarily focused on identifying and examining recurring themes and patterns within the dataset of cards from 1951 to 1969. The researchers gathered relevant data through document analysis by immersing themselves in the material, reading and rereading it to become familiar with its content. Consequently, the researchers systematically identified and assigned codes to specific portions of the data that represent meaningful units. The researchers examined these codes and grouped them into meaningful clusters based on shared characteristics. These clusters represent the themes that emerge as patterns and ideas from the data. Researchers then refined these by reviewing and organising the coded extracts for connections and relationships between them. According to Creswell and Creswell (2018) and Kress (2010), by examining the perspectives and experiences of individuals or groups, thematic studies give researchers a rich and in-depth understanding of complex social phenomena.

Themes

The song request cards revealed two prominent themes. The themes are as listed in the following and will be explained in the succeeding section:

1. Song requests by armed forces personnel
2. Request of songs from films

Song requests by armed forces personnel

Table 1: Details of request cards for song requests by armed forces personnel

Date/ Year	State sent/ Receiving station	Language/ Section	Song/ Artist
1951	Kuala Lumpur/Kuala Lumpur	Malay/Song request of the army division	<i>Tinggal Kenangan/</i> R. Azmi
11 Dec 1954	Kota Bahru/Kuala Lumpur	Malay/Radio Malaya military special request	<i>Nona Singapore/</i> R. Azmi
29 Jan 1955	Mentakab, Pahang/ Kuala Lumpur	Malay/The Malay division of the police force	<i>Tidor-lah Intan/</i> Rokeah
9 Feb 1955	Kelantan/Kuala Lumpur	Malay/Police force	<i>Lagu Bunga</i> <i>Percintaan/Asiah</i>
2 Mar 1955	Sungei Siput, Perak/Kuala Lumpur	Malay/Military force	<i>Gelora Hati/</i> Normadiah
21 Mar 1955	Kuantan/Kuala Lumpur	Malay/Police force division request	<i>Di Mana Kau</i> <i>Berada/Ali Aziz</i>
29 Mar 1955	Johor/Kuala Lumpur	Malay/Military plan	<i>Aku Ta Tahu/</i> R. Azmi
29 Mar 1955	Kedah/Kuala Lumpur	Malay/Military force	<i>Gelora Hati/</i> Normadiah
29 Apr 1955	Kedah/Kuala Lumpur	Malay/Military security forces division	<i>Doakan Jaya/Lena</i>
2 May 1955	Malacca/Kuala Lumpur	Malay/Police division	<i>Wanita dan Teruna/</i> Lena dan Jasni
3 Sep 1955	Penang/Kuala Lumpur	Malay/Malay section police division	<i>Hitam Manis/</i> R. Azmi
14 Apr 1956	Gopeng, Perak/Kuala Lumpur	Malay/Malay police force	<i>Tatap Sayang, Tatap</i> <i>Chinta/Rokiah</i>
30 Apr 1956	Triang, Pahang/Kuala Lumpur	Malay/Police force	<i>Ku Perchaya Pada-</i> <i>Mu/Zainab Majid</i>
10 Aug 1956	Sungkai/Kuala Lumpur	Malay/Police force	<i>Selamat Pengantin</i> <i>Baharu/R. Azmi</i>
15 Oct 1956	Mentakab, Pahang/ Kuala Lumpur	Malay/Malay section police division	<i>Tidor Lah Namda/</i> Normadiah
13 Apr 1957	Ipoh, Perak/Kuala Lumpur	Malay/Malay section police division	<i>Inang Baru/</i> Salmah Ismail

(Continue on next page)

Table 1 (Continued)

Date/ Year	State sent/ Receiving station	Language/ Section	Song/ Artist
24 Apr 1957	Ipoh, Perak/Kuala Lumpur	Malay/Malay section police division	<i>Selamat Hari Raya</i> / Salmah Ismail
14 Apr 1959	Muar, Johor/Kuala Lumpur	Malay/Song requests of the royal police force	<i>Resam Dunia</i> / Rokiah
29 Dec 1959	Bangi/Penang	Malay/Police request	Any song/ Ahmad Jais
14 Mar 1965	Sarawak/Penang	Malay/Royal police force	N/A
20 Aug 1965	Sabah/Kuala Lumpur	Malay/Song request of police department	<i>Dendang Potianak</i> / Ahmad Daud

Table 1 displays requests for songs from personnel of the army and police forces, respectively. It can be discerned that radios are widely accessible and affordable, making them a common household item. Malaya experienced a state of emergency from 1948 to 1960; during this period of political instability, the public relied heavily on the radio for both entertainment and situational updates. These request cards demonstrate how military and police forces were deployed to serve in areas distant from their homes. They believed the radio would comfort them while they were away from home on duty. An example of this was seen on a card dated 29th April 1955 that the sender wrote: “*Permintaan dari saya ialah lagunya Doakan Jaya yang dinyanyikan oleh Lena. Lagu ini harap ditunaikan kepada adinda saya Zainab Yaman*” (My request is the song *Doakan Jaya* sung by Lena. This song is dedicated to my sister Zainab Yaman). This was a song dedication by an officer stationed far from home to his little sister. Another card, dated 14th April 1959, was sent by a female sender in Johor, dedicating a song possibly to a partner or husband who was serving as a police officer in Penang. It read: “*Lagu ini haraplah ditujukan kepada Inspektor Mohd Som yang berada di Penang dengan ucapan kaseh mesra dan salam rindu*” (I hope this song is addressed to Inspector Mohd Som who is in Penang with warm greetings).

Sending a message or a dedication along with a song request on the radio enabled these individuals to convey emotions such as love, greetings, or remembrance of noteworthy events. Even though they are separated by distance, these messages foster a feeling of emotional intimacy and connection. A shared experience is created when listeners request these songs through the radio. A sense of connection and mutual enjoyment can arise even between people who are physically separated by geographical space when they discover that others are enjoying the same song at the same moment. Essentially, radio song requests serve as a social and emotional

link, bridging physical distances and facilitating connections, communication, and shared experiences through music.

On another request card dated 10 August 1956 from the armed forces requests set, a husband stationed in Perak requested that a song be played on the radio for his wife in Kuala Lumpur with a message for her to remember her duties. The request read: “*Saya harap dapat tuan siarkan lagu di bawah ini iaitu lagu Membawa Diri nyanyian Kamariah untuk isteri saya Hamidah Wah dengan ucapan janganlah adinda lalai segala tanggungan mu tiap hari*” (I’m hoping you’ll play Kamariah’s song *Membawa Diri*, which is dedicated to my wife Hamidah Wah with the message, don’t neglect your daily duties). Even if this might be viewed as relatively private between the couple, it can be seen that there was hope that the radio would serve as a bridge between them despite their great distance.

Requests of songs from films

Table 2: Details of request cards for requests of songs from films

Date/Year	State sent/ Receiving station	Language/ Section	Song/Artist	Film
14 Jan 1956	Seremban/Kuala Lumpur	Tamil/Tamil section	<i>Nalla Nalla Sevai</i> /Jikki	<i>Porter Kanthan</i>
22 May 1956	Teluk Anson/Kuala Lumpur	Tamil/Tamil section	<i>Poovaa Manamum</i> Poothadhu/Jikki	<i>Naan Petra Selvam</i>
21 July 1956	Kuala Lumpur/ Kuala Lumpur	Tamil/Tamil section	<i>Masila an Kathila</i> / A.M. Rajah, Bhanumathi Ramakrishna	<i>Ali Baba</i>
17 Aug 1956	Jementah, Johor/ Kuala Lumpur	Tamil/Tamil section	<i>Kannil Thondrum</i> / K. R. Ramasamy and Jikki	<i>Sugam Enge</i>
6 Apr 1957	Penang/Kuala Lumpur	Tamil/Tamil section	<i>Manushanai</i> <i>Manushan</i> Saapiduraandaa/T. M. Soundararajan	<i>ThaikkuPin Tharam</i>
9 Apr 1957	Pahang/Kuala Lumpur	Malay/Malay section	<i>Inang Baru</i> /Saloma	<i>Penarek Becha</i>
13 Apr 1957	Ipoh, Perak/Kuala Lumpur	Malay/Malay section police division	<i>Inang Baru</i> /Saloma	Penarek Becha
16 Apr 1957	Alor Gajah, Malacca/Kuala Lumpur	Tamil/Indian section	<i>Muthal Mutham Pole</i> / A.P.Komala	<i>Jeya Simman</i>

(Continue on next page)

Table 2 (Continued)

Date/Year	State sent/ Receiving station	Language/ Section	Song/Artist	Film
3 May 1957	Sungai Petani/Kuala Lumpur	Tamil/Tamil section	<i>Vaazhndhaalum Esum Thaazhndaalum Esum/ T.M.Soundararajan</i>	<i>Naan Petra Selvam</i>
9 May 1957	Buloh Kasap, Johor/ Kuala Lumpur	Malay/Malay section	<i>Inang Baru/Saloma</i>	<i>Penarek Becha</i>
11 May 1957	Muar, Johor/Kuala Lumpur	Malay/Malay section	<i>Inang Baru/Saloma</i>	<i>Penarek Becha</i>
13 May 1957	Ipoh, Perak/Kuala Lumpur	English/Mail bag	<i>Shall We Dance/ Deborah Kerr</i>	<i>The King & I</i>
13 May 1957	Klang/Kuala Lumpur	Malay/Song requests	<i>Anak Ku Sazali/ P. Ramlee</i>	<i>Anakku Sazali</i>
20 May 1957	Alor Gajah, Malacca/Kuala Lumpur	Tamil/Tamil section	<i>Kannil Thondrum Kaatchi Yaavum/K. R. Ramasamy and Jikki</i>	<i>Sugam Enge</i>
4 June 1957	Malacca/Kuala Lumpur	Malay/Malay section	<i>Terbuku di Kalbu/ P. Ramlee and Normadiah</i>	<i>Kipas Hikmat</i>
6 June 1957	Bagan Serai/Kuala Lumpur	Malay/Song requests	<i>Inang Baru/Salmah Ismail</i>	<i>Penarek Becha</i>
14 June 1957	Tapah/Kuala Lumpur	Malay/Malay section	<i>Tiada Kata Sechantek Bahasa/P. Ramlee</i>	<i>Anakku Sazali</i>
1 Mar 1959	Malacca/Kuala Lumpur	Malay/Song requests	<i>Bulan dan juga Angin/. Ramlee and Normadiah</i>	<i>Panggilan Pulau</i>
27 Apr 1959	Klang/Kuala Lumpur	Malay/Popular song requests	<i>Bulan dan juga Angin/P. Ramlee and Normadiah</i>	<i>Panggilan Pulau</i>
12 May 1959	Sungkai/Kuala Lumpur	Malay/Popular team song requests	<i>Bulan dan juga Angin/P. Ramlee and Normadiah</i>	<i>Panggilan Pulau</i>
1961	Singapore/Kuala Lumpur	Malay/Malay section	<i>Gelora/P. Ramlee and Saloma</i>	<i>Seniman Bujang Lapuk</i>
10 Nov 1964	Kuala Lumpur/ Penang	Malay/Section for young men and women	<i>Sedangkan-Lidah Lagi Tergigit/P. Ramlee and Saloma</i>	<i>Tiga Abdul</i>

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Table 2 (Continued)

Date/Year	State sent/ Receiving station	Language/ Section	Song/Artist	Film
30 Aug 1965	Sungai Lembing, Pahang/Kuala Lumpur	Malay/Malay section	<i>Ji Kalau Ku Tahu</i> / P. Ramlee and Saloma	<i>Sitora</i> <i>Harimau</i> <i>Jadian</i>
21 Sep 1965	Kubu Gajah/Penang	Malay/Malay section	<i>Sedangkan Lidah Lagi</i> <i>Tergigit</i> /P. Ramlee and Saloma	<i>Tiga Abdul</i>
23 Sep 1965	Tikam Batu/Penang	Malay/Malay section	<i>Sedangkan Lidah Lagi</i> <i>Tergigit</i> /P. Ramlee and Saloma	<i>Tiga Abdul</i>
Oct 1965	Bukit Mertajam/ Penang	Malay/Malay section	<i>Pewira</i> /Saloma	<i>Masam</i> <i>Masam</i> <i>Manis</i>
24 Nov 1965	Jitra/Penang	Malay/Malay section	<i>Gerhana</i> /Saloma	<i>Gerhana</i>
17 Mar 1966	Sungei Bharu, Penang/Penang	Malay/Malay section	<i>Sri Bulan</i> /P. Ramlee and Saloma	<i>Sabaruddin</i> <i>Tukang</i> <i>Kasut</i>

The 1950s and 1960s, popularly recognised as a period associated with the “Golden Era” of Malay films were crucial in the forging of an independent post-colonial nation outside of the colonised Malayan identity inculcated by the British (Adil 2019). Establishment of a Malay musical repertoire was largely influenced by the Malay films that were directed by P. Ramlee. P. Ramlee also composed and performed many of the songs that were featured in his films. These songs were mostly requested by the listeners of the Malay section and were often broadcasted due to popular demand. While there is no guarantee that these song requests were fulfilled by the radio producers and announcers, it is a potentially exciting idea – that anyone could have had a chance to choose and curate the songs to be broadcast through the airwaves.

The popularity and iconic status of P. Ramlee and his wife Saloma cannot be overemphasised. A browse through the cards from the 1960s reveals that there were repeated requests for the same songs from the influential musical couple. Just as the longevity and popularity of these songs continue to exist independently outside of the films, the song requests demonstrate the appeal of these songs, which are aligned with expressions of intimacy and sentimentality. These expressions seemed to be concomitant with conceptions of a Malay cultural identity employed as part of ethnonationalist discourse (Adil 2019). Nonetheless, the concept of *kasih*, which in English translates as love, admiration, or fondness, seemed to be the main focus of these three songs.

Three prominent film songs were selected and requested in 1965 and 1966. These songs were sung by P. Ramlee and Saloma in the films and played a significant role in the narrative of these films. This demonstrated the popularity of these songs, as listeners were still requesting them even a year after the films' release. The song *Jikalau Ku Tahu* was a song request made on a card dated 30 August 1965 from the comedy horror film *Sitora Harimau Jadian* (1964). The song title roughly translates to "If I Knew" and expresses affection conveyed in a discreet manner, where admiration is directed towards the moon, the jasmine flower, and the stars. The musical duet is in the style of a love ballad with strings, saxophone and piano accompanying the singers. Along with the song request is a line of greeting *Uchapan apa khabar* (How are you?) from Wan Rokiah Hamid to Mohd Zaini. On a card dated 21 September 1965, the song *Sedangkan Lidah Lagi Tergigit* was requested for Zanariah Kamal's own entertainment. This song featured in the film *Tiga Abdul* (1964) starring both P. Ramlee and Saloma playing herself. *Sedangkan Lidah Lagi Tergigit* proves to be especially popular and was requested thrice from 1964 to 1965 from two different sections: two from the Malay Section and one from *ruangan permintaan teruna dan dara* (request section from the young). *Sedangkan Lidah Lagi Tergigit* is a metaphorical attempt to describe the relationship between a married couple, akin to the teeth and the tongue, where the closeness of each other in proximity can lead to occasional tensions, just like how a tongue is prone to accidental bites from the teeth. On a card dated 17 March 1966, the song *Sri Bulan* from the film *Sabarudin Tukang Kasut* (1966) was requested with wishes of a happy engagement from Zaini bin Mohd Yasin. The song "Sri Bulan" was also sung by P. Ramlee and Saloma in a more upbeat tempo, featuring a Latin-inspired Rumba clave pattern in the drums. These songs highlight not only the ensuing popularity of P. Ramlee and Saloma and how their songs contributed towards the establishment of a national broadcast repertoire, but equally allowed for expressions of intimacy and sentimentality that were widely popular and that cut across regional divides among Malay listeners nationally.

DISCUSSION

This article presents a preliminary observation and analysis of radio request cards from Radio Malaya during the 1950s and 1960s. In light of this pilot investigation, it is inevitable that drawing generalisations about a society's inclinations and preferences from a small sample of song request cards will inevitably have its limitations. Among the challenges is that most cards from the 1950s and 1960s were handwritten and some of them are very difficult to read. Several details, such as the year sent, the sender's name, a clear message, and the song title dedicated, are either missing or not stated in some of the cards. Nonetheless, given

the available information, we were able to make observations that provided us with a glimpse of the prevailing pattern of popular music tastes from the 1950s to the 1960s. The most relevant themes that emerged from the analysis of this study are song requests by armed forces personnel and requests for songs from films. To summarise and reiterate the main points of this article, the study's goals are as follows: (1) to examine how the radio request cards portrayed listeners' preferences and listening habits in the 1950s and 1960s; (2) to determine which genres accounted for the majority of the songs that were requested over the radio; and (3) to recognise that radio request cards gave listeners the freedom to choose the songs they wanted to hear. The first channel, TV1, debuted in 1963, marked the official introduction of television. A second channel, TV2, was subsequently introduced only in 1969. Before television became widely available, radio played a crucial role in entertaining and fostering a listening culture. It is a medium for mass communication that reaches a large audience from various demographics and geographical locations. It enabled people from various backgrounds to access information, news, and entertainment simultaneously, resulting in a shared experience. The frequency of radio request cards introduced by Radio Malaya increased during the Malayan emergency period, which lasted from 1948 to 1960. The radio request cards enabled listeners to actively participate in programming by requesting their favourite songs and expressing preferences, especially because they are separated geographically with their loved ones. In addition, requests made with these cards influenced music trends. Popular songs that were frequently requested on the radio became hits, thereby influencing the overall musical landscape, as well as contributing to the formation of a common musical culture. Radio Malaya helped to increase the popularity of artists like R. Azmi, Normadiah, Lena, Salmah Ismail (Saloma) and Ahmad Jais to name a few.

Song requests from films revealed how the 1950s to 1960s—generally regarded as the Golden Era of Malay cinema—were essential to the creation of an independent post-colonial nation distinct from the colonised Malayan identity the British had ingrained. The P. Ramlee-directed Malay movies had a significant impact on the development of a Malay musical repertoire. Many of the songs that were included in the movies were also written and performed by P. Ramlee. These songs not only show how P. Ramlee and Saloma became well-known and how their songs helped establish a national broadcast repertoire, but they also show how Malay listeners nationwide were able to express feelings of intimacy and sentimentality that cut across regional boundaries. The song requests revealed the popularity of these songs that were in line and consistent with notions of a Malay cultural identity used in ethnonationalist discourse (Adil 2019).

Lastly, the request cards demonstrated how Radio Malaya, an “authority-defined” structure (Shamsul 2012; Shamsul 1996a), gave listeners the flexibility to select the material they wished to hear rather than making it necessary for them to listen to the predominant perspective on what qualifies as entertainment. By allowing listeners to actively influence the content and cultural impact of radio broadcasts, radio request cards served as an instrument for audience engagement. A vibrant and shared popular culture emerged prior to the television era, partly due to the personalisation, community building, and cultural significance associated with radio requests.

CONCLUSION

It can be argued that the radio request cards by Radio Malaya created a shared cultural identity for the country. Radio plays a crucial role in extending and reinforcing Anderson’s (1983) idea of nations as imagined communities. Anderson argued that nations are socially constructed, and that members of a nation often do not personally know one another, yet they share a sense of belonging and a common identity. This imagined community is created through shared language and a sense of collective history. Radio through the request cards helped disseminate information in a common language. This shared linguistic medium helped create a sense of unity among diverse individuals who were geographically distant but consumed the same media content. One factor in the formation of a common cultural area within the imagined community was the cultural homogenisation brought about by the request cards. A sense of shared identity was strengthened as people all over the country listened to the same popular song requests. Radio acted as a powerful medium in shaping an imagined community through the dissemination of narratives that contribute to the construction of a shared national identity. Through these means, radio plays a crucial role in connecting individuals across vast geographical distances, creating a sense of belonging to a larger imagined community.

The results of this study suggest that Radio Malaya had a significant impact on the development of popular music culture in the 1950s and 1960s, and that radio request cards played a crucial role in this process. It made music widely available, enabling people to discover new songs and artists in the comfort of their own (or neighbours’) homes – this helps to emphasise the shared radio listening experience that the authors mentioned earlier. With the help of the request cards, listeners were able to actively curate the playlist, express their tastes, and influence what was broadcast on the radio. By allowing listeners to request particular songs and dedications, the radio request cards promoted direct communication between radio

stations and their audiences. The language of the cards intended for the channel deejays made it apparent that listeners felt a personal connection to the radio station and its hosts, which fostered a sense of community. Furthermore, societal trends were reflected in the popularity of specific songs or genres, particularly in song requests from the armed forces and local films. We found that the request cards represented the audience's preferences and tastes during the study period. A contributing factor to the cyclical nature of the popular music trend was Radio Malaya's adaptation of their playlists in response to requests. In conclusion, radio request cards were an innovative tool that gave listeners the power to actively influence and interact with the music they heard on the air. Popular music culture emerged as a dynamic phenomenon largely due to this interaction.

Today, radio and radio broadcasting are viewed as rather conventional. Nonetheless, radio has steadily evolved to keep pace with modern technology, with satellite and streaming internet stations becoming increasingly popular. Modern digital two-way radios enable one-to-one communication that is typically encrypted for increased security today. Nevertheless, due to their continued presence in both homes and automobiles, radio remains relevant. In the broadcasting industry, radio request cards have a long history of giving listeners a way to participate in the programming of their favourite stations. The authors of this article hope that further research and study into recent platforms will provide a good indication of how technological advancements in communication and media have shaped musical consumption and the broad popular music landscape in the late twentieth century. Lastly, we believe that further investigation and academic inquiry into popular music, radio, media and history in the context of Malaysian studies will help illuminate the complex web of cultural identity, social dynamics and historical development that is essential to understanding and preserving Malaysia's rich cultural heritage.

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