



Universiteit
Leiden
The Netherlands

Conducting Anthropological Research Amongst the Malays: Applying the "ngopi" Approach

Bergwerff, Sanne

Citation

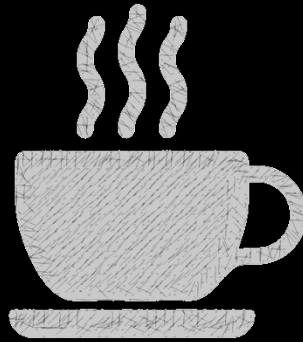
Bergwerff, S. (2023). *Conducting Anthropological Research Amongst the Malays: Applying the "ngopi" Approach*.

Version: Not Applicable (or Unknown)

License: [License to inclusion and publication of a Bachelor or Master thesis in the Leiden University Student Repository](#)

Downloaded from: <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/3567484>

Note: To cite this publication please use the final published version (if applicable).



Conducting Anthropological Research
Amongst the Malays

*Applying the
“ngopi” Approach*

Name: Sanne Bergwerff
Student no.: s2127830
Supervisor: Dr. A.T.P.G. van Engelenhoven
Program: MA History, Arts and Culture of Asia
Word count: 15.338
Date: 31-12-2022

Dedicated to all the people who have helped me during my stay in Indonesia. I would like to thank Ibu Pudentia, Kak Sita, Zulpageri, Ibu Patricia and Pak Aone in particular, without whom I would not have been able to complete my research.

*Pisang emas dibawa belayar
Masak sebiji di atas peti
Hutang emas boleh dibayar
Hutang budi dibawa mati*

Table of contents

Chapter 1 <i>Mau ngopi?</i>: introducing the topic	(2)
1.1 <i>Mau ngopi?</i>	3
1.1.1 Field research	5
1.2 Problematic	6
1.3 Method	6
1.4 Structure	7
Chapter 2 The <i>ngopi</i> approach : a methodological framework	(8)
2.1 Learning from handbook approaches	9
2.2 Essential concept: <i>kemelayuan</i>	10
2.3 The <i>ngopi</i> approach: a practical guide	12
2.3.1 Gathering information	12
2.3.2 Working with informants	12
2.3.3 Using and referencing information	13
2.3.4 Recording equipment: dos and don'ts	14
2.3.5 Disadvantages	14
2.3.6 Advantages	14
Chapter 3 Mak Yong: applying the <i>ngopi</i> approach	(15)
3.1 Mak Yong: an introduction	16
3.2 <i>Empat raja</i> : expert approaches	16
3.2.1 Yousof	17
3.2.2 Pudentia	17
3.2.3 Hardwick	18
3.2.4 Darmawan	18
3.3 Case study: Mak Yong and the <i>ngopi</i> approach	19
3.3.1 <i>Topeng</i> tales	20
3.3.1.1 Batara Guru	20
3.3.1.2 <i>Manusia harimau</i>	22
3.3.2 The <i>rebab</i> mystery	23
Chapter 4 <i>Mau</i>: concluding remarks	(24)
4.1 Summary	25
4.2 <i>Mau</i>	26
4.3 Future intent	27
Reference list	28
List of images	30
Glossary	31

Chapter 1



Mau ngopi?

Introducing the topic

1.1 Mau ngopi?

“This is very Indonesian,” she says to me. We were sitting at a big wooden table in the middle of the *kedai kopi* (coffee shop) across the road from the BPNB (Balai Pelestarian Nilai Budaya) office. We were enjoying a cup of coffee, me, Kak Sita (Sita Rohana) and Mas Jo. Kak Sita is the one who spoke to me. She was referring to the fact that our conversation was joined by the owner of the coffee shop, as well as three other men enjoying a beverage and *kretek* (clove cigarettes) in the same shop.

I did not fully grasp the lesson that she was teaching me in this moment. So, later on, when the *satpam* (security guard) of BPNB asked me where I had been, I simply replied “*ngopi*”, which, at that point, I understood to merely mean ‘having a cup of coffee’. His follow-up question was “with whom?” but when I replied with “*sendiri*” (by myself), he looked at me with a strange expression on his face and he just laughed. I could not figure out why he reacted this way to my answer. It was not until much later, that I understood why it was so strange to him that I had said that I had gone for *ngopi* by myself.

Ngopi is an Indonesian term that literally translates as ‘having a cup of coffee’, but what it actually means is having a conversation together over a beverage. It is a very important pastime in Indonesian society to eat and drink together and to have lively discussions or just to talk about anything at all. I would go even further to say that it is a concept. A concept of bonding. During *ngopi*, connections will be made, stories told and secrets revealed. It is no longer merely about the coffee that is consumed, it is about the experience.

*Siapa yang bisa naik gunung sampai ke lereng
Biasanya bisa mencapai puncak bukit
Mengapa lebih nikmat ngopi bareng-bareng
Karena bisa berbagi asa meski sering sedikit
...
Buat apa punya mobil mentereng
Kalau malah membuat sesak dada
Kepingin banget deh ngopi bareng
Sambil mengenang indahnya masa muda¹*

(Anastasia, 2022)

In an oral society such as Indonesia, having discussions over a cup of coffee is ever so important. As expressed in the two *pantun* (poems) above, having *ngopi* together is more important than owning a fancy car and more delightful than reaching the top (in life). Over coffee, jewels of information can be discovered. Yet this type of narratives are rarely, if ever, written down. Stories are often based on hearsay or ‘gossip’, for example: “the old man who lives two *kampung* over from here, still remembers that event, as he was there when he was still a little boy”. Consequently, this means that there is no written record, no reliable source and no way of knowing the ‘truth’.

¹ Translation (by me):

Who can climb mountains up to the slope
Is usually able to reach the peak
Why is it more delightful to drink coffee together?
Because we can share our hopes, even if it’s just for a little while
...
What use is it to own a fancy car?
When in fact it causes you to suffocate
I’d rather share a cup of coffee
While reminiscing about the beauty of youth

But what is the 'truth'? And must it be our ultimate goal to discover it? The 'truth' is not always that which is compatible with historical record. Individual stories and perspectives might be just as valuable. Literate societies seem to consider it necessary to link oral narratives to historical 'truths'. However, when working with an oral society, would it not sow more seeds to adapt the oral way of sharing and remembering while conducting research in such areas? The information found when adapting this approach can prove to be much more interesting and rewarding than the 'truth'. Having said that, it will require us to rethink the ways in which we gather and process information.

When working with an oral society, a desire to record and 'fact-check' everything might have a negative side effect. While merely intended to seek the 'truth', this strategy, inadvertently, ruins the magic of the story, it loses all its inherent mysticism, while casting doubt on the credibility of the person who is willing to share their knowledge with you. There is something very special about having a meal or a cup of coffee with someone and coming back with interesting bits of information, intimate knowledge and personal opinions that would perhaps not have been shared in a 'clinical' interview setting. Therefore, my suggestion would be to cast away recording devices and simply sit down for a cup of coffee and a conversation with an informant.

My focus in this thesis is on the Malay people. The Malays are an ethnic group, the majority of whom live in Malaysia. They also form part of the Singaporean and southern Thai societies. In Indonesia, the Malays inhabit parts of Borneo and Sumatra and they form the majority ethnic group of the Riau Islands. Their language, Bahasa Melayu (Malay), formed the base for what is now the national language of Indonesia, Bahasa Indonesia. The decision for Malay as national language is something the Malays are very proud of.

In this thesis, I will argue that we are in need of a new approach for conducting anthropological research amongst the Malays. With 'we', I mean the (western) academics working in the field of anthropology, cultural or area studies with a focus on Indonesia or Southeast Asia. The new approach I am proposing is what I call the *ngopi* approach. The method is based on the workings of Malay society and the Malay way of thinking, explained by a concept called *kemelayuan* (Malayness). When we dive into the mind of the Malays, we will see how and where previous approaches may have failed to deliver the intended results when carrying out anthropological field research amongst the Malay people.

Last summer, I was doing field research in the Riau Islands, a place known as the motherland of Malay culture. I was there to study one of the Malay traditional arts, Mak Yong. Mak Yong is a form of theatre consisting of dialogue, song, music, dance and ritual. It is an oral tradition that is indigenous to Pattani (southern Thailand), Kelantan (Malaysia) and the Riau Islands. The Indonesian Mak Yong was 'discovered' somewhere around 1976 (Yusof, 1976: 15-16). Somewhere in between this 'discovery' and the 1990s, when Ibu Pudentia started her research in the archipelago, the art had, by all accounts, disappeared in the region (Pudentia, 2010: 7). For the current thesis, I am using Mak Yong as a case study to build and substantiate my argument, that is, that we need to apply a new approach in cultural studies when it comes to carrying out research with oral societies.

In the following section, I will shortly share my experience during the field research in the Riau Islands and introduce the setting and most important players in the story. The remainder of this chapter will cover the problematic, based on what I encountered during my field research. Following that, I shall discuss the methods I am employing for this thesis, as well as the reasoning behind the choice for these particular methods as opposed to others. This chapter ends with a layout of the current thesis, what will be discussed in each chapter and some preliminary conclusions.

1.1.1 Field research

*Tanjungpinang parit pemutus
Di situ tempat Riau Lama
Kasih sayang janganlah putus
Kalau dapat biarlah lama*

*Pulau Pengyangat Inderasakti
Negeri mas kawin Engku Putri
Tanda cinta suami sejati*

*Kalaulah penat Tuan di sini
Ke Tanjungpinanglah memanjakan diri
Kami siap sedia menanti²*

(Manan, 2009: 22)

There is no doubt about it, I left a piece of my heart in Tanjungpinang, the capital of the Riau Islands, Kepulauan Riau, or Kepri for short. The Kepri province consists of thousands of small islands. It used to be part of a larger province, together with mainland Riau, which is located on Sumatra. In 2004, Kepri split from mainland Riau and became its own autonomous province. Tanjungpinang is located on Bintan Island, two hours from Singapore by ferry. It is a colourful city, on a beautiful island with a rich and long history which its inhabitants are very proud of.

At the beginning of June this year, I set foot on Indonesian soil for the very first time. It was arranged that I would spend a few months doing an internship with Ibu Pudentia (Dr. Pudentia MPSS), head of the ATL, Asosiasi Tradisi Lisan (the Oral Traditions Association). As a leading expert on Mak Yong, Ibu Pudentia helped me get started on my field research. She welcomed me into her home, where I stayed for two months, enjoying the cooking skills of Mbak Iyem. After that, I set out for the Malay world. Ibu Pudentia left me in the safe hands of Kak Sita in Tanjungpinang. Kak Sita helped me get around the island and introduced me to the Malay way of life.

I was staying in a *wisma* (guesthouse) above the BPNB office, where Kak Sita works. I spent most of my time in the office and the BPNB library, where there were plenty of sources on Mak Yong. I was told to visit Mantang, one *pong-pong* boat ride away from Bintan island, to find informants for my research. The wife of a colleague of Kak Sita, Bu Rina, who is a teacher on Mantang, agreed to chaperone me to the tiny island. Here, I got to meet some prominent members of the Mantang Mak Yong troupe, with the help of Zulpageri. Zulpageri, who is one of the *gendang* (drum-like instrument) players of this group, took me around the island on the back of his motorbike to visit the Mak Yong members.

² Translation (by me):

Tanjungpinang, breaker of trenches
It is the place of Riau of Old
Love and affection, don't you break
If you could, just let it be

Penyangat Inderasakti
Land of the dowry of Engku Putri
The sign of a husband's true love

If tired, Sir, come hither
To Tanjungpinang, indulge yourself
We are ready awaiting

1.2 Problematic

The first problem I encountered was getting face-to-face time with Mak Yong performers. Even though I was introduced to some members of the Mak Yong groups by Ibu Pudentia, there did not appear to be much willingness to talk to me. One dancer was prepared to talk to me at first. We had coffee and dinner and she told me much, including the fact that she was blocked on WhatsApp by the group leader, potentially because he learned that she was meeting with me. But, after that, she was difficult to get hold of and it became clear to me that we would not meet again. Even among those informants that I did meet in Mantang, there were clear differences in their preparedness to share information with me.

A second problem is the discrepancy between literacy and orality. At heart, Indonesia will always remain an oral society, even though it is attempting to re-imagine itself as a literate one. This is where problems arise. Storytelling is still a major part of Indonesian life (over a cup of coffee for example), but how do we deal with stories told or 'facts' remembered? For, the problem with storytelling is that it is susceptible to change and adaptation. Although people love to refer to some kind of text or manuscript, no one ever seems to have seen these. What good would it do to check these texts, when narratives have been transmitted orally since way back when?

The third, and most subtle, issue is the Malay way of talking. Unlike a society such as the Netherlands, known for its directness, the Malays prefer vagueness, the vaguer the better. The most polite way to talk to someone is in the indirect way, addressing someone in the third person. I have also noticed that direct answers to questions are avoided in a most ingenious way. No one will ever tell you "I don't know", instead, they will refer to someone who does know or might know the answer. This is also a way to avoid answering a question they simply do not want to answer. The Malays are, as are the Indonesians in general, known for not saying what they mean. They may say 'yes' where they mean 'no'. In fact, there seem to be a million different ways to say 'no' in Bahasa Indonesia, most of which do not even consist of any variation of the word *tidak* (no). There are ways to convey disagreement without speaking, that is, saying nothing at all. Another way is to tell a story, to all appearances unrelated, or to recite a *pantun* (poem) through which the discontent is shared. The reason behind this is to avoid anyone feeling *malu* (to lose face). Small talk is also an art the Malays have taken up to another level. They can talk for hours about seemingly irrelative matters, when in fact they can be discussing very important or sensitive subjects. That is why it is a crucial for researchers to learn to read between the lines when working with Malay people. Yet another reason why recording word-for-word what has been said becomes redundant. Much more information is conveyed in demeanour, through non-verbal behaviour, in what is not said, or through subtle metaphors unknown to an 'outsider'.

Thus, I was faced with a dilemma, how to deal with my informants? I have heard many things during my stay in Indonesia, but none of this information was recorded and almost all of it was based on hearsay or 'gossip' (only some coming directly from the source) told to me over a meal or a cup of coffee. Many a Zoom meeting with my supervisor, Pak Aone (Dr. A.T.P.G. van Engelenhoven) revolved around this issue. What was I supposed to do with the information gathered and how could I use this information in an academic research paper? And so it happened that it was suggested by Pak Aone that this very dilemma could be the subject to be addressed in my thesis.

1.3 Method

Multiple times I received the advice to "just record everything" whenever we were talking about my prospective research. In the end, I did not. Partly because the motion simply feels unnatural to me (which is what made me exclaim things such as "I am not fit for this type of research") and partly because it did not feel right in the context that I was working with. I was working with an oral society,

moreover, a society that has (understandably) strong feelings about ‘outsiders’ coming to conduct research. It was my opinion that, if I were to press ‘record’ on my phone while talking to someone, I would lose the ability to create any kind of bond based on trust with the person I was talking to.

As this research was conducted following the disciplines of anthropology, folkloristics, oral traditions and (cross-) cultural studies, most of the background and theories are based on these. I am using a modest selection of secondary literature in this thesis. Partly, these academic sources are used for background information on the current topics. To a certain degree, the literature is also used for concepts such as Malayness and approaches to anthropological and cultural research. The academic dissertations were used for a discussion on previously chosen strategies in Mak Yong research.

Besides secondary literature, this thesis consists largely of primary sources. These are made up of my personal observations in the field, as well as information that was shared with me by informants during my stay on the Malay soil. Video recordings, all of them property of Ibu Patricia, were only reviewed to get a sense of the subject of my research, no direct information from these is used. The information to be discussed was largely collected by application of the *ngopi* approach, which will be fully explained in the second chapter. The most important note to make is that I have not made any recordings, digital or otherwise, to which can be referred, for reasons explained above. Other than a few scribbled notes, often written down after a conversation, there is thus no record of my field research. Moreover, even though most people did not seem to have any problem with me using the information they told me, I have decided to anonymise a lot of the informants to respect their privacy.

1.4 Structure

Following this first introductory chapter, I will unfold the *ngopi* approach in three steps. The first step is to lay out handbook approaches used in anthropological fieldwork, cultural studies and oral traditions research to see what can be learned from them. Secondly, it is vital to pay attention to the concept of Malayness, *kemelayuan*, in order to understand the inner workings of Malay society. This concept forms the basis for the *ngopi* approach. I will fully explain the *ngopi* approach in the third and final step by describing the method by way of a practical guide as elaborately as possible. This second chapter is meant to create a methodological foundation for the remainder of this thesis, as well as future research in this area.

The third chapter embodies the application of the *ngopi* approach to Mak Yong research. The chapter is divided into two parts. The first part covers previous approaches to Mak Yong research, in which I will discuss the four major experts, the *empat raja* (four kings) of Mak Yong. These four academics are the late Professor Ghulam-Sarwar Yousof, Ibu Pudentia, Ibu Patricia (Dr. Patricia Ann Hardwick) and Dr. Alan Darmawan. I will take a critical look at the various ways these experts have conducted their respective PhD research and discuss if and how the respective Kings and Queens of Mak Yong have applied the *ngopi* approach. The second part forms a case study of Mak Yong. In it, I will discuss some of the fascinating stories I have learned about this oral tradition. This part is divided into three narratives. The first two are both based on stories around characters from Mak Yong stories: Batara Guru (the Spiritual Teacher) and Harimau (the Tiger), respectively. The third narrative is based on the mysteriousness around the *rebab*, a musical instrument used by some Mak Yong groups. For the case study, the *ngopi* approach was used and thus the theory explained in the second chapter was put into practice.

In the fourth and final chapter, I will first provide a summary of what has been discussed in this thesis. After that, I will move on to formulate one final conclusion that my research has come to. And, finally, this chapter contains future intents, in relation to further research in the field of socio-cultural studies, as well as an expression of hope for other researchers to apply the *ngopi* approach to future anthropological research in the Malay world.

Chapter 2



The *ngopi* approach

A methodological framework

2.1 Learning from handbook approaches

In order to establish a framework for the *ngopi* approach, we first must direct our attention to standardised approaches, written down for the purpose of guiding researchers on their quest in the field. In this review section, these handbook approaches have been divided into three categories: (1) related to oral traditions research; (2) those dealing with anthropology; and (3) approaches in cultural studies.

Before we start, a few terms should be clarified. Firstly, we need a definition of field research, which may be defined as “the systematic study of ordinary activities in the settings in which they occur” (Bailey, 2007: 1). The second term in need of explanation is the participant observation method, which means to immerse yourself in the subject (culture) of your research. This method encompasses staying in the community, following their daily routines and customs (Konopinski, 2014: 75). A final definition should clarify the distinction between informal or unstructured interviewing and structured or formal interviewing. Unstructured interviews are simply conversations without a clear agenda, while structured interviews are often planned to the minute (Bailey, 2007: 96-100). Unstructured interviews are not necessarily recorded unlike structured interviews.

Finnegan (1992) has written the only complete practical guide to oral traditions research that I could find. It has already been thirty years since it was published but certain parts of the book may still be relevant today. Although concerned with oral traditions, much of the book is dealing with text, because, as she recons, the relevance of textual analysis still remains (Finnegan, 1992: 26). However, the author also questions the excessive use of recording equipment as she writes that “there is no need to record everything” (Finnegan, 1992: 64). McKinney, in her book on cultural research (2000), dedicated a few chapters to the study of oral traditions as well. One of the things listed among the oral traditions is ‘gossip’, which she dubs a “gold mine of data” (McKinney, 2000: 234) as it “offers an emic perspective on behavior” (ibid.). Furthermore, McKinney says not to search for the ‘correct’ version of an oral tradition and states that a combination of the participant observation method and informal interviewing is most effective for studying oral traditions (2000: 261; 243).

For anthropological research, a practical guide was compiled by Konopinski (2014). The authors of the book ascribe much value to recording, transcribing, making elaborate field notes and using scholarly publications as ‘reliable’ material (Konopinski, 2014: 86; 108; 134). Even though it is advised “to think hard about whether your project really demands the depth of detail that recording interviews provide” (Konopinski, 2014: 85), it is clear that having conversations and using field observations alone is not considered strong enough to substantiate any research on its own. In Danelo’s *Field Researcher’s Handbook* (2017), it is even written that “advancing an academic argument requires rational proof” (98) and that an academic “audience demands you to write the truth” (105). This persistent belief for needing ‘truth’ and ‘evidence’ is what the *ngopi* approach is meant to debunk.

In cultural studies, McKinney’s and Ryen’s works proved most useful. McKinney stresses the importance of language learning for cultural research (2000: 63-80), which is indeed essential for research amongst the Malays since there are not many who speak English. Although she advocates for the use of recording devices wherever possible (McKinney, 2000: 244) she is also a clear supporter of the participant observation method combined with unstructured interviewing. In the chapter by Ryen on cross-cultural interviewing (2001), it is stressed that researchers should establish a good, trusting relationship with informants. Besides being open and actively participating in the community, it is made clear in the chapter that it is also very important to learn to understand specific forms of non-verbal communication used by the subjects of your research. The chapter, although quite useful, makes a lot of general statements about dealing with cross-cultural research, whereas, it is my opinion, that we could also benefit from more culture-specific handbooks for anthropological and cultural research.

2.2 Essential concept: kemelayuan

*Kebanyakan Melayu hati peramah
Siapapun datang diajak singgah
Minum dan makan duduk serumah
Tidak memilih tinggi dan rendah³*

(Effendy, 2005: 30)

In order to explain the *ngopi* approach, it is essential to understand the concept of Malayness, *kemelayuan*. What does it entail to be Malay? What does it mean? In this instance, I am seeking to define *kemelayuan* in terms of what it means to be Malay in Indonesia, more specifically to be Malay in Kepri.

Malayness is about more than just ethnicity. It is about identity, customs, habits and culture. In Malaysia, *kemelayuan* is usually promoted on the basis of three very clear characteristics. In order to be(come) Malay, one has to adhere to Islam, speak Bahasa Melayu and follow Malay *adat* (customary laws). Thus, to be Malay, does not necessarily mean being ethnically Malay. In Indonesia, there are clear distinctions between ethnic groups. People speak in terms of “he is Javanese” or “she is Malay” but all of them are *orang Indonesia* (Indonesian, people living in the Republic of Indonesia). However, what being Malay entails is not always very clear. One may self-identify as Malay, while others would define them by another ethnicity (Chinese, for example).

Malayness is said to be “one of the most challenging and confusing terms in the world of Southeast Asia” (Barnard, 2004: xiii). *Contesting Malayness* (Barnard, 2004) is a book compiled from academic research on the concept, tracing its history and origins. Other than a translated version of the *Syair Nasib Melayu*, the book lacks representation of the Malay voice in this story. Nicholas Long has created a more inclusive work on what it means to be a Malay in Indonesia, specifically focussing on the Kepri region, where he did extensive fieldwork. An interesting observation he made is that the Malays have a clear distinction between truth and lies. A historical account is considered ‘true’, however, eyewitness accounts, sometimes from the second hand, can also be considered ‘history’ (and thus the ‘truth’) (Long, 2013: 75-76).

A related notion of Riauness could be considered. This term was proposed by Al Azhar in early work (1997: 770) though not explained in further detail. Any other literature in which the term is used is, unfortunately, unavailable to me. Darmawan refers to an unpublished article written by Al Azhar and Sita Rohana in his dissertation (2021: 232). When I asked Kak Sita about this citation, she reacted very surprised to this reference and did not say anything about the existence, location or content of this article. Riauness might be an applicable, even meaningful, term to the Malays of Kepri and mainland Riau but without further material on this, it is difficult to say so with certainty.

The *Syair Nasib Melayu* is a poem written in 1990 by H. Tenas Effendy, a Malay culturalist and literary scholar. It is a poem on the fate of the Malays. It starts off quite bleak, with explanations of how the Malays lost their empire and their greatness to several colonising entities. The poem is very critical of the way that the Malay people deal with outsiders. The author wrote that some Malays are cowards,

³ Translation:

Most Malays are friendly
Whoever comes, they are invited in
Drinking, eating and sitting in the same house
High or low it doesn't matter

(Barnard, 2004: 223)

some are stupid, lazy, they keep quiet when they should speak up and they lack ambition to make something of their lives. Towards the end of the poem, however, the author shows how the Malays are also resilient, proud, strong and knowledgeable. The *Syair Nasib Melayu* is an ultimate resource of an inner perspective. If one wishes to find out how a Malay person views the Malays as a group, I advise reading the epic poem on the fate of the Malays.

Moving away from conceptual academia on Malayness, it is also interesting to see what happens in psychological and linguistic research regarding the workings of the Malay mind. Hans Pols wrote a piece on the colonial theories of the Malay mind. Colonial psychiatrists believed the inhabitants of the Dutch East Indies to be inferior and their minds to be “inherently pathological” (Pols, 2007: 118). These theories were, of course, used to keep the people under the thumb of the colonial regime. Though hard to read in this day and age of political correctness, some of the stereotypes continue to live on and can be useful to be aware of when working with the Malays, with the necessary nuance. For example, what was previously judged as suggestible, compliant and obedient character traits can now be understood as politeness. It should also be noted that it is a well-known stereotype that the Malays are ‘nice to your face’ but may be spitting poisonous words about you ‘behind your back’. No doubt, the colonial government, at times, misjudged politeness on the part of the Indonesians as harmonious compliance. Their love for metaphors and metonymies should also be discussed. The Malay language is riddled with metaphors and, as previously said, even ‘yes’ can mean ‘no’ sometimes. How they ever managed to create a comprehensive dictionary of Bahasa Melayu is a mystery to me. And, who knows, perhaps there is still much to discover about the meaning of words in Malay. In any case, without someone with inside knowledge, it would be near impossible to learn the language. One could study the entire dictionary and still find it difficult to communicate with the Malay people.

On that note, the dissertation of Kim Hui Lim sheds some light on the Malay’s preference for using proverbs and what they mean to convey by using them. As he rightly points out, the *hati* (liver), for the Malays is the emotional centre of the human body, similar to how the heart is viewed in the western mind. The Malays are a very emotional people, although they do not tend to wear their ‘hearts’ on their sleeves, in fact, they might even be considered to be emotionally suppressive (Lim, 2003: 89; 90; 159). Being very emotionally expressive can even get you in trouble as a person who acts this way can be thought to have mental health problems. Instead, the Malays prefer to express themselves politely, even when telling people off, by using proverbs (Lim, 2003: 159; 41).

We cannot talk about Malay identity without discussing the concept of *semangat*. The term relates to the Malay notion that all things have a spirit, even inanimate objects. It has been said that it no longer carries the same connotation as it once did and that today, the meaning of *semangat* has become quite fuzzy (Long, 2013: 153-154; 245). The term is still widely used though, I have had it said to me many times. From the context, I take it to be an exclamation of encouragement, along the lines of “keep your spirits up”. The concept that all things have a spirit is also embedded in the Malay language. For example, for phrases like ‘turn off (the lights)’ or ‘to turn something on’, they use the words ‘*(di)matikan*’ (to make die/kill) and ‘*(di)hidupkan*’ (to bring to life).

After reading the literature, I suspected that *kemelayuan* might not be the correct term to use in the context the way I intended. Anytime I asked informants about it, they appeared either disturbed or confused by my use of the term, similar to what Long found during his fieldwork (2013: 11). I would infer that, either informants did not want to talk about this concept because of negative connotations related to the term or the concept was simply unknown to them, which would mean that it is an academic construct only and is thus not meaningful to the average Malay person. What is clear is that none of the academic sources have actually provided me with satisfying answers or insights into what Malay identity truly means for the Malays and how it shapes their daily lives. However, all the bits and pieces of academic sources combined with my own observations were sufficient for the construction of the *ngopi* approach as laid out below.

2.3 The *ngopi* approach: a practical guide

The *ngopi* approach is not a completely new method per se. It is reasonable to assume that this technique is frequently employed by anthropologists across the world. However, it is not recognised as an appropriate research method in the academic sphere. Therefore, this practical guide is meant to show its relevance in academia. The subjects discussed in this section are (1) how to gather information in compliance with the *ngopi* approach; (2) how to use this information and reference sources; (3) the dos and don'ts of using recording equipment; (4) possible disadvantages of applying the *ngopi* approach; and (5) main advantages of the method.

2.3.1 Gathering information

Where do we get the information and resources for our research in accordance with the *ngopi* approach? Of course, an important method of any substantial research is the literature review. One should be familiar with the subject by reviewing previous studies and, preferably, some primary sources before starting field research. The participant observation method goes a long way in gathering information as well. However, neither of these methods would be sufficient should one wish to find out what people really think about certain subjects.

For field research, it is usually customary to record as much as possible, either visual or audio. In the third section, I will discuss this further. For application of the *ngopi* approach, it would be wise to withhold recording as much as possible, unless absolutely necessary. There is no such thing as an 'official' interview with the *ngopi* approach. Interviews should be conducted in preferably informal locations, in a 'friendly' manner, as if one is merely having a conversation with an acquaintance over a cup of coffee. It is possible to bring writing material in case something needs to be written down immediately. However, it is my experience that this action causes a significant loss in the flow of a conversation. By looking away to write something down, you break the connection with your informant for a while and this may damage further trust-building and conversational opportunities.

The best way to gather information using the *ngopi* approach is to have an informal conversation, keep the attention in the moment and then, at a more convenient moment, write down the information gathered from the conversation. More often than not, the actual wording that was used to convey something will become less meaningful for the research itself. Therefore, writing the essential, core information down from memory at a later time, should be more than sufficient.

2.3.2 Working with informants

You will need sufficient skill in Bahasa Indonesia or Bahasa Melayu (which, to be frank, was still lacking for me even after three years of studying the language). It is not about the grammar or the vocabulary that makes this language so difficult to fully learn. What makes this language special is the hidden meaning behind words. It is the language use, the *budi bahasa*, that makes Indonesian nearly incomprehensible to 'outsiders'. Without this knowledge, a researcher can stumble upon many misunderstandings while working with the Malays because the Malays may not always speak their mind. A lot of opinions are hidden in the way they talk about something or someone. It is rarely obvious. Unless they are engaging in what we may call 'gossip', opinions become clear in the way stories are told. In light of the hierarchy of Malay society, it not rarely happens that high members of society are spoken ill of behind their backs. This is simply part of the culture. At times, the wording of such gossip can be brutally honest. In such cases, I propose not to use those exact words. Usually, the reason people share harsh words and opinions with you is that they trust you (or attempt to draw you to 'their side') but to use the exact wording in an academic research paper might betray said trust.

In the Malay world, I learned, it is customary to bring something for your informant if you wish to gather information from them. Unfortunately, I have seen that money can become a source of friction and frustration in informant-researcher relationships. For that reason, I suggest staying away from monetary donations as long as possible. Something I heard many times over was “you have no money”, from people helping me with my field research. It meant to show informants that I was just a ‘poor’ student and that they should expect no money from me. Nevertheless, it is considered polite to bring something. You could bring food, I would often bring fruit or *kueh-kueh* (pastries), or take them out for coffee or dinner. For male informants, you could bring cigarettes, too. For Zulpageri, I brought a Dutch magnet that I carried with me to Indonesia for cases such as this.

The most important thing to do is to try and shape a trust bond, make them as comfortable as possible, and respect things they do not want to share or tell you, specifically as an ‘outsider’. There are certain types of knowledge that are considered sacred and, therefore, secret. This kind of information can either not be disclosed to a researcher at all or it can at the very least not be recorded. I once heard a story of a researcher who faced this dilemma. Since the academic procedure required him to make a record anyway, he decided to simply make the records ‘disappear’ so as not to disclose this sacred knowledge to those who were not entrusted by the informants.

Getting informed consent from Malays can be tricky. They are unlikely to say they do not wish to participate in the research directly to your face. If asked something along the lines of “*boleh direkam, iya?*” (may I record this?), they feel compelled to say “*iya*” or “*boleh*” (yes), regardless of their feelings towards being recorded. This is one of the main reasons that I have decided not to record any conversations. Even though it is unlikely that they would not give consent, it would always be uncertain whether there were really no objections on the part of the informant.

As should be clear by now, the Malays are more likely to express themselves in indirect ways. This indirectness is what the researcher should be perceptive to, lest the bonding efforts with informants remain fruitless. It can happen that people do not answer questions in a direct way. It may even seem as if they are having a completely different conversation as their answer does not appear to have any relationship with the question. It is also rare for Malays to tell you “I do not know”, as this might cause them to feel *malu* (to lose face). Instead, they might refer to someone else who would know. Also, if they do give a somewhat direct answer, it could be that they start with statements such as “I heard...” or “it happened to someone I know...” or “someone once told me...” This ensures that the person telling you this information cannot be implicated or held accountable for the information told after that. Silence is also very important. How you interpret the silence of your informant as a researcher is, of course, up to you. It should be said though that in a Malay context, silence often means discomfort. A Malay will often interpret silence as anger, sadness, disagreement or *malu*.

Even though being an ‘outsider’ might seem a disadvantage, it might actually work in your favour. As I was told, the Malays love to share knowledge with outsiders, rather than with those whom they may consider ‘one of their own’. As explained in the handbooks, it is important to build a reciprocal trust relationship with your informants. The best conversations I had were moments when we exchanged culture. I was curious about the Malay way of life and they were curious about Dutch culture, thus we shared it with each other.

2.3.3 Using and referencing information

The most complicated part of the *ngopi* approach is how to use the information and how to reference your sources. In this section, I will therefore share some insights regarding the processing of information obtained through the *ngopi* approach. There are three main concerns to keep in mind for this process: confidentiality, value and reliability.

In order to uphold confidentiality, some sources should be anonymised, while others can openly be referenced. For that reason, I sometimes state explicitly who said what. At other times, I refer to people through their position in society or relation to Mak Yong. Most often, I omit the source altogether when I deem it irrelevant to the story or if I feel it could put the person in a precarious position (this should obviously also be applied when an informant explicitly asks to remain anonymous).

There is a Dutch expression, *iemand in zijn waarde laten* (to accept someone as is), that perfectly connotes what I mean by the issue of value. Whatever is discussed, it should be taken at face value. That is, differing opinions and varying accounts should be used side-by-side. Do not attempt to find the 'true' version of a narrative. Face value should thus be considered as the actual story as told by a certain informant, which is not the same as 'fact' or 'truth'. In other words, do not question the reliability of the account given to you by an informant.

2.3.4 Recording equipment: dos and don'ts

It is perfectly acceptable to use recording devices whilst employing the *ngopi* approach. There is, however, an issue with how to use the recorded information. It would, for example, be very useful to record stories such as Mak Yong tales that are used in performances on video or audio. But rather than making several records of different versions of one story and compiling them into one 'most accurate' narrative goes against the *ngopi* approach. Recording should only be used if the actual wording is pertinent to the research. Making a record using pen and paper is, of course, also possible. However, this might be as distracting, perhaps even more so, than using an audio or visual recording device.

2.3.5 Disadvantages

A major disadvantage of the *ngopi* approach is, arguably, that it produces 'unreliable' information. We are not looking to compare or verify the information that is shared. The way in which stories are remembered and certain opinions are written down as is. It should be clarified that these are remembered 'facts', opinions or views. But there is no argumentation or search for whichever view or 'fact' is the 'truth'. Furthermore, because nothing is recorded, most information is written down from memory as well. It could be a few hours after a conversation, it could be days or even months.

The approach could also be considered 'unethical' because of the absence of informed consent. As explained, obtaining informed consent amongst the Malays is difficult and rather questionable. However, that does mean that all the information used is inherently 'not consensual'. This is why we need to be very careful what to disclose about the identity of informants and how much of the conversation can be shared without damaging the bond between researcher and informant.

2.3.6 Advantages

The biggest advantage of using the *ngopi* approach is that it is a culture-specific method for conducting anthropological field research. It ensures an unbreakable bond between researcher and informant since it does not question the value and reliability of the stories told and it is respectable vis-à-vis an informant's confidentiality. And, last but not least, it saves time in making tedious transcriptions of interviews from which perhaps only a slight percentage turns out to be useful. It should be noted that various researchers already employ this method, the current thesis simply argues for the approach's inclusion as a valuable and proper research method. The following chapter shows the practical application of the *ngopi* approach, for which I am using academic literature side by side with academic and local folklore.

Chapter 3



Mak Yong

Applying the *ngopi* approach

3.1 Mak Yong: an introduction

Mak Yong is a form of traditional Malay theatre. It comprises dance, music, song, ritual and dialogue. It is believed to be a long-standing tradition, going back to seventeenth-century Pattani courts (southern Thailand). Most scholars seem to agree that Mak Yong originated in Pattani, (Nasuruddin, 2000: 40-41; Pudentia, 2010: 3; Hardwick, 2009: 38-39), although not everyone agrees that there is enough historical evidence to support the 'seventeenth-century court' narrative (Yusof, 1976: 44-45). From Pattani (allegedly), the art spread to Malaysia and Indonesia, where it is still found in Kepri.

There are a number of stories used in Mak Yong theatre, some say about twelve (Pudentia, 2000: 15; Yusof, 2017), while others say fifteen (Nasuruddin, 2000: 45-46). Pertaining Kepri Mak Yong specifically, Darmawan lists about five most frequently performed stories (2021: 2-3), which is one less than discovered by Al Azhar during his research on Mantang Mak Yong (1989: 4). Although there are several written manuscripts in circulation, the Mak Yong performers learn the stories, songs and movements through oral transmission. The stories are always about the adventures of Kings (called Pak Yong) and Queens (called Mak Yong), Princes and Princesses. There are also maidens, ogres, *jin* (spirits/demons), robbers and mystic animals.

In Kelantan, Mak Yong also has strong shamanistic links, such as with *maineri* (Main Puteri), a healing ritual. This is not found in Kepri Mak Yong. But there are still rituals necessary for a performance, such as the opening (*buka tanah*) and closing (*tutup tanah*) rituals that need to be carried out for every staging. I am told that performances used to last all night long, for three nights in a row. Nowadays, however, standard Mak Yong staging lasts no longer than thirty minutes, up to an hour, perhaps a few hours. Many of the Mak Yong groups active today struggle with financial support and to make a living performing the traditional art. This is especially true since the Covid-19 pandemic, during which staging Mak Yong was particularly difficult.

Interaction with Mak Yong performers proved to be quite a challenge at times. One instance that very much stuck with me was the time that Ibu Pudentia tried to get me in touch with the leader of one of the groups. Shortly before she was to fly home to Jakarta, Ibu Pudentia invited him to lunch and later met him at the only airport on Bintan island. The two sat down on a metal bench outside the Raja Haji Fisabilillah airport in Tanjungpinang. While she was in intense conversation with this man, Kak Sita and I were sitting just one bench over. I could not follow much of what was discussed but at one point, Ibu Pudentia pointed at me and told him something about why I was there (to ask questions about Mak Yong, gather information from the performers) and that, perhaps he could meet up with me. He looked over to the bench where I was sitting and did not reply.

3.2 Empat raja: expert approaches

The *raja* (King), called Pak Yong, is the most important role to play in Mak Yong theatre. The *raja* is always portrayed by a woman, even though it is a male character. It is also the most competitive position. Everyone wants to become *raja*. The academic sphere of Mak Yong research is just as competitive, if not more so. On more than one occasion I have received gentle warnings not to get involved in, or continue doing Mak Yong research. The position of Mak Yong expert seems to be as desirable as becoming *raja*. For this reason, I am using the prominent character as an analogy to discuss the four experts, *empat raja*, of Mak Yong research. Below, I will discuss the respective research methods, problems and critiques of these Kings and Queens of Mak Yong.

3.2.1 Yousof

Professor Ghulam-Sarwar Yousof may be considered the King of Malay performing arts. Although one of the highest esteemed experts on Mak Yong, this Punjabi Malaysian scholar more or less stumbled into this area of studies by force rather than by choice. He has even expressed discontent about this and tried to get out of it on more than one occasion (Khor, 2015). The King of Malaysian Mak Yong reportedly passed away recently, as of November this year, at the age of 83 (Nambiar, 2022). Yousof's dissertation, although now perhaps somewhat outdated, still remains one of the most comprehensive works on Kelantanese Mak Yong to this day. He focusses partly on historical questions, partly on performance structure and a little bit on shamanistic aspects of Mak Yong (Yousof, 1976).

The dissertation came into being after a long period of extensive research. The research consisted of reviewing existing video material followed by a long period of field research. During his eleven-month field research, Yousof collected and documented as much material as possible. Part of this was attending and recording performances, songs, stories and taking interviews. Another part of his research consisted of 'reconstructing' certain elements of Mak Yong performances that, at that time, were no longer used. He also admittedly worked to compile a single 'most correct' version of a Mak Yong tale (Yousof, 1976: 9-11; 14). Yousof has been critiqued for leaving out the voice of the performers in his work (Hardwick, 2009: 47). Throughout his dissertation, he relies heavily on scholarly works whenever possible. When discussing intimate knowledge of performance structure, stories and ritual workings, he often tends to omit his sources altogether, implying that the information comes from his own observations. Where he does credit informants, he uses footnotes to refer to interviews or personal communication with performers. Unlike scholars, the local informants are not referenced in the text (see for example page 85).

3.2.2 Pudentia

The Queen of Indonesian Mak Yong is without a doubt Dr. Pudentia MPSS. She has worked on Mak Yong research since the early 1990s. In the summer of this year, Ibu Pudentia took me in, because I wanted to study Mak Yong and what better place than under the roof of one of the most important experts on the subject? I spent two months with her in Jakarta, learning the ins and outs of the Indonesian way of life. We often talked during breakfast or dinner, whenever she could spare the time. Even though retired, Ibu Pudentia is active as head of the ATL (the Oral Traditions Association) which works to preserve local oral traditions such as Mak Yong. The Javanese scholar is also currently a lecturer at Universitas Udayana in Bali. Simultaneously, she advocates at UNESCO for the recognition of Kepri Mak Yong as Intangible Cultural Heritage.

Around the turn of the century, Ibu Pudentia received her doctorate with her research on Mak Yong. Her dissertation is on the essence of Mak Yong and the aspects of orality in the art. Rumour has it that the dissertation does not live up to its academic value but perhaps such notions should be negated. Most of the thesis is concerned with Mak Yong as an oral tradition as she makes a comparison between written and oral versions of Mak Yong tales. The oral performance, she concludes, is not tied down, in other words, there is more room for improvisation, than in any written version of a Mak Yong story, which is much more static (Pudentia, 2000: 166). She notes that it is very difficult to document and analyse this type of traditions, because no two performances are the same (29; 52). This type of oral performance may not be considered 'whole' by outsiders, for the Malays who carry this tradition it is most definitely *utuh* (whole) (209). Ibu Pudentia's research method is clarified as the participant observation technique together with recorded performances and structured as well as unstructured interviews (18; 43; 45). She spent around ten years on this research, visiting the region for two months at least every year (44). Ibu Pudentia features one of her informants, Pak Atan, frequently throughout her thesis. There are no interview transcriptions in the appendix other than one example of an interview with Pak Atan's wife (372). As in this last instance, elsewhere in the thesis, the names of Pak

Atan's wife and child are anonymised (69). In my opinion, this dissertation shows instances of ideal application of the *ngopi* approach to certain situations. She has been criticised, though, for not paying adequate attention to the wants and needs of the performers during her research. Notwithstanding, she is personally responsible for the revitalisation of Kepri Mak Yong. Some wonder whether the performers initially even wanted the tradition to be revitalised. However, any time I asked performers about that, I received the same answer. They are happy the tradition is still alive today, if not for the efforts of Ibu Pudentia, there would not be Mak Yong to be performed today. The dissertation itself has got lore around it as well. It is almost like a well-kept secret that makes it all the more desirable. It was never published online and, I am told, there is only one copy that lies somewhere in the basement of Universitas Indonesia library. The mysteriousness and secrecy that have been created around this document bring to life a certain amount of gossip. People wonder what could possibly be written in this dissertation that it is so difficult to get hold of.

3.2.3 Hardwick

I had the privilege to meet Dr. Patricia Ann Hardwick in person when I was in Kuala Lumpur earlier this year. We talked about many subjects over coffee and frozen yoghurt in a mall in the city. Ibu Patricia is an American scholar who is now lecturing at Universiti Pendidikan Sultan Idris, in Malaysia, where she now lives happily with her husband and three children. There was a time when Ibu Patricia was perhaps destined to be the (new) Queen of Mak Yong but it seems she now wishes she was just a commoner. She has expressed intentions to leave the field of Mak Yong studies. Her dissertation on the traditional theatre is concerned with the shamanistic aspects of Kelantanese Mak Yong (Hardwick, 2009). Nowadays, Ibu Patricia focusses more on the Mak Yong stories, such as the one she published this year (Hardwick and Jufry, 2022). The book, a Mak Yong tale as told by Ali bin Ibrahim, is a fine example of the *ngopi* approach.

For her dissertation, Ibu Patricia spent ten months among the Mak Yong performers in rural Kelantan. Not only did she record, collect and document, but she was also trained as a Mak Yong performer. She shares her experiences with this in her dissertation, including negative encounters with neighbours and money problems with the groups (Hardwick, 2009: 2-11). Her appendices are filled with transcripts of interviews, including parts where she is asked to turn off the recorder because they were sharing sensitive information (284; 483-484). It must be said that although clearly not omitting the voices of the performers, a certain sensitivity in dealing with names and information is lacking. Almost ten years after finishing this dissertation, Ibu Patricia turned her head towards Kepri Mak Yong. She spent around a year in this Malay heartland in Indonesia, often staying over at the house of her informants. Any time I brought her name up in Mantang, the performers spoke of her with enthusiasm. The fact that she would sleep there and the fact that she speaks fluent Malay made her a very welcome guest.

3.2.4 Darmawan

Dr. Alan Darmawan is an Indonesian scholar and a relative newcomer to the stage. He might be considered the upcoming King of Mak Yong, provided he wishes to continue to work in this area. His respective dissertation on Mak Yong discusses the revival and survival of the art as well as the way in which Malayness is expressed in the traditional theatre. In his work, he uses a combination of direct and indirect or anonymous referencing to informants. Based on his methodology, in which he explains to have used notes to document interviews and "discussions with friends" (Darmawan, 2021: 28) and recording devices only for documenting "sites and events" (ibid.), it is clear to me that he adopted the *ngopi* approach to some extent. He has received criticism about his inclusion of Mak Yong Muda as a true form of the traditional theatre and this oversight is accredited to the fact that he did not stay among the performers for a long time. Darmawan paid short visits to Kepri over a span of four years (ibid.). This, of course, can slow down attempts to form trustworthy relationships with informants.

3.3 Case study: Mak Yong and the *ngopi* approach

As one of the traditional Malay performing arts, Mak Yong holds a special position in Kepri society. Many consider it important enough to be revitalised and preserved, although one might wonder why it nearly disappeared in the first place. Recently, the theatre has struggled with performing during the Covid-19 pandemic, and thus many groups struggled with income. In Kepri, there are three main troupes that perform Mak Yong. The Kijang group proved to be difficult to get in touch with, despite attempts. One of my first days on the island, we went to the family home in Kijang and met with the Mak Yong performers shortly. The group is led by Pak Satar, one of the sons of Pak Atan, who was Ibu Pudentia's lead informant.

Another Mak Yong troupe from Kepri resides on Mantang island. Through the efforts of Kak Sita, I was able to visit members of this group a few times. This group is currently led by Pak Ali, who calls himself the 'manager'. Usually, the leader of a Mak Yong group carries out the opening and closing rituals (*buka tanah* and *tutup tanah*⁴) of a performance, yet Pak Ali prefers to leave that to one of the children. I was told that there are two Mantang Mak Yong troupes, an 'old' one and a 'young' one. It is my understanding though, that the 'old' group nowadays also mainly consists of a new, young generation, as the old guard is retiring. Zulpageri, who plays the *Ibu gendang* (drum) in the Mantang Mak Yong group, was so kind as to show me around the island and introduce me to his fellow group members.

The third Mak Yong group comes from Batam on which I have little information. Then, there is also a group in Tanjungpinang, called Mak Yong Muda, which some consider to be 'real' Mak Yong, while others disagree. Unfortunately, during my stay in Kepri, I was unable to attend any performances, as none were scheduled. Thankfully, I was provided with an abundance of video material, all of which are accredited to Ibu Patricia. This way I was still able to get a pretty good idea of what a Mak Yong performance entails. There are also subtle differences between the Mantang, Kijang and Batam performances of Mak Yong tales. Some stories are more popular than others, and, I gather, some stories are only performed by certain groups.

An interesting question arises when we consider what exactly is Mak Yong '*asli*' (real/true/original). One pointed to the Kelantanese form as 'real' Mak Yong, while another told me that the 'true' Mak Yong tradition could only be found on Mantang. Yet both the Kijang and Mantang troupes consider themselves the 'real' Mak Yong, and both claim to be in possession of the 'original' musical instruments and masks. Both groups have allowed me to see their original masks and the Kijang group also showed their *alat musik asli* (original instruments). When I asked about the instruments in Mantang, however, I was told that they were stored in a different location but I was assured that those in their possession were definitely the 'original'. It does not appear to be a discussion on historical lineage, but rather what is considered 'original' in the mind of the performers.

There are many stories going around about Mak Yong. Some of these are origin stories, of how Mak Yong came to be. There are also tales about the musical instruments, not only about the physical instruments but also legends of how these instruments came into existence or how they received their names. Then, there are stories about mysteries surrounding the characters and the use of *topeng* (masks). And, last but not least, there are also stories, or rumours we might say, about the groups, group members and internal tensions, most of which are related in some way or another to the idea of *keturunan*⁵ (descent/inheritance). The remainder of this chapter will touch upon many of these tales that have come to my attention during my fieldwork.

⁴ Literally the opening and closing of the *tanah*, ground or soil. What is meant is the opening or closing of the stage, the *panggung*. Sometimes the rituals are therefore named *buka panggung* and *tutup panggung*.

⁵ For more information on this concept, see Vivian Wee's *Melayu: Hierarchies of Being in Riau* (PhD dissertation, Australian National University, 1985).

3.3.1 Topeng tales

A Kepri Mak Yong performance consists of stories played out by several characters. There are royal characters, such as the *raja*, named Pak Yong, who is always portrayed by a woman. There is also always a princess and a queen accompanied by a group of dancers. In the Mantang and Kijang groups, these female roles are usually played by Muslim women, who in daily life wear a *jilbab* (head scarf) but not while performing. Then, there are several characters played by men, wearing *topeng* (masks). The inventor of using *topeng* in Mak Yong is said to be a man who imitated what he had witnessed *manusia harimau* (weretigers) doing in their village (Al Azhar, 1989: 23). Some say the use of masks serves male actors to save face when portraying a female character, such as Inang Pengasuh. It could also just be practical, for example, if a character is played by more than one person in a single performance (Pudentia, 2000: 17).

During the opening ceremony, called *buka tanah* (opening the stage), the most important masks are 'prepared' for the performance by means of a ritual. These are the *topeng* of Awang Pengasuh and Inang Pengasuh, two comical characters, and Batara Guru, the spiritual teacher, which I will elaborate on further on in this chapter. The masks are believed to be embedded with the spirit of the character after this ritual. After the *buka tanah* ritual, no one is allowed to leave the stage area, as it is believed this would bring about bad things. Other characters that might appear *bertopeng* (wearing masks), depending on the story performed, are the robbers, the *jin* (demon), the doctor and the Chinese man. Besides human and godlike characters, there are also a few animals that play important roles in the Mak Yong tales. There are two deer, the Kijang Emas (golden deer) and the Kijang Hijau (green deer) that are often used in the Kepri performances. But the character that truly grabbed my attention is the Harimau (tiger) character. Later, I will discuss this *topeng*-wearing figure at length.

The idea that the *topeng* can have spiritual, supernatural qualities, even to be possessed by spirits, lead me to the idea to discuss two *topeng* below. First, Batara Guru, the spiritual teacher, who is thought to possess magical properties. And, secondly, the Harimau, about which the story goes that the wearer of this mask can get possessed by the spirit of the tiger. After that, I will delve into what I have dubbed 'the *rebab* mystery'.

3.3.1.1 Batara Guru

I was sitting in my bedroom in Jakarta, on a video call with Kak Sita and Ibu Patricia. The meeting was arranged by Kak Sita so that I could meet Ibu Patricia and discuss with her my research on Mak Yong. We talked about many aspects regarding Mak Yong and Mak Yong research. One of the things brought up in the discussion was the mask of Batara Guru. I was told that it is a very powerful *topeng* and that, because it was in the house I was in, it was attributed to be the reason for certain things to happen. It seemed to me that this mask was something of a guardian, instilled with some kind of black magic.

A mere week before, I accompanied Ibu Pudentia and Kak Sita on a visit to the *kampung* where the Kijang Mak Yong family lives. When we arrived, it was immediately clear to me that we had come at a bad time. The women welcomed us with tears in their eyes. It was told that one of the family was very sick at the time. Still, Ibu Pudentia had clearly travelled far to see them and they seemed very grateful for her to be there. However, I was quite distracted by their emotional state, so a lot of things that were said went right by me. Despite them clearly having other priorities, we were invited in and they came bringing in their 'original' Mak Yong attributes. There were *gendang* (drums) and *topeng asli* (original masks). But not the Batara Guru mask, as this powerful *topeng* was gifted to Ibu Pudentia by the former leader of the group, Pak Atan, who has since passed.

The internal tension within this group is a story in itself. When we were there, one of the women said that another one would not be allowed to perform certain parts of the Mak Yong, since she was not

keturunan, a descendent of the original Mak Yong family. Meanwhile, I was told that one of the prominent members was also not *keturunan*, yet she was taking up one of the highest positions. The conflict within the family appeared to take a turn for the worse after she passed as there were immediate whispers saying that new management would serve the group well.

On my first journey to Mantang, I met with the wife of Pak Gani, the former leader of the Mantang group. I rode across the island on the back of Zulpageri's motorbike to a traditional house, standing on the water. "Assalamualaikum", Zulpageri called inside. From somewhere inside the house came the reply, "Walaikumsalam". We took off our shoes and entered the house and sat down in a blue room with no furniture. We were sitting in a circle, me, Zulpageri, Pak Gani's wife and her daughter. Her daughter has since taken up the role of *raja* but Pak Gani's wife still remembers all the songs and movements, as she used to take up this role. Since her husband's passing was quite recent still, only about two years ago, it was still an emotional subject to talk about. I directed most of my questions more or less to Zulpageri, who translated and transmitted them to Pak Gani's wife in the regional dialect. For her answers, it worked the other way around.

After a short introduction and a little discussion, Zulpageri asked to see the *topeng asli* on my behalf. And suddenly this box appeared, filled with masks, much more than I had seen in Kijang. I asked about the *topeng*, which characters they represented and in what stories they were used. When Zulpageri introduced one of the white masks (among the four or five) as Batara Guru, I was intrigued. So, I inquired about its special properties. And Zulpageri said to me that this character is able to revive the dead, bring them back to life.

According to stories told to Alan Darmawan by the Mantang elders, the Batara Guru mask possesses a unique property. It is said that it is "able to drive away a storm [...]" (Darmawan, 2021: 39). During a Mak Yong performance, which back in the day could easily take up two or three nights, it was remembered that the Batara Guru mask was hung above the staging area, in order to ward off the storm (ibid.). The god or spiritual teacher, as Zulpageri explained, can bring the dead back to life. In a Mak Yong performance this is accomplished by the recitation of a mantra by the Batara Guru figure:

*Pulang pulih, pulang pulih sedie kale, sedie kale
Aku nak pulih, aku nak pulih anak cucu kami, anak cucu kami
Asal sirih, asal sirih pulang ke gagang, pulang ke gagang
Asal pinang, asal pinang pulang ke tampuk, pulang ke tampuk
Asal kapur, asal kapur pulang ke kulit, pulang ke kulit
Asal gambir, asal gambir pulang ke getah, pulang ke getah
Asal tembakau, asal tembakau pulang ke daun, pulang ke daun⁶*

In the first part of the mantra, things are returning to their original states. Following that, the second part of this mantra shows how the body is brought back from the dead in five consecutive stages:

*Aku nak renjis, aku nak renjis air pancuran gading, pancuran gading
Renjis pertame, renjis pertame terus bergerak, terus bergerak
Renjis kedue, renjis kedue terus meresin, terus meresin*

⁶ Translation (by me):

Revive, are you ready to revive, are you ready
I wish to revive, wish to revive the descendants, the descendants
The betel leaf, the betel leaf returns to its stem, its stem
The areca nut, the areca nut returns to its cluster, to its cluster
The lime, the lime returns to its peel, returns to its peel
The gambier, the gambier returns to sap, returns to sap
The tobacco, the tobacco returns to leaves, returns to leaves

*Renjis ketige, renjis ketige teruslah duduk, teruslah duduk
Renjis keempat, renjis keempat terus berdiri, terus berdiri
Renjis kelime, renjis kelime pulih kembali, pulih kembali*⁷

(Darmawan, 2021: 140)

3.3.1.2 Manusia harimau

Once upon a time, a man sailed to Sumatra. He was a trader. Caught up in a storm, he was stranded in the woods in the middle of nowhere. Now knowing which way to go, he started walking. He walked and walked until he came to a village. But this was no ordinary village. For, here resided the *manusia harimau* (weretigers). The man hid and watched how the *manusia harimau* were preparing for a feast. They made strange movements, singing and dancing, making music. When the man was at last able to return to his homeland, he shared what he had seen. And from his story, emerged the Mak Yong tradition.

This origin story of Mak Yong was told to me but this is not a word-for-word translation. Also, since it was not recorded, the details may have been spoken differently. Still, this is definitely the essence of the tale. Ever since I heard about *manusia harimau*, it has not left my thoughts and I sought to find out more about it. Weretigers may be described as villagers turning into tigers at night (similar to werewolves) or it might be that tigers are acting like humans, or humans acting like tigers.

The idea of weretigers exists in many cultures in Asia, the natural habitat of the tiger (see Newman, 2012). Besides Mak Yong, the weretiger is also said to have inspired a specific form of *silat*, Malay martial arts (Newman, 2012: 93). Lore has it that mimicking a tiger, or portraying the Harimau, makes one turn into a tiger, albeit spiritually. In Malay, this is called '*jadi harimau*' (becoming a tiger) or '*dimasuk jiwa harimau*' (being taken over by the tiger's spirit). It sounds similar to other beliefs of possession by spirits or demons. I heard that seeing a member 'turn into' a tiger on several occasions, had scared one Mak Yong troupe so much, that they refuse to portray this character anymore.

When I asked about the Harimau character in Mantang, the stories that were told were not quite as frightening. We were sitting in the house of Pak Gani's widow. On the wall, one single *topeng* was on display, the Harimau. I asked about this mask, was it possible to become a tiger when playing the Harimau? They told me that there once was someone who experienced something strange while playing the Harimau. During the performance, a glass standing close to the performer, suddenly shattered into a thousand pieces. Normally, with so much glass flying around, anyone nearby would definitely not walk away without a scratch (especially considering they play barefoot on stage). But this man remained unharmed. They claim it was because "*dia dimasuk jiwa harimau*" (he was taken over by the tiger's spirit). The spirit of the tiger protected the performer from the shards of glass.

Because I was so interested in this particular character, Zulpageri took me to meet a man who used to play the Harimau. I asked the man if he had ever experienced the kind of thing that was described to me before. The man seemed rather uncomfortable by my presence and my questions but he answered me anyway. He told us that sometimes while playing the Harimau, he is able to make certain movements, jumps to be exact, that he would normally not be able to make. Because of this, he is not

⁷ Translation (by me):

I wish to sprinkle, I wish to sprinkle holy water, holy water
The first splash, the first splash keeps moving, keeps moving
The second splash, the second splash keeps sneezing, keeps sneezing
The third splash, the third splash stays seated, stays seated
The fourth splash, the fourth splash keeps standing, keeps standing
The fifth splash, the fifth splash coming back to life, coming back to life

tripping over or getting caught in the cloth and planks of the staging area. Traditionally, Mak Yong is performed on improvised stages, usually made from wood covered with sheets. Getting caught in the stage could be potentially hurtful. Yet, again, this performer remained unharmed. The Harimau can thus be considered a very powerful, protective force.

3.3.2 The *rebab* mystery

There is a fascinating mystery around one of the musical instruments used in Mak Yong, the *rebab*. The *rebab* is a two-string instrument that plays a very important role in Malaysian Mak Yong. However, for some reason, the instrument is not found in Kepri Mak Yong. The reason why Kepri Mak Yong never adopted the *rebab* is not of concern here. The *rebab* mystery is a puzzle of significance, authority, heritage and origin. An important concept touched upon when discussing this mystery is the concept of 'invented traditions' (see Hobsbawm, 1983).

There are various origin stories featuring the *rebab*. One story, used by Ibu Pudentia in her dissertation introduction (2000: 1-2), is a story as told by one Bahari bin Abdullah, compiled by A.K. Mokhtar (1965). The story takes place in the Malaysian province Kedah. It is told that a boy is born from the relations between a woman and an *anjing*⁸ (dog). Growing up without his father, the boy eventually starts searching for his true heritage, where he comes from. Eventually, he discovers the truth (Mokhtar, 1965: 15). When he finds his father's remains, the boy decides to make an instrument out of its bones, the *rebab* (18-19). After this, he travels from village to village, accompanied by his mother, playing the *rebab*. Over time, the boy falls in love with his own mother. This scandal causes them to be expelled, cast out ("*di-yong-kan*"), from the villages (21-22). Thus, Mak Yong came into existence.

In another tale, I was told, the *rebab* is made from a woman's body. Once upon a time, a child was born. The boy was named Yong. His parents, by default, were thus Mak Yong and Pak Yong (the mother and father of Yong). One day, as the mother was breastfeeding her little boy, her breast fell off and she passed away. From her body, the *rebab* was fashioned. Here, we have another origin for the Mak Yong tradition. The mother-child (*Ibu-anak*) connection resonates throughout the tradition. The *gendang* (drums), for example also come in a mother-child pair, as do other instruments used in Mak Yong.

Having learned of these stories, it is not surprising that the *rebab* is often termed to be the most important instrument in Mak Yong (Pudentia, 2010: 5; Yousof, 2017; Darmawan, 2021: 2; Hardwick, 2009: 85). However, there is no *rebab* found today in Kepri Mak Yong performances. Rumour has it that at one point, it was attempted to (re-)introduce the *rebab* in Kepri, even though, I am told, there was never a *rebab* in the Kepri Mak Yong tradition to begin with. Here, we get close to pushing boundaries between tradition and invention.

Furthermore, it is said that a Javanese *rebab* player was hired to teach the Mak Yong performers. A Javanese *rebab*, I am told, is a very different instrument and thus not compatible with the Malay tradition. Although the endeavour was unsuccessful, it has definitely left an imprint. For example, when I asked Zulpageri whether they used a *rebab*, he said "yes, there is just no one to play it at the moment". It made me wonder why he would not just tell me that they simply do not use it. Why did he feel the need to formulate the absence of a *rebab* in this way? The funny thing is that when I asked Zulpageri, "what is the most important instrument in Mak Yong?", he did not hesitate one minute to reply, "the *gendang*, for sure."

⁸ This is particularly condemning as the *anjing* (dog) is considered *haram* in the Malay world. When touched by a dog's saliva, one is required to wash the body with dirt seven times before attending daily prayer.

Chapter 4



Mau

Concluding remarks

4.1 Summary

In the first chapter, *mau ngopi?*, it becomes clear what *ngopi* means in Malay society. Having conversations over a cup of coffee makes for a meaningful bonding experience. It is general knowledge that people change the way they behave and speak (however subtly) when they are aware that they are being recorded. Recording, even in the form of writing, messes up the flow of a conversation. It takes away the magic. Over the course of my field research in the heart of Malay culture, this is what I observed and experienced. I am forever grateful for my stay in Tanjungpinang, where I met the kindest people and learned the most about Malay culture.

During my stay in Indonesia, I noticed that the most interesting or ‘juicy’ stories were told to me in informal settings, over coffee or dinner. The best pieces of information were always disclosed ‘accidentally’ (without my asking for it). This, I thought, would cause some trouble since there was no way to reference this kind of information in my thesis along the academic lines that I had learned. How to deal with this ethical conundrum? That question led me to think of a new method to deal with oral societies such as the Malays. Hence, the idea for the *ngopi* approach was born.

The second chapter lays out the specifics of the *ngopi* approach, how it works and important things to keep in mind while applying this method. From the handbooks, we learned that recording and proper referencing are still very much part of academic requirements when working in the field and conducting interviews. When conducting informal interviews or unstructured interviews, the *ngopi* approach appears to be within the scope of proper academic research methods. However, following the handbooks, this can never be used as your only method. It should always be applied side-by-side with recorded material and academic literature, in other words, ‘reliable’ sources.

Malayness, or *kemelayuan*, is a very important concept in understanding the *ngopi* approach. It forms the basis of how to work with your Malay informants. The stereotypical cultural traits are a helpful tool for understanding customs, philosophies and behavioural patterns. Even though the academic studies on Malayness are not directly applicable, the feelings towards *kemelayuan* as a concept in today’s society are indeed shaped by its origins and history. For our purpose, the most important aspects of Malayness are those which shape people’s behaviour. Among other things, these are religion, *adat*, language, oral traditions, history and heritage for those who identify as Malay.

The third chapter of this thesis contains the application of the *ngopi* approach by means of a case study on Mak Yong. But, before we can dive into the Mak Yong stories, we first have to review existing works on the subject. I did this by discussing the *empat raja*, the four Kings and Queens of Mak Yong research. Even though most of the experts have applied the *ngopi* approach to varying degrees, it was never recognised as separate methodology. The researchers often felt compelled to add abundant transcripts in their appendices or to create a ‘truest’ version of a story by compiling different versions together.

Mak Yong, one of the oral traditions from the Malay world, forms an excellent case study for the application of the *ngopi* approach. The performing art is riddled with mysticism, origin stories and curious tales. About the internal friction within and among the Mak Yong groups, one could write a book alone. The same could be said regarding academic folklore. The *raja* character from Mak Yong tales is used as a symbol for the academic disputes and highly competitive positions taken up by experts on the Malay performing art. Overall, I have tried to make sure to give all actors a voice in this thesis, while keeping true to the trust bond built up during my fieldwork amongst the Malays. As an ‘outsider’, my only hope is to remain faithful to the Malay culture whilst doing right by the performers, insiders, researchers and those who wish to do field research in the Malay world.

4.2 Mau

The desired response to the question “*mau ngopi?*” is “*mau*” (yes, I want to). Is the *ngopi* approach something we want in the academic world? Do the advantages outweigh the disadvantages? Will it be applicable beyond the Malay world? These are some of the questions to be answered in this concluding section. In this part, I shall review the *ngopi* approach in terms of its value and applicability to research in the fields of anthropology and cultural studies.

The first reason to want the *ngopi* approach is that it is a culture-specific method. Even though universal methods and theories are well-sought after, there are some problems with them. One is that such theories are often researched on and applied to WEIRD⁹ (Western Educated Industrial Rich and Democratic) subjects, meaning we need to question their universality in the first place. Second is that we lose sight of what cultural differences can bring us. In this age of ‘wokeness’, the focus tends to be on what makes us equal and similar, as humans, instead of what makes us different, even though there may be valuable insights to be discovered in the latter. Although the *ngopi* approach is specifically designed for the Malays in Indonesia, there is no reason to think it could not be applied to other areas. A similar approach may be used throughout Indonesia. However, in such cases, we need to keep in mind who our informants are. For example, for research among the Javanese, the *ngopi* approach must be adjusted to fit with the cultural traits of that group. There is even a chance that this technique could work beyond the borders of Indonesia if it is adapted appropriately. In the Netherlands for example, it would most likely not be appropriate to stay over at an informant’s house, whereas this is very common in Indonesia. The Dutch (stereotypical) directness would also be something to be aware of, this will help in phrasing questions and anticipating answers. Further research could reveal whether there is any substance to that hypothesis.

A second, very important advantage of the *ngopi* approach is that it ensures the confidentiality of informants whilst saving time in writing interview transcriptions. By using the *ngopi* approach, you will be able to bond with informants and make observations in a natural setting without the interference of recording devices (including writing). As explained, recording a conversation can make people uncomfortable and it breaks the momentum of a lively discussion. Without it, the informant can be given the undivided attention of the researcher, as one would do in a casual get-together with friends. The environment of the setting can also be taken up better by the researcher since there is no pressure on exact remembrance of the informant’s words and there are no distracting thoughts about the functioning of recording equipment. The informants do not need to fill in forms for consent, since the conversation is not recorded and they will not be quoted directly (since there is no transcription). Their consent is simply their willingness to interact with the researcher. They will remain anonymous if they want to or if the researcher considers it more appropriate to omit the names of informants.

And, finally, a third reason justifying the need for the *ngopi* approach is that it gives room for the valuable, though underappreciated ‘gossip’ as a narrative discourse or even an oral tradition. Especially considering that engaging in gossip is such a pertinent part of Malay and Indonesian culture. I cannot even remember how many times people told me, “we love to gossip”. In my opinion, gossip is a very natural human phenomenon and can be considered an outstanding social bonding technique in many cultures, even though in western cultures (in my experience) it is often frowned upon and seen as a ‘bad trait’. I say we embrace ‘gossip’ as a precious source into the insights of the human mind. In conclusion:

Mau ngopi?

Mau.

⁹ This stems from psychological research but I feel that it is applicable to other areas of studies as well.

4.3 Future intent

The first item on my to-do list is to translate the current work into Bahasa Indonesia. The idea is that this work was never supposed to be merely for the western academic world to show that we are in need of change. It was always meant to be for everyone. And, since we discussed specific Indonesian-Malay cultural traits, the thesis should be published in Indonesia as well. Of course, this will happen in consultation with the supervisor, provided the content is judged to be of significant value. It should be translated and adapted adequately in order to reach qualifications that would make it suitable for publication in Indonesia.

As far as the *ngopi* approach is concerned, it would be useful to take a critical look at some outdated approaches to anthropological and cross-cultural research. In this current paradigm shift, the *ngopi* approach could break open the discussion on cultural-specific methods. In order to revolutionise the field, we need to reconsider even long-standing practices such as what is thought to be 'proper' referencing. It is, therefore, my hope that the *ngopi* approach will open up academia to atypical methods. The *ngopi* approach could be useful for application amongst the Malays in anthropological research, fieldwork in general, cultural studies and oral traditions research. And, with a little further research, perhaps this method can be applied in other regions of the world as well.

In 2021, I wrote my Bachelor's thesis on the phenomenon known as *pasung*. That is the locking up and/or shackling of *orang dengan gangguan jiwa* (people with mental health problems). Although it might seem to be a thing of the past, this is still happening on a global scale. In Indonesia, there are several organisations working to eliminate the practice and, slowly but steadily, they are bringing about change in the field of mental health care in the country.

Going forward, I wish to continue research in this area. In particular, I aspire to focus on interrelated issues of mental health, LGBTQ+ acceptance and women's rights. With recent laws passed, that are meant to be implemented in 2023, the latter two seem to be more pressing issues than ever. The nation is moving towards politically right-wing governance, in which freedom, human rights and freedom of speech are taking steps back (Carrick, 2022).

*Walaupun Melayu hatinya lembut
Terhadap pendatang bermanis mulut
Tetapi jangan haknya direbut
Melayu pun sanggup menghadapi maut¹⁰*

(Effendy, 2005: 56)

In light of such sensitive subjects, the *ngopi* approach would be the go-to method. It is imaginable that establishing trust with informants in this case is of the utmost importance. Add to that stigma and even a prohibition to speaking out about certain topics, making recordings of interviews might become a risky venture. I, therefore, propose to simply have a conversation, human to human. Sharing hopes, dreams, fears, opinions and concerns in a low-profile discussion among friends or acquaintances. People can remain anonymous but the information can still be used in a meaningful way.

¹⁰ Translation:

Although Malays are soft-hearted
Toward new comers they talk sweetly
But don't take away their rights
Malays are willing to face death

(Barnard, 2004: 238)

Reference list

- Al Azhar. 1997. "Malayness in Riau: The Study and Revitalization of Identity." *Bijdragen tot de Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde* 153 (4): 764-773.
- Al Azhar. 1989. "Teater Mak Yong Mantang Arang Kepulauan Riau: Cerita dan Pengungkapannya." Seminar Program Pernaskahan I, Fakultas Sastra, Universitas Indonesia, Jakarta, June 27-29, 1989.
- Anastasia, N. 2022. "18 Pantun Ngopi, Bisa Jadi Ajakan Ngopi Bareng, Cocok untuk Anak Senja." *Tribun Kaltara*. Posted January 21, 2022. <https://kaltara.tribunnews.com/2022/01/21/18-pantun-ngopi-bisa-jadi-ajakan-untuk-ngopi-bareng-cocok-untuk-anak-senja?page=2>.
- Bailey, Carol A. 2007. *A Guide to Qualitative Field Research*. 2nd ed. Thousand Oaks, London & New Delhi: Pine Forge Press.
- Barnard, Timothy P., ed. 2004. *Contesting Malayness: Malay Identity Across Boundaries*. Singapore: Singapore University Press.
- Carrick, Heather. 2022. "Indonesia Law: Non-Marital Sex Ban, Impact on Tourism to Places Like Bali, Punishment, Reaction – Explained." *National World*. Posted December 6, 2022. <https://www.nationalworld.com/news/world/indonesia-law-non-marital-sex-ban-impact-tourism-bali-punishment-3944400>.
- Danelo, David J. 2017. *The Field Researcher's Handbook: A Guide to the Art and Science of Professional Fieldwork*. Washington D.C.: Georgetown University Press.
- Darmawan, Alan. 2021. "A Country of Words: The Revival of Mak Yong Theatrical Performance and Malay Identity Formation in Indonesia's Riau Islands." PhD diss., Universität Hamburg.
- Effendy, H. Tenas. 2005¹¹. *Syair Nasib Melayu*. Yogyakarta: Balai Kajian dan Pengembangan Budaya Melayu.
- Finnegan, Ruth. 1992. *Oral Traditions and the Verbal Arts: A Guide to Research Practices*. Vol. 4 of *ASA Research Methods in Social Anthropology*. London & New York: Routledge.
- Hardwick, Patricia Ann. 2009. "Stories of the Wind: The Role of *Mak Yong* in Shamanistic Healing in Kelantan, Malaysia." PhD diss., Indiana University.
- Hardwick, Patricia Ann, and Fara Dayana Mohd Jufry. 2022. *Dewa Pechil: A Mak Yong Tale Told by Ali bin Ibrahim*. Tanjung Malim: Universiti Pendidikan Sultan Idris.
- Hobsbawm, Eric, and Terence Ranger, eds. 1983. *The Invention of Tradition*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Khor, K. K. 2015. "Ghulam-Sarwar Yousof: A Lifetime of Research." *gsyousof.com*. Accessed December, 2022. <https://gsyousof.com>.
- Konopinski, Natalie, ed. 2014. *Doing Anthropological Research: A Practical Guide*. London & New York: Routledge.

¹¹ The poem was written in 1990 but it was published in 2005. A translation can be found in Barnard, 2004.

Lim, Kim Hui. 2003. *"Budi as the Malay Mind: A Philosophical Study of Malay Ways of Reasoning and Emotion in Peribahasa."* PhD diss., University of Hamburg.

Long, Nicholas J. 2013. *Being Malay in Indonesia: Histories, Hopes and Citizenship in the Riau Archipelago.* Singapore: NUS Press & Copenhagen: NIAS Press.

Manan, Dra. Hj. Suryatati A. 2009. *Revitalisasi Sastra Melayu.* Yogyakarta: AKAR Indonesia.

McKinney, Carol V. 2000. *Globe-Trotting in Sandals: A Field Guide to Cultural Research.* Dallas: SIL International.

Mokhtar, A. K. 1965. *Asal Usul Mak Yong.* Penang: Saudara Sinaran Berhad.

Nambiar, Predeep. 2022. "Mak Yong Expert Ghulam-Sarwar Dies Aged 83." Free Malaysia Today. <https://www.freemalaysiatoday.com/category/highlight/2022/11/10/mak-yong-expert-ghulam-sarwar-dies-aged-83/>.

Nasuruddin, Mohamed Ghouse. 2000. *Teater Tradisional Melayu.* Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka.

Newman, Patrick. 2012. *Tracking the Weretiger: Supernatural Man-Eaters of India, China and Southeast Asia.* Jefferson & London: McFarland & Company Inc.

Pols, Hans. 2007. "Psychological Knowledge in a Colonial Context: Theories on the Nature of the 'Native Mind' in the Former Dutch East Indies." *History of Psychology* 10 (2): 111-131.

Pudentia, MPSS. 2000. "Makyong: Hakikat dan Proses Penciptaan Kelisanan." PhD diss., Universitas Indonesia.

Pudentia, MPSS. 2010. "The Revitalization of Mak Yong in the Malay World." *Wacana* 12 (1): 1-19.

Ryen, Anne. 2001. "Cross-Cultural Interviewing." In *Handbook of Interview Research*, edited by Jaber F. Gubrium and James A. Holstein, 334-354¹². Thousand Oaks, London & New Delhi: SAGE Publications.

Yusof, Ghulam-Sarwar. 1976. "The Kelantan *Mak Yong* Dance Theatre: A Study of Performance Structure." PhD diss., University of Hawaii.

Yusof, Ghulam-Sarwar. 2017. "The Mak Yong Dance Theatre as Spiritual Heritage: Some Insights." *SPAFA Journal of Archaeology and Fine Arts in Southeast Asia* 1 (1)¹³.

¹² The online version has different pagination from the hard copy. Therefore, accurate referencing is not possible.

¹³ There are no official page numbers available for this article.

List of images

Front page: Coffee cup pictogram. Vecteezy.com (edited).
<https://nl.vecteezy.com/vector-kunst/4844022-eeen-kop-van-koffie-pictogram-vector-illustratie>.

CHAPTER 1

Top left: the first time I was having coffee alone in the *kedai kopi* across the street from the BPNB office, personal photo, taken in Tanjungpinang, August 2022

Top right: *ngopi* with Kak Sita on the way to the Raja Haji Fisabilillah airport, personal photo, taken in Tanjungpinang, August 2022.

Bottom left: the coffee and *pisang goreng* (fried banana) that was offered to me by my neighbour and head of BPNB, Pak Toto, personal photo, taken in Tanjungpinang, August 2022.

Bottom right: my homemade *kopi instan* (instant coffee) in the home of Ibu Pudentia, in the background are *pisang emas*¹⁴, personal photo, taken in Jakarta, July 2022.

CHAPTER 2

Top left: photo taken by an unknown photographer, in a coffee place in Tanjungpinang. We were unaware that this photo was taken. Later it was used in online advertisement for the coffee shop. It shows me and my informant in a conversation over a cup of coffee and some snacks. It is the quintessential representation of the *ngopi* approach.

Top right: coffee in a popular coffee shop in Jakarta, having *ngopi* with Ibu Pudentia and her son, personal photo, taken in June 2022.

Centre: selfie taken by my informant after our conversation in Tanjungpinang, August 2022.

Bottom: the view from the terrace at my homestay above the BPNB office, personal photo, taken in August 2022.

CHAPTER 3

Top left: the *topeng asli* from Mantang island, personal photo, taken in Mantang, August 2022.

Top right: *rebab* player, circa 1952, *Indonesia Tanah Airku* (1952: 79). Wikimedia Commons (edited).
https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Man_playing_rebab,_Indonesia_Tanah_Airku,_p79.jpg.

Bottom left: me and Pak Ismail, a Mantang Mak Yong actor of the old guard, taken by Zulpageri in Mantang, August 2022.

Bottom right: the Harimau mask that is displayed in the home of Pak Gani's wife, personal photo, taken in Mantang, August 2022.

CHAPTER 4

Top: Kak Sita and Asti catching up over coffee. Asti had been away for a year to finish her Master's degree in the Netherlands. After this photo was taken, we spent a long weekend travelling to Lingga island and Batam island, personal photo, taken in Tanjungpinang, September 2022.

Bottom: photo taken by one of the waitresses, one of the first days in Tanjungpinang, together with Ibu Pudentia (left) and Kak Sita and her colleagues from BPNB (right), August 2022.

¹⁴ Important fruit featured in the famous *pantun* quoted on the dedication page.

Glossary

Acronyms, abbreviations & titles

BPNB	Balai Pelestarian Nilai Budaya (Preservation Centre of Culture)
ATL	Asosiasi Tradisi Lisan (Oral Traditions Association)

Kepri	Kepulauan Riau, the Riau Islands
-------	----------------------------------

Ibu	respectful title, Ma'am, literally also 'mother'
Pak	respectful title, Sir, derived from 'Bapak' meaning 'father'
Mbak	Javanese title, depending on age and occupation, lower than 'Ibu'
Mas	Javanese title (male), depending on age and occupation, lower than 'Pak'
Kak	Malay title (female), generally lower than 'Ibu', depending on age and occupation, from 'kakak' meaning 'sister' or 'older sibling', male equivalent is 'Bang'

Malay terms

<i>adat</i>	customary law
<i>asli</i>	original, real, true, authentic
<i>buka/tutup tanah</i>	opening and closing rituals of Mak Yong
<i>empat</i>	four
<i>gendang</i>	drums, used in Mak Yong music
<i>hati</i>	liver, often translated as 'heart', metaphorically the emotional core
<i>jilbab</i>	Islamic head scarf worn by Malay women
<i>jin</i>	demon, spirit
<i>kampung</i>	village
<i>kedai kopi</i>	coffee shop
<i>kemelayuan</i>	Malayness
<i>kepulauan</i>	archipelago, group of islands
<i>keturunan</i>	heritage, descendants
<i>kretek</i>	clove cigarettes
<i>kueh-kueh</i>	pastries, sweets, cookies
<i>mainteri</i>	shamanistic ritual performance
<i>malu</i>	embarrassment, shame, losing face
<i>manusia harimau</i>	weretigers
<i>mau</i>	want, going to
<i>ngopi</i>	having coffee
<i>pantun</i>	traditional Malay poetry
<i>pong-pong</i>	small boats used for short transportation between islands in Kepri
<i>raja</i>	king
<i>rebab</i>	string instrument, used in Malaysian Mak Yong
<i>satpam</i>	security guard
<i>semangat</i>	belief that all things have a spirit or soul
<i>topeng</i>	masks, traditionally used in Kepri Mak Yong
<i>wisma</i>	guesthouse
<i>utuh</i>	whole, complete