Margaret Kartomi (ed), *Performing the Arts of Indonesia: Malay Identity and Politics in the Music, Dance, and Theatre of the Riau Islands*. Copenhagen: Nordic Institute of Asian Studies Press [Studies in Asian Topics 68], 2019, xx + 410 pp. ISBN: 9788776942595, price: GBP 70.00 (hardback); 9788776942601, GBP 25.00 (paperback).

This book contributes to the related fields of regional identity politics and the revival of traditions in Indonesia. Political decentralization has provided chances for local histories, cultures, languages, and identities to play larger roles in the political terrain. Local political elites exploit the concept of ethnic territory to redefine administrative boundaries and gain formal status as a regency or province. The Riau Islands Province was formed in this context. Distinguishing itself from Riau Province on the mainland of Sumatra, it promotes a distinct Malayness as an identity anchored in the history of the Riau-Lingga Sultanate. Several traditional art genres have been revived to serve as identity markers. *Performing the Arts of Indonesia* focuses on selected forms of music, dance, and theatre that are now witnessing a revival.

Kartomi frames this book through “memory codes” (p. 3), a concept utilized to reveal the technical aspects of the reproduction of traditional arts. Most artists apply repetitive motifs: melodic, rhythmic, poetic, and gestural. They function as mnemonic devices to retrieve unwritten compositions. However, this shift from group to personal compositions indicates a change. Identity politics have elevated selected art forms to the status of icons representing five regencies (Bintan, Lingga, Karimun, Anambas, Natuna) and two cities—Batam and Tanjung Pinang. These places are not merely represented, but determine particular performance styles. Regarding the importance of places, Kartomi groups the fourteen chapters of the book into four parts based on geography: the Riau Islands as a whole, its western islands, its northern and north-eastern islands, and its cities. Individual chapters discuss the particular art forms found in the island groupings, viewed from sociopolitical contexts, and anthropological and historical perspectives.

Part I (Chapters 1–5) offers a general overview of the Riau Islands, historical trajectories, cultural configurations, and soundscapes. The province of Riau Islands or Kepulauan Riau/Kepri, which has been defining a distinct provincial identity since its formation in 2004, consists of about 2,408 islands primarily south of Singapore. Cultural features and identity formation are analyzed within a historical perspective. Leonard Andaya positions Kepri in the southern Malay World, associated with the historical polity of Srivijaya, to distinguish it from the northern Malay World, which is connected to the Bujang Valley in modern Kedah. Being located on maritime trade routes linking the islands

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to the rest of the world contributed to a hybrid Malay culture (*kacukan*). The *nobat* royal ensemble is one such tradition where the mixing of cultural features is prominent in Malay music traditions. Kartomi reveals the history and the role of *nobat* as a symbol of sovereignty that legitimates the coronation of the king. Despite its demise in the early twentieth century, there have since been efforts to reinvent its sounds and evoke the memory of the former Riau-Lingga Kingdom. Jenny McCallum looks at the audiences' emotional responses found in nineteenth-century Malay writings. Its reinvention demonstrates the change and influence of modern musical genres. Cynthia Chou uncovers the change of the auditory environment of the sea nomads, from natural sounds and traditional musical instruments (gongs, drums, and violin) to pop music and Christian devotional songs.

Part II (Chapters 6–9) centers on artistic representation in the western islands, including Lingga, Bintan, and Penyengat. Two comparative studies reveal the importance of place for distinct performance styles. Brigitta Scarfe and Muhamad Hasbi contrast the performance of a village-based violinist with that of a town-based violinist. Bronia Kornhauser discusses two performances of a *bangsawan* theatre troupe, a fictional story staged outdoors in a rural area and a historical narrative staged indoors at an event in Tanjung Pinang. An examination of art in Penyengat highlights the importance of stylistic aspects and knowledge for the reinvention and continuity of this tradition. Vivienne Wee writes about the role of “tacit knowledge” in music production in the lives of musicians (p. 198). Raja Alfirafindra and Rina Martiara discuss the revival of the *zapin* music and dance.

The revived traditional arts in the northern islands are the focus of Part III (Chapters 10–11). Syafaruddin, Manolete Mora, and Margaret Kartomi elaborate on an artistic icon from Anambas Islands—the *gobang* masked-dance—with its ironic humor and combination of local and European styles. Karen Kartomi Thomas compares two performances of the *mendu* theatre in Natuna, one from a village in 1984 and one from a town in 2013. In the context of socio-political change, she found that the theatre form changed significantly in its presentation style, from the outdoor earthen stage with bamboo structures to the polished floor and less-decorated stage in a sports hall. The duration is also shortened from several nights to only a few hours. Despite retaining fundamental dramatic elements and a spontaneous style, the more recent performance have lost their cosmological significance.

Part IV (Chapters 12–14) focuses exclusively on the major cities of Batam and Tanjung Pinang. Considering urban life settings, the chapters in this section take into account the influences of the music industry, world music, and new developments on Malay music. Geoffrey Benjamin compares two groups

of artists in Penyengat and Tanjung Pinang that compose music identified as “traditional” and “new creations” (pp. 279, 285), but shows their reliance on memory codes from the Malay music tradition. The latter group demonstrates the adoption of global music forms such as pop, rock, blues, and jazz in Malay music. Manolete Mora, who compares musical practices in Batam and Tanjung Pinang, describes a new mixed style, in which the tensions between global cosmopolitanism and local distinctiveness are no longer present. Another external element that colors Malay music is the culture of migrants. Nicholas Long calls attention to a group from the island of Flores that invests in music production for political purposes.

Identity politics standardize traditional arts through the creation of icons (pp. 18–23). Going beyond the artistic icons that define identity, this book rightly and necessarily describes the motifs and distinctive styles that bear the meaning of “Malayness” in artistic practices. However, the authors do not question the consequences of this standardization to the idea of Malayness as a forged identity, which is elusive, evolving, and contested (Barnard 2004). I would suggest that the icons should be viewed as a temporary manifestation of ever-changing Malayness. Although Andaya has viewed the history of the Riau Islands across national borders, the roles of artistic icons in the recent configuration of identity in the Malay World remain in question. Distinctive styles create a distinguishable provincial identity, but Malay art forms are a shared heritage across larger communities in the Malay World, performed at many international festivals. Undoubtedly, this is the context in which they should be considered to understand how icons contribute to the Malay World cultural network as a whole. Through this lens, we may observe the islands in their proper position, as the reconstruction of Malayness is not only due to political decentralization in Indonesia, but also dynamic connections across the Malay World.

Although some chapters are not as convincingly argued as others, this book enriches the field regarding the interconnectedness between artistic expression, identity formation, and Malay studies. I found particular value in the substantial amount of sources based on the extensive fieldwork. *Performing the Arts of Indonesia* is recommended for people interested in Southeast Asian performing arts. Scholars, university students, and artists will find in it fruitful discussions on art, history, identity politics, place, and the concept of space.

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Reference

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