

Nathan Porath (ed.), *Hearing Southeast Asia: Sounds of Hierarchy and Power in Context*. Copenhagen: NIAS Press, 2019, xxv + 352 pp. ISBN: 9788776942618, price: GPB 70.00 (hardcover); 9788776942625, price: GBP 25.00 (paperback).

As an academic field that brings together the different auditory research in communication, media, music, and language, among others, Sounds Studies has grown in significance in the Humanities and Social Sciences since the 1990s. An area of study that examines sound recordings, music, and acoustic ethnography as its source, Sound Studies now has its own dedicated academic journals and book series. However, scholarship of sound in and about Southeast Asia remains rare. The limited literature available is often written within an ethnomusicological framework. *Hearing Southeast Asia: Sounds of Hierarchy and Power in Context*, edited by Nathan Porath, studies sound and sound-making in Southeast Asia from an anthropological perspective. At the core of the book's analyses is how understandings of hierarchies and power relationships within the matrices of various religious and political systems are heard, and how they (re)sound in the region. The book comes with a companion SoundCloud account, where readers can listen to the sound case studies discussed in specific chapters.

Porath's theoretically dense opening chapter (Chapter 1) weaves together an impressive array of canonical sound studies concepts and theories. Sound Studies is an interdisciplinary enterprise, and Porath's extensive review of literature draws from the different academic disciplines of linguistics, (ethno)musicology, philosophy, anthropology, and performance and media studies. I also appreciate the distinction made between sounds within nation state-based history and late twentieth-century consumerism. However, I wonder how useful the ethnographies of local languages in sound scholarship are, especially for local readerships—leaving me with the question of whether observation may have already been done in linguistics, or that such observations are novel only to Western (anthropological) ears.

How does one read a collection of essays of various conceptual engagements with Sound Studies in different geopolitical territories of a region? Should it be approached as an area studies project, comparing the sound cultures of the different countries? Or should it be approached for its thematic and methodological engagement with sonic concepts and theories?

At the onset, the book chapters are organized by country, although the case studies presented in each chapter might not strictly adhere to the national categories they are assigned to. Benjamin (Chapter 2) investigates degrees (cline) of Malayness—as ethnicity or culture—as imagined and constructed in Malay traditional music. In studying comedic sounds in Orang Sakai shamanic heal-

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ing rituals, Porath (Chapter 4) expanded and revealed the fluidity of Benjamin's notion of the cline—a concept he considers not a hierarchy but rather a continuum with subtle gradations—of Malayness.

The second set of chapters spans the different geographic areas and communities of Indonesia. Henley (Chapter 7) writes about the politics of the use of loudspeakers by Indonesian mosques in a growing national debate over religious noise. Ellen (Chapter 5) reflects on the linguistic and paralinguistic sounds of the Nuaulu spirit ritual in the Moluccan islands. Duile (Chapter 6) listens “to the indigenous activists’ [...] perception of sound from the natural environment, in particular of birdsong” (p. 203) to examine the acoustic ecology in Kalimantan and what the disappearance of sounds means for the indigenous community. McGraw (Chapter 8) studies the socially inscribed power of the Balinese *gong agung*. Chou and Kartomi (Chapter 3) think through the sound world of the Orang Sakai's water-based culture in Riau.

Writing about Myanmar, Coderey (Chapter 10) examines social hierarchies in the Theravada Buddhist recitations. Douglas (Chapter 9) examines the Burmese conception of power as reflected in music and language. In listening to the chanting of Jesus's passion and crucifixion in Pampanga, Philippines, Bautista (Chapter 11) situates the *pasyon* as an affective practice of empathic commiseration. Platt (Chapter 12) draws from Thai classical literature descriptions of the manifestations of monarchical powers and hierarchy in court and social practices of soundings and silencing.

Another way of reading the book is to consider the various themes and disciplinary engagement with sound theories and concepts and their intersection with systems of hierarchies in the different Southeast Asian localities and societies. Examining musical case studies and analyzing them with ethnomusicological tools, Benjamin argues for the importance of melisma (the elaborate and indirect transitions between notes) as an analytical tool to understanding the degrees of Malayness. He proposes that these in-between note transitions are where the cline of Malay identity and cultural hierarchies are traversed and negotiated. Extending their analogy of Ingold's notion of the ontology of dwelling, Chou and Kartomi elaborate on the Orang Suku Laut's music with their marine soundscape and nomadic sea existence.

Employing a more linguistic analysis, Platt considers “various terms used in Thai to describe sounds and thereby to inherently assess and arrange them in a hierarchical system” (p. 367). Meanwhile, McGraw employs Latour's Actors Network Theory in analyzing the *gong agung* to reframe it beyond ethnomusicology—an ambitious idea, although its application was not fully realized. Expanding beyond the common musical and linguistic framing of sound toward notions of sound such as ‘vocalities’ and social performance, Coderey's

chapter argues that the belief of the laypeople in the efficacy of their voice to recite Buddhist chants creates a different hierarchy of ‘vocality’ in Myanmar’s Theravada Buddhists. Taking into consideration acoustic ecologies, Duile’s chapter studies the relationship between the Dayak communities and their biophonies (the sounds of non-human animals).

Combining a historical perspective (drawing from literary sources) and contemporary ethnographies, the volume presents the diversity of the region’s urban and rural soundscapes. The variety of approaches and methods of the different chapters resonate with the development of sound brought in by the consumerism of the late twentieth century—underscoring the Southeast Asian urban- and rural landscapes not as static geographic spaces but historically evolving sites. As a book covering a broad spectrum and heterogeneous sound concepts across a large geopolitical region, its very fluidity of ideas and approaches may make this ambitious book project seem fragmented and unfocused. Nevertheless, that is also where its significance lies. This milestone publication in sound studies focusing on the Southeast Asian region complicates our scholarly ears with the pluralities of the Southeast Asian sound cultures.

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