

The final chapter of the book takes the disappearance of Lao development expert Sombath Somphone in 2012 as a vantage point to explore the hazards of research under an authoritarian regime. Here the book shifts the focus more to the challenges for non-profit and faith-based development organizations (and affiliated researchers) than the daily life of the Lao population in former war zones. Sombath is certainly a powerful memento of the excesses of authoritarianism in the Lao PDR. If we consider, however, what happened in the last eight years in, say, Cambodia and Thailand, it is hard to believe that “terror provoked by political disappearance ... is ethnographically specific to Laos” (p. 133). That said, the book can be read as a gloomy comment on the recent “authoritarian revival” (p. 141) in Southeast Asia more generally, even if the author might not have had this in mind. This atmosphere of fear and uncertainty that the author evokes is, arguably, not country-specific.

The book is a compelling study of the multifarious hazards haunting former war landscapes in Laos and a fascinating literary project. As an innovative and creative reflection of anthropological methods and epistemologies, the book is an excellent contribution to the discipline. Readers sharing a general interest in Southeast Asian post-conflict and authoritarian contexts—if not scared off by jargon—will gain new perspectives from this thought-provoking book.

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*Tales of Southeast Asia's Jazz Age: Filipinos, Indonesians and Popular Culture, 1920–1936.* By Peter Keppy. Singapore: NUS Press, 2019. xiii+269 pp.

A cursory perusal of this book would mislead one into thinking that the two popular culture stars presented—Filipino Luis Borromeo and Indonesian Miss Riboet (pronounced ‘*ribut*’)—are awkwardly

detached from each other. Readers would ask: are they not fascinating subjects worthy of separate publications? More so, what ties the Filipino artform of *vod-a-vil* (Filipino vaudeville) to Malay opera at the turn of the twentieth century? How does the American art form of jazz feature in these two Southeast Asian contexts? Why should popular culture be considered when writing about a period of intense emancipatory politics and burgeoning indigenous nationalist movements for these colonial territories? Fortunately, Peter Keppy does very well to pose and address these questions and connections through his exemplary historical ethnography of two seemingly disparate agents and genres of popular culture in Southeast Asia that have been given limited scholarly attention.

The book is divided into ten chapters and an epilogue. Chapters 2 to 6 discuss the Cebuano vaudeville composer and producer Luis Borromeo, popularly known as Borromeo Lou, along with the socio-historical development of *vod-a-vil* from the 1920s to the 1930s. Chapters 7 through 10 examine the popularity and social impact of Malay opera star Miss Riboet, as well as her constellation of fans, journalists and other opera stars and troupes that were active in 1920s to 1930s pre-independence Indonesia. Their hagiographical achievements as fixed to specific periods, places and national spaces are, however, far from the intent of this study.

Keppy narrates an intricate history of exchanges and connections across a colonized Southeast Asia during the jazz age. He finds that “the age of jazz” best defines the historical context of popular musical-dance genres performed by his subjects of study—such as “the Charleston, the foxtrot” and even “the Argentinean tango”—as resonant with the politics of ethnicity and racial hybridity found in such music’s “European and Afro-American origins”, which therefore encouraged Southeast Asians during this period “to question and reconstruct the boundaries of race, class, national identity, gender and the modern” (p. 5). This dismantling of boundaries via historical ethnography is successfully achieved not just through the colourful narratives of the book’s main subjects but also of the diverse individuals—producers, actors, writers, journalists, socialites,

politicians—that intersect with Borromeo’s and Riboet’s stories of stardom, colonial era negotiations and emancipatory expressions. As explored in chapter 8, the journalist Khwee Thiam Tjing, also known as Tjamboek Berdoeri (Spiked Whip), who—alongside his highly critical writings on the injustices of Dutch colonialism for the newspaper *Soeara Publiek* (Voice of the Public)—was an evident fan of Miss Riboet and her electrifying social commentary on stage (pp. 177–86). He highlighted in his tributary poem “Riboet’s potency as spokeswoman for the Javanese underclass” (p. 183).

Readers will also notice the integral role of the widely dispersed and diverse Chinese *peranakan* and *mestizo* communities in the patronage, development and flourishing of the region’s popular arts. Crucially, Riboet’s husband and opera-company co-founder, Tio Tek Djien, Jr., was born to a “wealthy *peranakan* Chinese family” (p. 144), and Borromeo was from an “urban merchant and landholding elite ... Chinese-*mestizo*” family (p. 19). These inter-ethnic relationships speak to larger issues about the cultural and economic mobilities of diasporic communities across the region and the inherent contradictions in what postcolonial states consider indigenous expressions in Southeast Asia.

Such complex intercultural and interregional connections are also evident in the wide range of source materials referenced; in particular, the extensive list of 106 periodicals from locations such as Manila, Cebu, Bandung, Batavia/Jakarta, Surabaya, Singapore, Sabah and Penang (pp. 244–46). A major challenge in researching popular music from the early twentieth century outside of Europe and the Americas is the limited availability of musical recordings. As evidenced in the book, Keppy could only listen to Borromeo’s music via home-made piano recordings of the composer’s sheet music performed by Fritz Schenker in 2015 (pp. 243–44). Miss Riboet, on the other hand, benefited from being “the first female in colonial Indonesia to be recorded extensively by a German record company on 78rpm shellac disc, the modern media and consumer item of the 1920s” (p. 136), and the book is informed by seven such recordings, including one from Manila (p. 243).

The wide range of interconnected sources and locations explored in this book suitably highlight the active mobilities of jazz age artists and performance genres within the region. Keppy's painstaking scholarship challenges existing studies on the music and performing arts of the region that are restricted in scope from viewing and hearing beyond contemporary national borders. This book serves, therefore, as a much-needed call for more cross-national studies that highlight how popular culture actors, narratives and historiographies crucially shape the unique social contestations and cultural affinities found across Southeast Asia.

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*Performing the Arts of Indonesia: Malay Identity and Politics in the Music, Dance and Theatre of the Riau Islands*. Edited by Margaret Kartomi. Copenhagen: NIAS Press, 2019. xx+410 pp.

The Riau Islands is a vast archipelagic province in Indonesia that spreads throughout the South China Sea until it laps at the borders of the island of Sumatra as well as the nations of Singapore and Malaysia. While it is a region of complex ethnic, social and economic interaction, it is usually associated with a variety of social and cultural practices that are defined as Malay. *Performing the Arts in Indonesia* is a dense—albeit, perhaps mistitled—work that focuses on various cultural productions from this one province. The fourteen chapters, as well as its four appendices, are the result of an Australian research project that attracted academics to Riau and practitioners from this Indonesian archipelago into a discussion of “localised manifestations of the Riau Islanders’ music, poetry, dance, martial arts and theatre in the context of traditional Malay concepts of place, cosmological and performance space, and memory codes that generate group performances” (p. 3). Essentially, each chapter