

Beyond oligarchy, much like Indonesia's democracy, has many facets and is a work-in-progress.

That said, the great value of this volume is in the questions it raises rather than its ability to resolve debates over the oligarchy thesis. Indeed, graduate students and junior scholars, or even senior scholars, seeking ambitious and exciting research projects will discover a multitude of suggestions in the work. From Winters' emphasis on the weakness of rule of law to Pepinsky's advocacy for applying critical pluralism on policy outcomes to Buehler's elite competition model, political scientists interested in Indonesia will find the volume a rich resource for identifying substantively important and theoretically engaging research questions. Many empirical puzzles await as Indonesia grapples its way through a second decade of democracy, and the authors in this volume highlight promising directions that will push forward the field of Indonesian political studies for years to come.

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Antiphonal histories: Resonant pasts in the Toba Batak musical present

By JULIA BYL

Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2014. Pp. xiii + 316. Maps, Figures, Musical Transcriptions, Notes, Glossary, Bibliography, Index.
doi:10.1017/S0022463416000163

Antiphonal histories investigates present-day interpretations of history, human relations, and customs among the Toba Batak people of Indonesia. While ancestral connections to traditional practices centre around older highland villages and areas with proximity to Lake Toba, the author incorporates as well urban cultural negotiations of Toba people residing in Medan (North Sumatra's capital) and Jakarta (Indonesia's capital). Such negotiations are vividly presented within diverse performance settings ranging from weddings, funerals, and houses of Christian worship to palm wine stands and hotels. It also identifies present Batak constructs of history and religion including Islamic, Indic, Protestant, ethnic, colonial, and national pasts. The topics are developed through a reflexive scholarship, including personal contemplations on stories and experiences while in the field as well as the author's evaluations of performances of the music itself, its context of practice, and its signifiers for the Toba. The analyses include both very general and quite specific discussions concerning the fields of ethnomusicology, historiography, anthropology, and sociology. As expressed by the author, the publication presents an 'ethnographic engagement with the field of historical ethnomusicology' (pp. 4–5), that includes the author's experiences in the community and perceptions of Batak interpretations of history by examining present music performance.

The presentation of information, references, and analysis of Batak music performances as representative of intertwined histories and social relations benefits from the

author's numerous years of engagement with a specific community. The ethnographic accounts are highly personal, shifting from a fairly 'distanced' and 'objective' scholarly stance to one more intensely 'engaged' and 'subjective'. 'Antiphonal exhibitions' are as much reflective of a Toba history through musical performance as it is the author's autobiography through lived experience. Due to space limitations this review focuses on the three major sections of the book, namely the *Bindu* (introduction), *Tarombo* (genealogy), and *Partuturan* (positioning). The organisation of each section begins with a useful guiding 'Orientation' followed by its chapters.

The first section acts as an introduction and conceptual overview. Its beginning 'Orientation' presents an initial positioning of the publication as an ethnography in the field of historical ethnomusicology. Chapter 1 begins with a historical description of cartographies and early mappings of Sumatra and the isles of *Waq-waq*, cosmological orders that maintain Indic influences among the Toba, and a presentation of the different musical expressions examined. The second chapter introduces the author's Batak family, the Sitohangs. The *bapak* (father), a musician, instrument maker and resource for Batak history and customary practice, is continuously referenced throughout the study. The analysis of the song 'Jamila' connects the author's ethnographic sonic experience with the *bapak's* original version 'Oh, This World' and interpretations by the prominent Toba pub band Vithagoras. Chapter 2 continues with an extensive introduction of *tarombo* and *partuturan* with many personal anecdotes. This initial section introduces the reader to the theoretical approach of the following two sections dealing with musical ways of treating the past (*tarombo/genealogy*) and observations of the past to understand the present (*partuturan/positioning*), respectively.

The musical and human experiences of the author delineate analytical boundaries and the examination of Toba contestations in musical performance. The latter leitmotif is both useful in understanding the ethnographic experience and its resultant conclusions and, while limiting, introduces approaches of specific individuals filtered through the cultural values and lens of the author. In the analysis certain explanations lack precise referential terminology, e.g. 'Caribbean rhythm' and 'Arabic source' (p. 29) appear without citing specific genres or features. Other considerations include: 1) Transcription 2.2 of 'Raja Lontung' does not include the chord progressions as played by the Batak; and 2) the single paragraph of a song's musical analysis presenting melodic contours as portraying influences of Toba *gondang* music (p. 45) needs more development. Ethnomusicologically, these are more relevant than the several preceding pages detailing non-musical topics, e.g. *tarombo* and *partuturan* regarding the author's adoption into the Sitohang family, the separation from an American boyfriend, and the marriage engagement to Maska, a Batak musician. (As a minor editorial detail, text alignment is inconsistent; at times it is justified and at others, aligned to the left.)

The notion of 'antiphonal histories' itself reflects the researcher's personal interpretation of Toba culture in the absence of a Toba voice or explanation. The -etic term derives from the indigenous concept of *marsialus-alusan*, which means 'answering back and forth' and describes the 'space between answers, the dialectic by which they draw close or keep their distance' (p. 33). The western concept of *antiphonal* does not necessarily focus on the space or the 'in between', but rather on the

materiality of near-symmetrical musical responses. Although a useful term, no discussion on the differences between the indigenous -emic concept and the western -etic one appears. Principal validation comes (literally) from a 'nod' by the *bapak* without further scrutiny and critique of the usage or possible shortcomings of the term. Inexplicably, the indigenous concept *marsialus-alusan* does not figure in the subsequent analyses. For this reviewer, a lack of alternative Batak voices to support such personally-derived conclusions is problematic, even though Batak may concur with them.

The second part focuses on *tarombo* (lineage); its three chapters discuss and analyse Indic influences in traditional music (chap. 3); the impact of Islam and Christianity (chap. 4); and the positioning of the Toba as an ethnic minority within the Indonesian nation (chap. 5). The discussion includes rationales in traditional ensembles such as *gondang* (ritual ensemble, and name of the drums within the ensemble) and its associated mythical and cosmological conceptualisations, with a discerning analysis of indigenous beliefs and their resonant links to Shaivism. The claims of a connection between *gondang* and the Malay *naubat* ensemble for the arrival of the *sarune* (shawm) to the Toba ensemble are in need of further evidence. In my research in Central Sulawesi, another marginal area, I found multiple resonant pasts and valid local theories regarding the arrival of an instrument in different locales. In the Toba case, for organological purposes, the addition of figures of these instruments would strengthen the author's theory due to the presence of different types of *sarune* among the Toba. The discussion on nationalism presents a shrewd analysis regarding the movement of musicians to the city, the role of Toba figures such as Situmorang in post-independence Indonesia, and Toba aesthetics through an analysis of melodies, lyrics, and other signifiers manifested through musical practices.

The third section examines *partuturan* (positioning) in the final four chapters. Chapter 6 examines the musical activities of palm wine stands including the interaction of musicians as shaping and sustaining Toba popular songs. The account, although pertinent, suggests the limitations of participation for a female researcher in a largely male space of Toba interaction, as mentioned by the author. Chapter 7 analyses Christian church musical practices that include an examination of both social and musical interactions. Chapter 8 describes Toba musical figures residing in Jakarta, and compares and contrasts social interactions at a village gathering of a *marga* (patrilineal clan) and a concert in a hotel in Medan. The author presents a sensitive analysis of social relations concerning *partuturan* between 'capital city artists' (p. 234) and Batak communities residing in Medan and in the village. However the author's account of an invitation to perform the *gondang* detracts from the analysis of Batak social and musical interactions. Finally, chapter 9 presents a case study of social and cultural resolutions of *partuturan* regarding the presence (or not) of music for a funeral within the Sitohang lineage involving the author's landlord and sister considering the adopted lineage in this family.

Antiphonal histories constitutes a welcome contribution to Toba music and its history. It follows two trajectories: finding a resonance in present musical expressions and presenting an ethnographic encounter with the community the author aims to represent (p. 169). As an autobiographical ethnography, the study provides an abundance of ethnographic information regarding relationships, values, and cultural

decisions from the researcher's personal lived experience concerning *tarombo* and *partuturan*. As an ethnomusicological landmark of Toba Batak scholarship, it provides useful data about cosmological beliefs, historical influences, and musical decisions as found in specific customs, ceremonies, and events. This investigation could be enhanced by a critical and extensive engagement with other studies on Batak music and culture by both Batak and non-Batak scholars. Additionally, the inclusion of Batak voices and perspectives in the analysis — including assessments by other culture carriers beyond the author's hosts, the Sitohang family — would strengthen the validity of these personal evaluations of Batak music and culture. Although not entirely referenced within the manuscript, the bibliography is useful for further scholarship on the Batak.

As the title suggests, the book is a source for ethnomusicologists, historians, anthropologists, and sociologists. *Antiphonal histories* is a major contribution toward understanding Indonesia beyond the communities of Java and Bali that receive the bulk of attention by anglophone ethnomusicology. This reviewer considers *Antiphonal histories* an invitation to comprehend and explore further 'Resonant pasts in the Toba Batak musical present'.

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Starry island: New writing from Singapore

Edited by FRANK STEWARD and FIONA SZE-LORRAIN

Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 26, 1 (2014). Pp. xiv + 226.

Photographs.

doi:10.1017/S0022463416000175

Singapore's second literary battle is effectively over. The first — begun in its early years of independence — concerned the creation of a worthwhile literature by Singaporeans against the pressures of a colonial legacy. Its outcome was a small but stable body of canonical voices, against which a new battle was soon waged from the late-1990s. That second struggle had found the institutionalised form too suffocating and aimed to move Singaporean writing beyond having fixed centres and margins. The plan was to empower it and to render it more versatile, more able to embrace innovations as well as to reassess traditions.

It is at this exciting point in Singapore's bumpy but eventful literary development that *Starry Island* appears. Edited by Fiona Sze-Lorrain with Frank Steward as *Mānoa's* long-time series editor, *Starry Island* is a fresh experience of what it loosely calls *New writing from Singapore*. The anthology goes as much through familiar terrains such as Boey Kim Cheng's haunting memories of place and Alfian Sa'at's sensitive heartland stories as through unexpected ones such as Wena Poon's charming tale of friendship between two mainland Chinese in Singapore. Karen Kwek's and