Margaret Kartomi. ***Musical Journey in Sumatra.*** **Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2012. 500+ pp.**

Suryadi

Scholarly attention on Sumatran traditional music, including music from the small islands around it, has transpired since early 1930s. Two pioneers of this field were Jaap Kunst and Claire Holt. The Dutch ethnomusicologist Kunst visited West Sumatra and the island of Nias in 1930. He was interested mostly in Niasans music[1] and, to a lesser degree, Minangkabau music.[2] Holt, a French ethnographic scholar, traveled through Central Java, Bali, the Celebes, Sumatra, and Nias in early 1938 to film as many dances as she was able to witness. Her field research in Sumatra and Nias islands focused on the song-dances of Nias, Batak, and Minangkabau ethnic groups.[3] Since then there have been dozens of studies on Sumatran ethnic music carried out by Indonesian as well as international scholars. But none of those is as extensive in scope as the book under review. This is by far the most comprehensive, if not the most complete, scholarly study about Sumatran traditional music ever written.

In *Musical Journey*, Kartomi, the most prolific Australian ethnomusicologist on Indonesian traditional music, explores the traditional musical arts of Sumatra. She uses the term "musical arts" in this context to refer to performing arts containing music:

> [including] the vocal, instrumental, and body percussive music, the dance and other body movement, the art of self-defense, the bardic arts, and the musical theater performed at domestic ceremonies, as well as the arts performed during religious rituals and processions, and the adaptations of traditional genres that are performed on government and commercial occasions, during artistic tours and missions, and on the media. (p. 1)

The book guides us on the journey through the traditional world of music of various ethnic and subethnic groups living in Sumatra from the *lagu nelayan* (fishermen's song) of the Sekak sea people in Bangka Island to the variants of the *rapai'i* song-dances in Aceh; from the Minangkabau Islamic vocal genre of *salawaik dulang* of the West Sumatra's highlands to Mandailing's *gordang lima* orchestra of North Sumatra. It is based on the author's extensive fieldwork in the 1970s and the 1980s on the largest Indonesian island.

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[1] See Jaap Kunst, *Music in Nias* (Leiden: Brill, 1939–1940); see also Jaap Kunst, *Indonesian Music and Dance: Traditional Music and Its Interaction with the West: A Compilation of Articles (1934–1952) Originally Published in Dutch*, ed. Maya Frijn et al. (Amsterdam: Royal Tropical Institute, Tropenmuseum, University of Amsterdam, and Ethnomusicology Centre "Jaap Kunst," 1994). Kunst's fieldwork report to the Netherlands East Indies colonial government can be read in: "Verslag van Mr. J. Kunst, ambtenaar voor het systematisch musicologisch onderzoek in den Indischen Archipel, 6 Jan.–12 Mei," in *Oudheidkundig Verslag, 1930* (Batavia Centrum: Albrecht & Co., [1931]), pp. 68–89.

[2] In West Sumatra, Jaap Kunst only recorded vocals accompanied by *pupui*[*k*] (an aerophone made of rice stalk with horn made of young coconut palm) and *saluang* (bamboo ring flute). Apparently these vocals referred to Minangkabau verbal art genre *saluang jo dendang* (literally, flute with song). Kunst recorded three repertoires of this genre: "Lagu Patah Tiga," "Lagu Din-din," and "Lagu Baru" (Kunst, *Indonesian Music and Dance*, cited above, p. 268). The fact that Kunst made relatively few recordings of Minangkabau music seems to have been due to the fact that the durations of his visits in West Sumatra were relatively short. He sailed on the *SS Ophir* from Batavia on March 26, 1930, headed for Padang, where he stayed for two days. On March 28 he continued his trip to Nias Island on the *SS Reiniersz*. On May 6 he left Pini Island of Nias archipelago, heading back for Padang. From Padang he continued his trip to Tanjung Priok of Batavia on May 10 on the *SS Houtman* (see "Verslag van Mr. J. Kunst," cited above, pp. 68, 73; and "Muziek Pribumi bakal linjap," under rubric "Indonesia," *Sinar Sumatra*, May 22, 1930, p. 6). Possibly, Kunst recorded aforementioned Minangkabau vocals when he stopped in Padang in his trip to and from Nias and Pini Islands.

[3] See Claire Holt, "Dances of Sumatra and Nias: Notes by Claire Holt," *Indonesia* 11 (April 1971): 1–20; and Claire Holt, "Dances of Minangkabau," *Indonesia* 14 (October 1972): 72–88.

Musical Journey relates historical, mythical, religious, and social-contextual issues of many musical genres rooted in Sumatra. The book considers the "stylistic aspects of the music-dance relationships, the dance syntax, and the musical syntax, including melody, tempo, rhythm, meter, formal structure, melodic ornamentation, improvisation, and instrumental and body percussive interlocking techniques" (p. 1). Kartomi divides the Sumatran people she discusses in the book into five musico-lingual groups: the Malay/Melayu, the Minangkabau, the Batak, the Acehnese, and the Chinese–Indonesian. In turn, those five groups can be subdivided into thirty-three subgroups. As she describes in the glossary,

> musico-lingual groups [are] population groups and subgroups that are primarily distinguished from one another on the basis of the musical and lingual attributes of their vocal-musical genres (including songs, ritual/religious chanting, song-dances, and intoned theatrical monologues or exchanges), and only the second level of division on the basis of their musical instruments. (p. 421)

This "musico-lingual" categorization seems to have been used as the main criterion to organize this book. *Musical Journey* has an introductory chapter (Chapter 1) and then is divided into four parts. In Chapter 1, "Sumatra's Performing Arts, Groups, and Subgroups" (pp. 1–17), the author describes the scope of the book, provides an elucidation of the musico-lingual groups of Sumatra, and presents the major themes dealing with the music that recur throughout the chapters. Part I (Chapters 2–6) describes the traditional music in West Sumatra and Riau provinces. Part II (Chapters 7–9) focuses on the traditional music in South Sumatra and Bangka Island. Part III (Chapters 10 and 11) looks at the traditional music in North Sumatra province. Part IV (Chapter 12–14), sheds light on the traditional music in Aceh province. Clearly, the book's four parts refer to the Indonesian national administrative divisions of Sumatra. But, as the author mentions, the book only covers six provinces (South Sumatra, Bangka-Belitung, Riau, West Sumatra, North Sumatra, and Aceh), "making brief references in passing to the other four provinces—Lampung, Bengkulu, Jambi, and the Riau Archipelago" (p. 2). West Sumatra and Riau are blended into one part (Part I) because the Minangkabau and the subgroups of Malay inhabited both provinces and are close in terms of culture, language, and religion.

Browsing through the book's chapters, one is provided an extensive overview of how varied Sumatran music is in terms of the musical instruments and ensembles, and the genres that use them. The genres themselves range from those stressing verbal arts to those emphasizing dance. The musical instruments found in Sumatra can be classified into four types: idiophones, like *talempong* and *dulang*; membranophones, like *gandang, adok, rabano,* and *rapa'i;* aerophones, like *sarunai, saluang,* and *sampelong;* and chordophones, such as *kecapi, rabab,* and *biola*—just to mention a few names. Among these instruments, the membranophones show the most divergence and are found most often across all ethnicities over the island.

There are numerous genres described throughout the book. For instance, the author describes in Part I the Minangkabau dances, like *rantak kudo* and *tari piring*; the traditional open air theater *randai*; the bardic performances chanting *kaba* (Minangkabau oral stories) repertoires, such as *rabab Pesisir Selatan* and *dendang Pauah;* and five main Islamic-influenced genres, the *tabut, indang, salawaik dulang, dikia mauluik,* and *dabuih.* The author also describes Riau Malay's genre of *nobat* and the song-dances and healing ceremonies of the Suku Talang Mamak forest dwellers. In Part II, the author discusses various South Sumatran dances, like *tari kebar* and *tari tanggai;* the genres with Islamic flavor, *rodat* and *gambus;* and the music creation of *gendang Sriwijaya.* In this part, the author also describes the musical genres of Bangka Island, which exist not only among the indigenous, but the Chinese-descent communities as well. These genres include *sepintu sedulang, pinang-pinang,* and *campak Lom* dances and the *tanjidor* bands. In Part III, the author describes performances that were held among the Batak culture and the Mandailing subculture. These performances include the *sikambang* song-dance, *salendang, payung,* and *anak* dances. In the same part, she describes Mandailing's *gordang sembilan, gordang lima,* and *gandang dua* orchestras. In the last part (IV), the author discusses several of Aceh's dances and song-dances that have been strongly influenced by Islam. These dances include the *phô, seudati, ratôh duek, malelang,* and *rapa'i geurimpheng.*

Kartomi's description of the copious genres takes about 370 pages, which cover various themes including "identity, rituals and ceremonies, religion, the impact of foreign contact on music-dance relationships, social class, gender issues, and arts education" (p. 6). Such an abundance of information makes it easy for readers to get lost in the jungle of Sumatra's dances, song-dances, traditional theater, and verbal arts. Given Sumatra's physical size and large population, it would have been very useful if the author had provided a summary (as an appendix, perhaps) that showed the names of the genres, the musical instrument(s) they used, and the groups and subgroups that practiced them, so that readers could easily identify the geographical and cultural locations in Sumatra of each genre. The glossary (pp. 423–31) provides little information of this sort. For example, the *indang*[4] "tongue fu" performance is only explained as "a sitting song-dance genre with group frame-drum playing and singing of Muslim or secular texts" (p. 425), without any geographical and cultural information that would explain how it is exclusively performed by the Minangkabau subgroup in Rantau Pariaman on the west coast of Sumatra.

Fortunately, Chapter 14, "Connections of Sumatra," helps readers navigate the paths in the maze of Sumatran traditional music. This concluding chapter "draws together the connections between the traditional styles and genres of the performing arts across [the island], focusing on the impact of indigenous religion and Islam; classification of the musical instruments and ensembles; myth and legends; dances and music-dances relationship; social classes; gender factors; signal items of identity; and major changes since around 1900" (p. 343). Regarding historical and archeological investigations, Sumatra has been influenced by Islam since around the twelfth century. The emergence of Islam on the island had a significant effect on various musical genres, but many older, pre-Islamic elements remain. In Minangkabau, for example, the Paderi movement (1803–37), which was influenced by Wahhabism from Arabia, had attempted to promote Arab's Islamic-flavor stories in order to displace pre-Islamic indigenous verbal arts like *kaba*, which were regarded by these religious fundamentalists as promoting elements of paganism that were not in accordance with Islamic principles.[5] The origin of *indang* was also strongly connected with Islam. According to local stories in Pariaman, *indang* was initially shaped when the Syattariyah ulema Sheikh Burhanuddin in Ulakan introduced Islam to the people in the region in the second part of seventeenth century. In order to introduce Islamic tenets to the people, he performed a chant or song that became what people now know as *indang*.

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[4] For more about *indang*'s essence as a "tongue fu" (*seni bersilat lidah*), see Suryadi, "*Indang*: Seni Bersilat Lidah di Minangkabau," *Seni* 4,3 (1994): 226–39.

As a result, many genres now have an "Islamic flavor" (p. 348) mainly represented by the predominant use of Islamic membranophones, such as *tabuah, tasa, rabano,* and *rapa'i*. The author mentions that Sumatra's traditional musical instruments may be separated into different classifications, for example, those instruments played upstream (in the highlands) versus those played in downstream (coastal) areas, or according to the instruments' use in various musico-lingual groups or subgroups. Some of these instruments are even attributed with certain mystical powers (pp. 348–49). This propensity seems to represent the syncretism of Islamic elements with those from other religions and beliefs.

After considering the historical, social, and religious aspects of Sumatran traditional music, the author concludes that the instruments they use can be divided into five main categories:

> [B]eginning with the indigenous religious category, the origins of which date from before the Common Era to this day, followed by the Hindu–Buddhist category dating from the early centuries CE to circa the fifteenth century. The third category, associated with Islam (of whatever sect), dates from around the thirteenth century, while the fourth—European or Western—category is associated with Christianity in Christian areas dating from around the sixteenth century, and also with Western secularism in the twentieth. The fifth—Chinese Indonesian—category is associated with Confucian and Buddhist belief, belonging to the bilingual Hakka- or Hokkien- and Malay-speaking descendants of immigrants from China in the cities and some rural areas, despite the periodic anti-Chinese pogroms, for example, as part of the anti-Communist purges across Indonesia in 1965–66. (p. 349)

Therefore, many of the Sumatran traditional music genres have been influenced by the world's religions, such as Hinduism, Buddhism, and Islam, as well as other foreign ideologies and cultures. Other genres link up with indigenous local beliefs. This has contributed to the close association of Sumatran traditional music performances with rituals and religious activities in which aspects of gender relations are often visibly manifested. In West Sumatra, for example, the homeland of the Minangkabau, the ethnic group strongly associated with Islam, the traditional music tends to be segregated by sex, providing little opportunity for the presence of intimate duets involving men and women. In nomadic and semi-nomadic Malay-speaking Suku Dalem and Suku Laut subgroups (Kubu, Mamak, Lubu, Lom, Kuala, and Sekak), the men play a slightly dominant role in their musical arts (p. 365). Kartomi mentions that social classes are also reflected in Sumatran traditional music, although I do not think these apply to Minangkabau music since this matrilineal ethnic group is known to be very egalitarian. The author mentions that until the end of the colonial era, indigenous Malay societies throughout Sumatra and Malaya were divided into three main classes, namely, an aristocratic class and two subservient social classes. The two lower classes include the settled agricultural people and the nomadic or seminomadic Suku Dalem and Suku Laut. Each class of people made its own music ranging from the court genres associated with the aristocrat class to the folk genres associated with the lower social classes.

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[5] D. Gerth van Wijk says as much in his introduction to a Middle Eastern Islamic-based story he edited and translated into Dutch that was quite possibly introduced by the Paderi followers in West Sumatra. See D. Gerth van Wijk, "De geschiedenis van Prinses Balkis (Hikajat Poeti Baloekih)," *Verhandelingen van het Bataviaasch Genootschap van Kunsten en Wetenschappen* 41 (1881): i–ii.

The author also discusses the use of particular genres to strengthen local identity. "The government and ethnopolitical entrepreneurs have chosen to promote some signal items of music and dance as prestigious icons of identity in order to lend grace to political campaigns, cultural displays, and artistic missions (*misi kesenian*), to add ethnic legitimacy at fashionable weddings in urban areas and in diaspora; and for the development of tourism" (p. 367). Unfortunately, she does not pay much attention to the role of academic institutions like the Indonesian Art Institute (Institute Seni Indonesia) at Padang Panjang, which, according to Jennifer Anne Fraser, has contributed to carrying out "the fallacy of preservation" of Minangkabau traditional arts.[6] At the very end of the concluding chapter, the author briefly discusses other changes in Sumatran performing arts in the late nineteenth and the twentieth centuries. She takes into account the influence of recurrent changes of political climates to the life of local music, from the fall of the colonial regime in the 1940s to the current Reformation era. Nevertheless, my impression is that the author does not discuss in much detail the dynamic of Sumatran music in the 1990s and the 2000s. Her description and analysis of Sumatran music seems to extend only to the 1980s.

One of the most outstanding recent developments for Sumatran traditional music is the increasing engagement of performers with regional recording industries. As a result, it is now easy to purchase commercial cassettes and Video Compact Discs (VCDs) of the Minangkabau's *indang, salawaik dulang, rabab Pariaman, rabab Pesisir Selatan,* and other genres in local cassette stores and from sidewalk vendors in various West Sumatran towns, even in Jakarta.[7] Inexpensive musical recordings by the island's other ethnic groups have also become easily accessible. Needless to say, the collaboration of traditional musical genres and electronic communication has, to a certain extent, opened up new forms of transmission and new ways of reception in addition to the traditional form of public performances.

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[6] Fraser observes that "… the discrepancy between preservation in discourse and practice is revealed; there is a disconnect between what faculty *say* they are doing—i.e., preserving indigenous practices—and what they *do*—i.e., radically transforming them" (emphasis in original). See: Jennifer Anne Fraser, "Packaging Ethnicity: State Institutions, Cultural Entrepreneurs, and the Professionalization of Minangkabau Music in Indonesia," PhD dissertation, University of Illinois at Urbana-Campaign, 2007, p. 117.

[7] See Suryadi, "The Impact of the West Sumatran Regional Recording Industry on Minangkabau Oral Literature," *Wacana, Jurnal Ilmu Pengetahuan Budaya* 12,1 (2010): 35–69.

What I want to say is that Sumatran traditional music is still alive and possibly even more popular than ever, given the emergence of cassettes and VCD technology that is conspicuous in Indonesia. Such circumstances have generated musical experiments by assigning the elements of Sumatran traditional music to regional pop genres. However, the cultural position of "regional pop," a genre that exists in all ethnic groups in Sumatra and other parts of Indonesia, was not made clear in this book. In my opinion, regional pop music has its own ethnic characteristics, and is just as interesting as an object of ethnomusicological studies as its traditional counterparts. But since Kartomi's book is firmly based on the author's fieldwork in the 1970s and the 1980s, it seemingly has not captured the current transformations of Sumatra traditional music. Most chapters of the book are a reorganization of the author's articles that have been published in several international journals since the 1970s and the 2000s. Regrettably, not all of those articles are registered in the book's bibliography.[8] As a native Sumatran reviewer, I am also sensitive to some mistakes in the transcription of song texts (lyrics) quoted by the author in this book.

Despite these minor criticisms, the book deserves credit as a significant contribution in enlarging the body of knowledge of Indonesian traditional music. *Musical Journey* can be recommended to all those with an interest in the study of Indonesian ethnic music and the verbal arts. Undoubtedly, it is a most important reference for those who want to carry out further research on Sumatran music, especially the other genres that are not examined in this book.

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[8] For example, it is readily apparent that most of the materials from Chapter 2, "Music to Capture Tigers By" (pp. 26–41), and Chapter 5, "Four Sufi Muslim Genres in Minangkabau" (pp. 97–125), are a reorganization of the author's previous work, "Tiger Capturing Music in Minangkabau, West Sumatra," *Sumatra Research Bulletin* 2,1 (1972): 24–41; and "Muslim Music in West Sumatran Culture," *The World of Music* 28,3 (1986): 13–30. Yet neither article is noted in the book's bibliography.