



UvA-DARE (Digital Academic Repository)

[Review of: B. Barendrecht, P. Keppy, H. Schulte Nordholt (2017) Popular Music in Southeast Asia: Banal Beats, Muted Histories]

Yamomo, M.

DOI

[10.1163/22134379-17501015](https://doi.org/10.1163/22134379-17501015)

Publication date

2019

Document Version

Final published version

Published in

Bijdragen tot de Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde

License

CC BY-NC

[Link to publication](#)

Citation for published version (APA):

Yamomo, M. (2019). [Review of: B. Barendrecht, P. Keppy, H. Schulte Nordholt (2017) Popular Music in Southeast Asia: Banal Beats, Muted Histories]. *Bijdragen tot de Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde*, 175(1), 127-128. <https://doi.org/10.1163/22134379-17501015>

General rights

It is not permitted to download or to forward/distribute the text or part of it without the consent of the author(s) and/or copyright holder(s), other than for strictly personal, individual use, unless the work is under an open content license (like Creative Commons).

Disclaimer/Complaints regulations

If you believe that digital publication of certain material infringes any of your rights or (privacy) interests, please let the Library know, stating your reasons. In case of a legitimate complaint, the Library will make the material inaccessible and/or remove it from the website. Please Ask the Library: <https://uba.uva.nl/en/contact>, or a letter to: Library of the University of Amsterdam, Secretariat, Singel 425, 1012 WP Amsterdam, The Netherlands. You will be contacted as soon as possible.

UvA-DARE is a service provided by the library of the University of Amsterdam (<https://dare.uva.nl>)

Henk Schulte Nordholt, Bart Barendregt, and Peter Keppy (eds), *Popular Music in Southeast Asia: Banal Beats, Muted Histories*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2017, 104 pp. ISBN: 9789048534555, price: EUR 34.99 (paperback).

Popular Music in Southeast Asia: Banal Beats, Muted Histories is the third title published by the Leiden University research project “Articulating Modernity: The Making of Popular Music in 20th Century Southeast Asia and the Rise of New Audiences.” Unlike the first two edited volumes, this book takes on the form of a popular history trade book, and reads like a compendium to the project’s previous extensive ethnomusicological scholarship. Academic citations are omitted but information boxes about sound media, fashion trends, and popular culture trivia are provided at the end of each chapter. The monograph takes a polemical approach against nationalist historiography and state-sanctioned musical canons. It examines a cultural history of twentieth and early twenty-first century Southeast Asia through the lens of popular music—its musicians, audiences, and its attendant ‘lifestyle’ trends. The authors argue that ‘[p]opular music has been treated as trivial and banal’ and that ‘[i]ts performers are often muted, and music-loving publics ignored’ (p. 10). Such a sociological diagnosis is not exceptional to Southeast Asia, but the book does manage to provide original regionally-specific insights. The geographic imagining of Southeast Asia in this book includes Malaysia, Thailand, Singapore, the Philippines, and Indonesia with a strong focus on the last—given the personal geographic interests of the authors. Such metonymic analysis of a member nation highlights the need for a Southeast Asian studies volume to (sonically) re-construct/imagine the highly contested notion of the ‘region.’

Popular Music in Southeast Asia covers four historical periods that correspond to its four chapters. Set in the last four decades of European colonialism, Chapter 1 investigates jazz music popularized in the region by itinerant Filipino musicians and the rise of jazz female celebrities around the region. Such popularity was made possible through a transregional entertainment network, and the global spread of phonograph technology. The chapter, however, missed the opportunity to analyze how these musical developments influenced the decolonization movements in the region. Chapter 2 examines rock and roll and the concomitant rise of subversive youth culture in the 1950s and 1960s. Despite the local state and religious institutions’ moral indignation, local appropriations of rock music flourished into lucrative domestic music industries. Chapter 3 analyzes two concurrent movements in the 1970s and 1990s. On the one hand, the clash of the state-sponsored rapid modernization policies with the interests of rural citizens and working classes spurred the rise of ‘protest’ music. On the

BIJDRAGEN TOT DE TAAL-, LAND- EN VOLKENKUNDE

© MELÊ YAMOMO, 2019 | DOI:10.1163/22134379-17501015

This is an open access article distributed under the terms of the prevailing CC-BY-NC license at the time of publication.

other hand, to address the emergence of the urban middle-class who ‘had left their hometown villages, but were not yet global citizens’ (p. 65), government sponsorship of urban folk music saw the emergence of the ‘ethnic modern’ genre. This mixes rural traditions with the latest Western urban trends, such as in the case of pop Minang and pop Sunda in Indonesia. At the turn of the twenty-first century, indie music burgeoned through digital media—this is the theme of Chapter 4. New modes of production and distribution through online-generated contents and web-based platforms (e.g. YouTube and SoundCloud) animated new hybrid sonorities. The authors present the case of the Indonesian iteration of the *nasyid*—an Islamic vocal music with proselytizing subject matter that draws influences from US boyband genres, as well as the J- and K-pop styles. Citing Brent Luvaas, the authors observe how the Indonesian indie scene ‘has always been as much a mode of entrepreneurship as a bastion of free expression’ (p. 83).

The book’s transnational perspective situates local pop music production and practices within a multi-nodal network of constantly fluctuating powers of global popular culture. It proposes a music history and ethnography based on the specific nation-states’ old postcolonial alliances and new economic, religious, and socio-cultural relations. Given the book’s compact size and length, however, I wonder if it has inadvertently glossed over intra-national and micro issues of race, as well as queer and ethnic-class identities—often still unproblematized as residues of colonial structures. Instead, the book favored sweeping ‘official post-colonial’ nationalist historiographies which it dialectically opposed in the introductory chapter. I also ask: could this genre of public scholarship address non-academic audiences outside the Netherlands and Europe? Does the book offer valuable knowledge to popular readers in Southeast Asia, beyond existing local scholarship in the region? One thing noteworthy is that the PDF version of the book is freely downloadable. Embodying the authors’ observation of the democratizing power of the digital format and internet, the open access distribution of the book ensures its accessibility for readers from the region it is written about.

meLêyamomo

University of Amsterdam

m.j.yamomo@uva.nl