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Review

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The Sulu Zone: A Maritime Cultural Complex is a substantial and engaging Festschrift that honors Professor Ricardo Trimillos's long-standing contributions to ethnomusicology and scholarship on Southeast Asian performing arts. The volume presents the Sulu Zone, spanning the southern Philippines, Sabah, and parts of eastern Indonesia as a historically layered maritime cultural world shaped by mobility, Islam, kinship, language, ritual, music, dance, and oral tradition. It is in this sense that editor Mayco Santaella, in his introductory chapter, characterizes the Sulu Zone as a "cultural complex."

Bringing together scholars from religious studies, archaeology, colonial history, linguistics, ethnomusicology, and ethnochoreology, the volume is notable for its disciplinary range and the diversity of scholarly voices it gathers. It is also highly relevant to music and minority studies as many chapters examine how expressive practices give historical and cultural visibility to maritime, border-crossing, and often minoritized communities whose lives do not fit neatly within modern national and mainstream narratives. Music, dance, ritual, and oral tradition are therefore central means through which Sama, Bajau/Sama-Bajau, Tausug, Jama Mapun, Iranun, Pala'wan, and other communities sustain memory, negotiate identity, and articulate belonging across the Sulu, Mindanao, and Celebes seas. Its strength lies in showing how the Sulu Zone can be understood not through a single historical narrative, but through overlapping studies of settlement, language, ritual, music, dance, oral tradition, and memory.

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One productive way to read the volume is through three thematic clusters. The first examines how mobility, exchange, settlement, language, and social relations shaped regional identities across the Sulu Zone. The second foregrounds ritual, performance, music, dance, and embodied memory as key sites through which belonging and cultural continuity are enacted. The third raises important historiographical and methodological questions about preservation, documentation, and the politics of representation. These themes necessarily overlap, nevertheless they help clarify the volume's cumulative contribution.

The first cluster develops the Sulu Zone as a layered transregional world shaped by mobility, Islam, kinship, settlement, and exchange. Mayco Santaella's introductory chapter establishes the conceptual frame of the Sulu Zone as a "cultural complex," while Stephen Chia's chapter on Sama-Bajau origins, Felice Noelle Rodriguez's study of Ayala township, Isaac Donoso's discussion of Philippine music history, and Jason Lobel and William C. Hall's linguistic survey extend this frame across archaeology, colonial history, music, and language. Collectively, these chapters show how the Sulu and Mindanao-Celebes Seas functioned as spaces of sustained movement, contact, and cultural formation across what are now international borders.

The second thematic cluster centers on ritual, performance, music, dance, and embodied memory as key means of enacting belonging and cultural continuity. Greg Acciaoli and Fadzilah Majid Cooke's chapter on the Bajau Tempatan Kenduri in eastern Sabah shows how ritual practice is inseparable from Muslim identity, community formation, and territorial belonging, while Birgit Abels's discussion of Sama Dilaut *tagunggu*, a gong-based musical practice central to Sama Dilaut ways of sounding place, presence, and social belonging, presents sound and performance as experiential means of making presence, resilience, and place palpable within a maritime environment. Desiree A. Quintero's and Matthew Constancio Maglana Santamaria's chapters on dance challenge rigid colonial and ethnolinguistic classifications by foregrounding bodily knowledge, regional variation, and the need for more plural approaches to performance traditions. Music and oral tradition extend this concern further: Mayco Santaella's discussion of gong traditions and kulintang ensembles reveals a shared but internally diverse Sulu musical world, while Bernard Ellorin's, Felicidad A. Prudente's, and Jacqueline Pugh-Kitingan's chapters examine interethnic musical relationships among Sama, Tausug, Jama Mapun, and Iranun communities. Nicole Revel and Deirdre Bolger's chapter on *pala'wan tultul* shows how long-sung narratives preserve collective memories of violence, raiding, enslavement, fear, and loss. Taken together, these chapters show that ritual, dance, music, and oral tradition sustain history, memory, identity, and regional connectedness through embodied and sonic practice.

The third thematic cluster raises questions about documentation, fieldwork, classification, and the politics of representation. These chapters ask not only how music and dance traditions in the Sulu Zone have been preserved, but also how they have been classified, interpreted, remembered, and misrepresented through scholarly, archival, and institutional processes. Jason Lobel and William C. Hall, Desiree A. Quintero, and

Matthew Constancio Maglana Santamaria examine these questions through close studies of particular performance traditions, showing that documentation is never a neutral act of preservation. Rather, the ways in which genres are named, categorized, archived, and analyzed shape what later comes to be recognized as authoritative cultural knowledge. Robert Garfias and Yoshitaka Terada extend this concern from the perspective of fieldwork itself, reflecting on their encounters with musical life in the Sulu Zone and the transformations they observed over time. Their chapters make clear that field documentation is an interpretive practice shaped by memory, positionality, historical change, and the shifting meanings of musical life.

The volume's collective perspective on the Sulu Zone as a cultural complex culminates effectively in the final conversational chapter, in which Mayco Santaella and Wayland Quintero engage Professor Ricardo Trimillos in a reflective discussion of fieldwork, mobility, musical change, and cultural life across the Sulu world. Reflecting on fieldwork in the Sulu Zone during the 1960s, Professor Trimillos presents the region as a lived cultural world linked to Sabah, Borneo, and surrounding areas through kinship networks, trade routes, linguistic affinities, religious practices, and shared cultural forms. His discussion of fieldwork, positionality, violence, masculinity, and musical change, especially the shifting visibility of the *gabbang* bamboo xylophone, the *biola* violin, and the *kulintang* gong row, gives the volume a personal and historical depth that reinforces its broader argument.

A commendable feature of the volume is its methodological range, which supports its account of the Sulu Zone without reducing it to a single historical, ethnic, or national narrative. Contributors draw on archaeology, linguistics, colonial history, ethnography, oral history, music analysis, dance scholarship, and performance documentation, allowing the region to emerge through overlapping forms of evidence. Among the strongest chapters are those that combine close attention to expressive practice with broader historiographical critique. Isaac Donoso's chapter, for instance, unsettles binary understandings of Philippine music history by placing *kumintang*, an older Tagalog/Batangas song-dance or chant-dance form; *kundiman*, a traditional Filipino ballad genre often centered on romantic themes; *kulintang*, a southern Philippine gong-chime ensemble tradition; and *moro-moro/komedy*, a Spanish colonial Philippine theatrical tradition often centered on dramatized Christian-Moro conflict, within overlapping Islamic, maritime Southeast Asian, and Spanish colonial worlds. Desiree A. Quintero's and Matthew Constancio Maglana Santamaria's chapters on dance are similarly effective in showing how bodily knowledge and regional variation resist rigid and essentialist classification, while Nicole Revel and Deirdre Bolger's discussion of pala'wan tultul, an oral epic tradition, demonstrates how oral epic preserves memories of violence, raiding, enslavement, fear, and loss that written historical sources may not fully capture. Together, these chapters show the volume at its best: attentive to cultural detail, alert to historical complexity, and careful about the politics of representation.

Given the volume's strong maritime framing, the collection might have been further strengthened by incorporating broader ecological, material, literary, and media perspectives. Such perspectives would have expanded its account of how maritime worlds

are produced not only through ritual and performance, but also through environments, objects, texts, images, and technologies. This point should be understood not as a weakness in the volume's design but as an invitation to further scholarly expansion and interdisciplinary work. The volume's clear emphasis on performance, language, ritual, and historical memory remains persuasive and opens productive possibilities for future scholarship in ecology, material culture studies, literary studies, and media studies.

The Sulu Zone: A Maritime Cultural Complex makes a significant contribution to maritime Southeast Asian studies by showing that regional connectedness is sustained not only by political and economic histories, but also by expressive, linguistic, ritual, and embodied practices that cross present-day national borders. Its value extends beyond ethnomusicology to Asian studies, performance studies, anthropology, and history, particularly for scholars concerned with maritime mobility, cultural memory, and the formation of border-crossing communities. The volume also honors Professor Ricardo Trimillos's intellectual legacy by extending his commitment to fieldwork, mentorship, and the study of music and culture in Southeast Asia. Overall, this is a carefully curated and intellectually cohesive volume that will serve as an important reference for scholars of maritime Southeast Asia, especially those interested in music, dance, oral tradition, performance, and regional cultural history.

Author Biography

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