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Seascapes and Soundscapes: Island Culture and Music Making in the Nusantara Region

Panel: Performing Arts and Island Societies: Beyond State, Nation, and Empire

The term *Nusantara* is a 14th century Javanese concept developed during the Majapahit era with reference to its extended domains mostly in Insular Southeast Asia. The term became prominent at the beginning of the 20th century to name the then future nation of Indonesia. *Nusantara* meaning “other islands” reflected the archipelagic context of extended Majapahit domains which subsequently developed shared cultural. Similar to the English term “motherland”, the term referencing the nation of Indonesia and Malaysia *tanah air* (lit. land water) maintains this shared archipelagic conceptualization. Within this context, movement of musical traditions through trade, marriage, and migrations instigated and unified the region through shared cultural traits. This paper looks at soundscapes within seascapes through a chronological development and current practices that culturally maintain Nusantara domains in the 21st century.

Conceptualizing the *nusantara* region utilizing Bentley’s (2007) seascape notion provides a water (rather than land) oriented analytical approach to the development of culture in the region. An examination of musical practices through the presence of a “water space” follows an understanding of a “Mari-cultural evolution” (B. Andaya, 2006) in Insular Southeast Asia. Under such framework, this paper will look at this extended region during the Majapahit era, colonial times and post-independence musical practices that support and carry on the *nusantara* concept as a cultural region in the 21st century.