REGIONAL IDENTITIES IN SOUTHEAST ASIA

Contemporary Challenges, Historical Fractures

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TRANSNATIONALISM

Transnational Malay Identity: Stage Performances and the Revival of Royal Patrons in the Riau Islands[1]

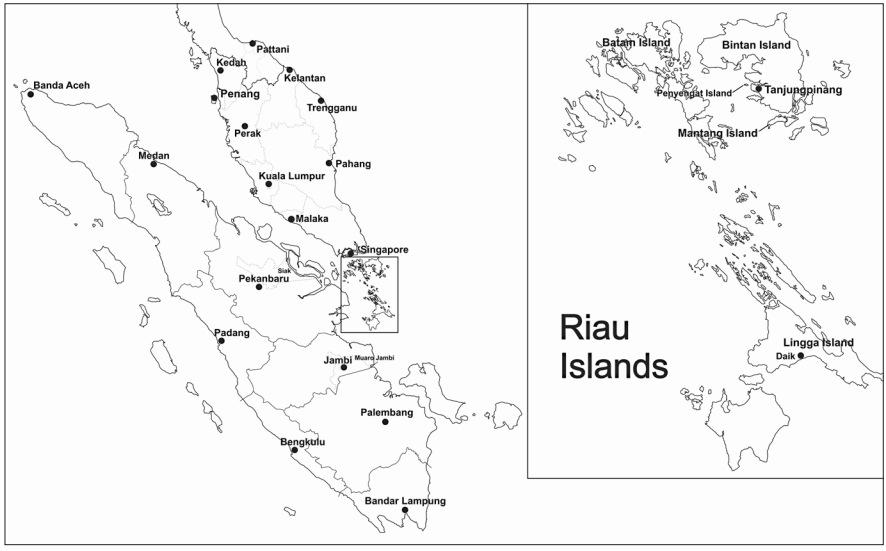
ALAN DARMAWAN AND JAN VAN DER PUTTEN

Studying Malay identity through a transnational lens seems logical but is, at the same time, problematic. The conceptual framework of transnationalism is most often used in the field of migration studies in which the concepts of homeland and diaspora are fundamental to understand the feelings, movements, and sociopolitical behaviors of migrants to maintain connections with the people "back home." The modes and realization of such contacts are based on historical contingencies and will change over time in intensity and content (Vertovec 2009, 13). Groups of people who identify themselves as Malay are dispersed around insular and mainland Southeast Asia, an area that may be referred to as the Malay World, which straddles the nation-states of Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, and other Southeast Asian states. They also include groups that have settled beyond the boundaries of this region. From this perspective, of course, Malays are transnational, as the areas where they have settled belong to different nation-states.

Recent studies about Malay identity have made it clear that the terminology "Malay" was used with different definitions in the course of history and in political discourses and agendas (cf. Barnard and Maier 2004; Kahn 2006; Milner 2010; Maznah Mohamad and Syed Muhd Khairudin Aljuneid 2011; and Long 2013). The studies expound and contextualize the point that in general "Malay" has been and, in some cases, is still being used to refer to the people of insular and peninsular Southeast Asia as a whole, or as a generic term for the speakers of variants of the Malay language. In other contexts, "Malay" may refer to an ethnic community whose members traditionally live in the coastal areas of Sumatra, Borneo, and the Malay Peninsula, or Muslim citizens of the nation-states Malaysia, Singapore, Brunei, and Thailand. Even some groups in Vietnam, Cambodia, and as far away as Sri Lanka and South Africa may identify themselves as Malay. To add to this blurred definition of the term "Malay,"

Malaysian and Singapore citizens quite commonly add other ethnic epithets to that of "Malay," such as Bugis, Boyan, or Jawa, to distinguish themselves from other members within the Malay community. At the same time, they indicate a certain affectionate relationship with the homeland or home community in Indonesia (the Bugis in Sulawesi and the islands of Bawean or Java). As might be expected, boundaries between the definitions are blurred and the ongoing processes of globalization have invigorated the formation of localized forms of a shared cultural Malay identity.

In this chapter, we reflect on Appadurai's notion (1996) about how imagination fuels the activities of culturalist movements which self-consciously produce "locality" in the context of a globalized world. Therefore, we look at how the imagination of "homeland" has been localized in the Riau Islands and, at the same time, maintains relationships with other communities in the Malay World. It is our contention that ever since the elevation of the Riau Islands to the administrative level of province in 2004, officials, cultural activists, and other local agents have been actively promoting this Negeri Segantang Lada ("A Spattering of Peppercorns")—referring to the multitude of islands strewn around the South China Sea—as Bunda Tanah Melayu ("Motherland of the Malays"), another name for the province that is being popularized in the local discourse.



Map of Sumatra, the Malay Peninsula, and the Riau Islands. Edited by Alan Darmawan. *Source*: National Atlas of Indonesia (Atlas Nasional Indonesia) published by the Geospatial Information Agency, Indonesia, 2015. See the online atlas through this link: <https://atlas.big.go.id/eatlas1/Atlas/Tampil/25#modalNarasi> last accessed 24 September 2021.

One might say that these agents are constructing and forging the region as a Malay *kampung* or neighborhood as a situated community where revived traditions invite the inhabitants, both of local and outside origins, to become culturally Malay (cf. Appadurai 1996, 178–79). They are also packaging it as a model to be reproduced in other regions where people subscribe to the cultural values they see as significant for Malay identity. As a contribution to this volume, what concerns us most in this chapter is how certain agents in the Indonesian province of the Riau Islands (Kepulauan Riau, henceforth abbreviated as Kepri) redefine Malay identity and reconfigure its cultural significance by revitalizing or resuscitating erstwhile artistic expressions and customs and commodifying these to be performed in cyclical arts festivals which travel to other regions and nations. In this chapter we will discuss how dance and other cultural performances are being circulated throughout the Malay World and beyond, mostly originating from Kepri and Riau Province on the island of Sumatra,[2] which strive to enhance their role as innovative art centers.

The second clear Malay identity marker that we will discuss is the institution of kingship in the modern garb of a sultan who pushes for economic development in accordance with the rules of Islamic law. In this respect, a form of Islam is propagated by a newly instated sultan of Bintan in Kepri who claims part of his legitimation from the Murabitun movement, a global Sufi network that strives after the reintroduction of the gold dinar and silver dirham coins for economic exchange in agreement with Islamic law. Backed by this movement and using his personal network, this sultan of Bintan has rekindled connections with Malaysian sultanates and uses his interpretation of Islam to fortify ties with other Indonesian sultans and rulers. However, the Murabitun connection and the existence of other and possibly older contenders for a position in the new aristocracy with cultural and political ramifications, may eventually undermine the role of the new sultan to transnationalize a Kepri-based standard of Malay cultural identity.

Identity and "Homeland" in Traditional Historiography

The traditional historiography of the Malay ethnic community harks back to the legendary tale of how descendants of Alexander the Great descended from the sky to establish a new kingdom by forging bonds with the local community near Palembang, South Sumatra. For reasons left unmentioned in the tale, after some time the king went to seek a new area in which to settle. After temporary stints in the islands of Bintan and Singapore, the group of Malay royalty descended upon

a small place on the west coast of the Malay Peninsula that later would become famous under the name of Melaka. This is the version that has come down to modern times through the traditional narrative *Sulalatu 'l-Salatin*, better known under the title *Sejarah Melayu*, preserved in manuscript copies from the nineteenth century. This narrative was probably compiled and copied in Johor after the Malay royal house was ousted from Melaka by the Portuguese in 1511. Being commissioned by certain factions in the Malay court, it was designed to legitimate the authority of the ruling faction and boost the reputation of the court, its history, and traditions. The latter motivation of its initial compilation was highly successful as it provided the Johor court with a predecessor of high renown and became an important source for the configuration of Malay culture. This was, at least, the case from the start of the nineteenth century onward, when the first translation in English was published by Raffles in England in 1821 and the first edition of the Malay text was printed by Abdullah Munshi at the Mission Press in Singapore in 1841. This tale is used throughout the Malay World to indicate the historicity of claims of certain parties or even regions in their efforts to revitalize the institution of the sultanate or principality as we will see below in the case of Bintan.

In Malaysia, nationalist agents used the tale's reputation to forge a Malay identity that was based on traditional pillars enhanced by the studies and measures of colonial officials and scholars. These pillars are Malay customs and good manners (*adat*), which are bound in and part of the concept of *bahasa* (language) (Maier 1993; Heryanto 1990), and Islam that was connected to the traditional leadership the sultans executed in the nine states that were part of the Federated States of Malaysia. The government of Indonesia initially withdrew all administrative and political power from the local rulers, and revolutionary militias killed several of the sultans with their families at the beginning of independence. However, with the main aim of keeping the nation together after the dismissal of President Suharto, the central government implemented far-reaching decentralization policies that encouraged a number of local polities to reinstate sultans and give them a renewed symbolic cultural position. Notions of Malay culture that are used to reconfigure the cultural identity are embedded in the culture that was established in the traditional sultanate courts that were dispersed within the Malay World and that took their model in the imagined grandeur of the Melakan court. This made Melaka the center of the Malay cultural world for a long time, but Kepri's recent activities have been vying with Melaka's focal point for the ongoing reconfigurations of Malay cultural identity. Kepri's authorities have been sponsoring festivals, art centers, and many other initiatives in a claim of becoming the rightful heir of the Malay royal traditions.

Nonetheless, the concept of "homeland" among these transnational communities that form the Malay ethnoscape has been grounded in Palembang and Jambi (Indonesia) and Melaka (Malaysia). As we argue here, however, there are signs that Kepri certainly is gaining ground in this cultural competition of claiming to be the proverbial "homeland of Malay culture." The notion of transnationalism becomes further complicated when we look into the different pillars that support the configuration of this cultural identity in the different local contexts in the Malay World.

Malay Communities, Identity, and the Initial Efforts of a Transnational Connection

Transnational activities in reconfiguring a Malay cultural identity in different localities may be a relatively recent phenomenon. In its initial stage, it nostalgically aims to reconnect groups of people who base their self-identification as Malay on their ethnic background and live as separate communities across national borders in Southeast Asia. The premise of the formation of such an identity is the imagination of a Malay cultural realm or ecumene, Alam Melayu or Malay World, which implies a narrative of united communities in a cultural space along the Strait of Melaka sharing a number of cultural elements. The 1824 London Treaty is regarded to have initiated the division of the Malay realm into a British and a Dutch sphere of influence. This division was continued by the postcolonial nation-states, which play an important role in reconfiguring the image of the Malay self and its communities on both sides of the Strait. Different formative processes leading to alternative configurations of Malay identity in Malaysia, Indonesia, and some other countries, were broadly caused by differences in political regimes and types of nation-building of these modern independent states.

Certain groups during the Indonesian revolution for independence (1945–49) pushed for the eradication of traditional rule, which triggered violent conflicts in East Sumatra. These conflicts led to the killings and persecution of Malay royal family members and the burning of their palaces (Reid 1979). Malay people who could claim communal ownership of the land lost their customary rights. The sultans had rented most of their customary lands to European and American companies since 1862, which the Indonesian state nationalized in 1958. The eviction from their lands became a structural problem that marginalized the Malay population and converted them into second-rate citizens. Moreover, a high influx of labor migrants from China, India, and

Java to the east coast of Sumatra, and groups voluntarily descending from the highlands of West and North Sumatran to take their chances in the new urban area of Medan and the plantation belt that evolved, turned the local Malays into a minority group.

Living in destitute circumstances and unable to afford proper education, Malays could not compete with migrants who strived hard to obtain land and make a living. Within the framework of national development that took place between the 1970 and 1990s, the configuration of national culture and identity was based on the creation of regional identity in the provinces (Rodgers 1993). In North Sumatra, the home of multiethnic groups, the Malay community was left out of the formation of its regional identity. In Riau Province, encompassing the islands and a vast area on the east coast of Sumatra, Malayness was made into a regional identity based on simplified and essentialized forms of cultural practices. If the awareness of being Malay in North Sumatra was related to the traumatic experiences during the process of state formation and marginalization, being Malay in Riau was associated with similar experiences caused by industrialization, exploitation of natural resources, and transmigration of laborers from other Indonesian regions, evicting local Malays from their traditional lands. Therefore, in the 1980s to 1990s, foregrounding Malay identity became an act of resistance to the Indonesian state, and the feeling of being Malay became more associated with the Malay World at large.

In Malaysia, Malays form the dominant racial group ruling over the others, comprising indigenous groups and people of Chinese and Indian origins. Since national independence in 1957, political leaders in Malaysia have always made it an important part of their agenda to promote the Malay language and culture as the basis for Malaysian national identity. The state of Malaysia developed a "Malay nation" based on racial division while putting Malayness at the center of its nation-building project. The affirmative actions contained in the New Economic Policy, which the Malaysian government adopted in 1971 to improve the socioeconomic position of the Malay people, inculcated among them a consciousness of being a modern Malay nation, of being a "new Malay" (Melayu Baru) (Rustam A. Sani 1993). Cultural aspects such as the Malay language, literature, and the arts continued to play a prominent role in Malaysia's national development. When Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad enthusiastically launched "Vision 2020" in 1991 to develop Malaysia into one of Asia's economic tigers, it not only included the expansion of economic cooperation with its neighboring countries, but it also aimed at strengthening cultural and religious connections that were considered a good basis for economic programs and enhancing the Malaysian nation as one single and powerful people.

In this context, Malayness was deployed to connect and promote Malaysia among other Malay peoples with their organizations in the Southeast Asian region and beyond. Malaysian state authorities supported such an enhancement of transnational connections in which a few individuals and organizations played a major role in propagating transnationalism "from below." Regional dialogues and cultural festivals formed the core of these efforts to develop partnerships between Malay organizations in the neighboring countries and Malaysia. These initial efforts created the basis for further development of transnational activities in the region. The main aim of these activities was the reconstruction of the Malay cultural realm to be implanted in multiple localities across national borders to form a genuine Tanah Melayu or Malay land. These activities emphasized emotional ties with the land and the sense of belonging to a shared Malay culture and heritage in the form of language and traditional art forms. Malaysian organizations initiated these activities that were received well in other parts of the region as they boosted local pride and supported local political agendas.

The initial efforts go back to October 1970 when thirteen associations of Malay writers gathered to form the Federation of National Writers Association of Malaysia (Gabungan Persatuan Penulis Nasional/GAPENA) (Zakry Abadi 1989, 15–22). The highly respected Malay intellectual Ismail Hussein, who led GAPENA from 1971 to 2013, developed it into one of the most active organizations promoting Malay literature and culture on a national and transnational level. GAPENA strengthened networks in the Malay World by organizing a series of gatherings they named Northern Dialogue or Dialog Utara since the first gathering in Penang in 1982. In the framework of this Dialog Utara, events were organized in Medan, Aceh, Terengganu, Perak, and Patani to enhance cultural and economic ties between the northern states in the Malay Peninsula and the northern provinces of Sumatra and southern Thailand.[3] The Malaysian government supported this initiative as it wanted to use cultural efforts to boost economic cooperation in an Indonesia-Malaysia-Thailand Growth Triangle (IMT-GT). Moreover, the Northern Dialogue stimulated other dialogue series, one of which was a similar series of events in the south, Dialog Selatan, involving Singapore, Johor, and Riau (SiJoRi-growth triangle) to forge a regional network in the south of the Malay Peninsula.[4] Initiated in 1992, this Southern Dialogue also envisioned enhancing economic growth in an Indonesia-Malaysia-Singapore Growth Triangle (IMS-GT) development scheme.

In its effort to become the leader of a Malay World network in the closing decade of the twentieth century, Malaysia staged a number of big events.

Following the Malay World Conference in 1982, further initiatives were taken in 1996 to set up the Secretariat of the Malay World network in Kuala Lumpur.[5] In addition to these efforts by the central government, the regional organization Dunia Melayu Dunia Islam (DMDI, Malay World Islamic World) was founded in Melaka to position Malaysia (i.e. Melaka) at the center of the Malaysian transnational movement. In a convention held in Melaka in 2000, DMDI envisioned distributing Malay values and concepts from Melaka to the entire world (Sakai 2009, 65).[6] In all these events, dialogue series, conventions, and conferences, stage performances such as music, dance, and theater were given a central role to display the aesthetic forms of Malayness. These art performances stimulated a Malay activists forum, which further articulated Malay identity, and connected the dispersed Malay groups by propagating the narrative of a shared heritage.

As a response to initiatives by DMDI and GAPENA in developing the transnational network, Malay activists in the neighboring island tried to configure Sumatran Malayness to unite Malay communities.[7] In this respect, the concept of an integrated Malay cultural space, Alam Melayu, has been used to produce and make a sense of place. Hence, it comes as no surprise that the definition of the place of origin where the Malay kingdom of Srivijaya was situated, gains in prominence. Up until then, the dominant discourse of the Malay place of origin came from Malaysia, hailing Melaka as the very center of Malay civilization. Around the turn of the twenty-first century, Sumatra's claim as the place of origin became stronger, concomitant with the formation of Sumatran Malayness. Several political and economic factors explain this decline in Malaysia's dominance, while Indonesian provinces in Sumatra invigorated their efforts to develop a Malay transnational network.

The decentralization of the Indonesian political system is the main factor behind the reconfiguration of Malay culture and identity and the emergence of a joint Sumatran Malayness. This policy provided more authority and autonomy to the regional levels of the state's administrative system (regency and province) to stimulate economic, educational, and cultural developments. The tourist economy became an important tool for economic development, promoting commodified forms of heritage in specific regions and cities. Even though they are characterized by ethnic diversity, many regions in Sumatra stressed Malayness as their main identity. This reformation of Malay identity in Sumatra was particularly focused on traditional centers of power, such as Palembang, Jambi, Pagarruyung, Siak, and the island of Bintan. Fostering the ambition to become the heartland of the Malay World, the island of Sumatra tried to

change the configuration of the previous cultural map drawn from a Malaysian perspective.

From this macro view of the Malay transnational network, we focus the discussion on the sociocultural processes taking place on a micro level in Kepri. The initiatives developed by agents in Kepri are rooted in the cultural movement active since the 1980s in Riau Province. Initially, it was a resistance movement in the 1990s against the central government in Jakarta. Riau declared its own "Visi 2020," which included turning Riau Province into the Malay economic and cultural center of Southeast Asia. Toward the end of the 1990s, political activists took the opportunity to lead a Riau independence movement against Jakarta-led exploitation of the region's natural resources and the suppression of civil rights of its population (cf. Colombijn 2003). This independence movement lost its momentum when countered with the regional autonomy regulations of the early 2000s, but it did trigger a commotion in the Riau Islands where political elites called for the establishment of an independent province separate from Riau, which was realized in 2004. The separation between the two provinces entailed the issue of how to distinguish from one the other and, at the same time, consider them as one single Malay people. This issue of cultural competition inspired cultural activists and art performers of both provinces to strive after the same goal of promoting their provinces as the "motherland of Malay culture" in a friendly but sometimes stiff bureaucratic competitiveness. In this competition, cultural festivals and heritage performances play a major role in the "Malayization" of the people in both Riaus and producing locality, while configuring a vibrant and highly dynamic Malay ethnoscape in its wake.

Malaysian efforts have declined significantly since the economic crisis of the late 1990s, which has had consequences on the force and intensity of Malaysia's cultural influence on the formation of transnational Malayness. By contrast, art festivals, predominantly engaging itinerary troupes from the Riau Islands, seem to play an increasingly important role in the formation of identity in Sumatra and other regions. This line of argument would confirm a shift of the center of cultural formations from Malaysia to both mainland Riau and Kepri, meaning that the activities that started in the 1990s in Pekanbaru and slightly later in Tanjungpinang seem to be paying off.

Transnational identity work at a local level is the main concern of this chapter where we pay particular attention to the role of cultural festivals in recreating the concept of Tanah Melayu (Malay Land), thereby reconfiguring and inculcating emotional attachment to the image of the Malay self, which contains both local dimensions and transnational entanglements. Malay identity is presented and promoted in an aesthetic form through the imagery of theater and dance

performances. The concept of Malay kingship, which forms the central theme in the performances, symbolizes Malay sovereignty, territoriality, and dignity as a manifestation of Malayness that through these performances is being restored and propagated. Before discussing the circumstance surrounding the restoration of the sultanate of Bintan Darul Masyhur in Kepri, we will explore how arts festivals help to produce place and invite the multiethnic population of the region to become local subjects through a series of performed rituals (cf. Apadurai 1996, 185).

Cultural Festivals, Malay Homeland, and Transnational Entanglements

Transnationalist relations between migrants and the people in the home countries include affective ties that the people at both ends feel and cherish while often nostalgically imagining an idealized home that is no longer there. Malay transnationalism has much to do with such emotional feelings, nostalgia, and imagination of a cultural realm, a homeland, which harks back to the era before colonialism and the postcolonial nation-states. However, unlike the transnationalism of a diasporic community whose homeland is situated far away, the Malay homeland is produced "here" in the place where many Malays have lived for a long time. Since the nostalgic reproduction of a homeland is often historically configured or imagined as a genealogy based on royal lineages, former kingdoms such as Melaka and Riau-Lingga compete to be designated as such. This homeland is considered as tainted by modernization and the presence of substantial numbers of newcomers practicing their way of life in the *kampung* or Tanah Melayu. Therefore, acts of reclaiming places and the recreation of the homeland are thought to be necessary and important. Cultural activists and performers use cultural festivals to reverberate the story about ancestral origins and their subsequent migrations, and to create cultural heritage comprising paramount achievements of Malay civilization in order to reclaim the Malay land and remake the "space" into their "place."

The content and discourse surrounding cultural festivals held in Sumatra and the Malay Peninsula indicate the Malays' concern about place, cultural realm, and landscape. Such cultural events serve as a tool to reconnect people with their places and evoke a sense of belonging. It is interesting to observe the ways Malays support their claim of certain places or sites as part of their heritage. In more general terms, and with regard to the interconnectedness of the Austronesians with their places, Thomas Reuter (2006, 11) argues that

> The Austronesian-speaking people articulate their sense of belonging to particular places and lay their claim to land or other territorial rights by invoking local histories of ancestral origins and migration. These accounts of human movement and emplacement might be written down but more often they are conveyed as oral histories. Origin histories are also inscribed on the physical landscape in the form of sacred sites, and on the minds of local participants through their shared experience of ritual performances held at these sites. Together these commemorative social practices generate a powerful sense of belonging and emplacement.

Reuter's contention above refers to the work of ritual performance and ritualized practices and the impact these generate. It is in such events that stories are created and retold, reanimated in bodily performances, and reinstated through traditional practices such as rituals and art performances to (re)make places. For the people and the participants, particular cultural events at heritage sites provide the opportunity to socially reconstruct and personally experience places and sites.

A memorable occasion in the Riau Islands that can exemplify the construction of a place through a cultural event is the gathering of Malay authors from across Southeast Asia (Perkampungan Penulis Melayu se-Asia Tenggara) held in Daik on the island of Lingga in 1997. Yusmar Yusuf, then head of the Center for Malay Studies at the University of Riau, gave the opening speech and commented upon historical sites and traditions that people have practiced up to modern times in Daik as their heritage from the Riau-Johor Malay dynasty, the successor of the Melaka kingdom. In this speech, he coined the name Bunda Tanah Melayu (Motherland of the Malays) for Daik, which inscribed the title to the place and, more importantly, into the participants' minds. The participants who stayed (*berkampung*) there with the local Malays for some time while experiencing the local way of life, landscape,[8] language register, and special flavors of nostalgic *kampung* cooking, wrote down and published their experiences in the form of poems, pantuns, and prose stories. The Malaysian co-organizing GAPENA published their impressions under the title *Daik Bonda Tanah Melayu* (Daik the Motherland of the Malays) (Rejab F. I. 2000). This outside recognition was a great boost for the confidence of the Riau Islands in general and the island of Lingga in particular, as it has a history of being rather marginalized within Kepri, where the focus is more on the northern islands of Batam and Bintan. The local authorities of Lingga district formalized the sobriquet to become an official

epithet of the district's territory,[9] which was then followed by a Kepri governor who broadened its scale to the provincial level in 2010.

Place names, landscape names, renaming, and making sense of place all construct a narrative framework that draws a connection between the present generation and the ancestors. Place and landscape are material aspects of myths of origin, which are embedded in local knowledge and relate to the recitation of an ordered sequence of place names, or "topogeny," which "represents a projected externalization of memories that can be lived in as well as thought about" (Fox 1997, 8). The story of the origin of the Malay dynasty as contained in the *Sulalatu 'l-Salatin* recounts successive migrations from Mount Seguntang in South Sumatra to the Riau Islands, Singapore, Melaka, and back to the Riau Islands, which correspond with historical sites local Malay groups celebrate because of their cultural significance. However, the topogeny in the geographic context of the Malay World consists of several localities with their respective local configurations dispersed around the national territories of Indonesia, Singapore, and Malaysia. As a matter of course, the ensuing quest for the center of Malay civilization and its original place of birth is contested in historical studies, which interpret the remains found in such places as Kedah's Bujang Valley, Palembang, Jambi, and some other places like Kepri. These contestations over the place of origin attract attention from Malay groups across national borders, which show the transnational nature of Malay identity. Besides local configurations of identity grounded in the respective sites, there are attempts to articulate a shared imagination of the Malay land, Tanah Melayu.

A song composed in 2005, "Hymne Tanah Melayu" (Hymn of the Malay Land), illustrates these efforts of making sense of place, of inculcating a sense of devotion to the Malay land. It serves as a text that helps Malays (re)embed emotional attachment to the Malay land. Tengku Ryo Riezqan from Medan, who composed the song, stated that he wrote the lyrics as a synthesis of his observations of the Malay communities in Sumatra and Borneo. He inferred that the lives of the Malays had been seriously affected since the inception of the Republic of Indonesia that destroyed the traditional rule in several Malay kingdoms. His experience as a member of the paramilitary forces assisting Indonesian soldiers "defending" Timor Leste against a "separatist" movement, made him concerned about the fate of the former Malay territory on the east coast of Sumatra. Tengku Ryo is a member of the former ruling house of Serdang, but only in the late 1990s heard the story about the killings of family members during the so-called "social revolution" in East Sumatra in 1946. He stated that his hike to the top of the legendary Mount Ledang near Melaka inspired him even more in composing the lyrics of the hymn. He believes that

the traditional ruling elites have lost control over their lands, which would have been used to develop their culture and civilization and bring prosperity to the people.[10] Based on the general feeling that Malays have been pushed aside and alienated from their lands, the hymn expresses a call to the Malay land, to make sense of it, restore peoples' attachment to it, and reclaim it firmly into their possession.

The lyrics of "Hymne Tanah Melayu," which is regularly performed in the opening ceremony of festivals, emphasize the connection with the land by repeating the phrase *Wahai Tanahku, Tanahku Melayu* ("O land of mine, my Malay land"), which is further underscored with phrases about its nostalgic beauty, such as *sungguhlah permai sedari dulu* ("truly beautiful in the past and present") and *damai berpuak menjadi satu* ("all groups are in peace to become one community"). It is full of praise for the Malay land that will affect the subject *Aku* ("I") because *Engkau* ("you") refers to the land that gave birth to *Aku* (*engkaulah satu tempat ku ber-Ibu*). In addition, the melody of the song invokes *Aku*, whom the audience and performers will identify with, to sing it solemnly and internalize its lyrics. Ever since the song was released in an album entitled *Kecik* ("Small") and uploaded to a website in 2009, Tengku Ryo has received fan mail from people who share with him that the song evokes melancholic feelings. Tengku Ryo dedicated the song to the Malays around the world, and the responses indicate a reception in the Malay world at large. Currently, it is sung by both audiences and performers at the opening of Malay cultural festivals in Medan, Riau, Lampung, and Kepri.

In Kepri, Malay activists, artists, and local government promote the region as the motherland of Malays through cultural festivals. By cultural festivals, we mean occasional events in which cultural productions, such as performing arts, spectacles, and rituals are performed. With reference to Ling and Lew (2012), festivals can be categorized based on their historical and geographic context. Most festivals in Kepri are contemporary in origin and promote local identity if the historical context is used, while they can be classified as place-specific and place-nonspecific festivals if the geographic context is used as the criterion. Place-specific festivals are rooted in a certain locality that reflects a community's sense of place (ibid., 17), which in the context of the recreation of the Malay homeland construct a narrative about associations of the landscape and/or place with three iconic symbols: historical sites, heroes, and traditions.

The narrative that associates the Malay land with historical sites emphasizes objects, physical remains, and sites as evidence of the former Malay kingdom. The Carang River Festival (Festival Sungai Carang) held annually in Tanjungpinang presents the story of early eighteenth-century Riau with its harbor and royal

palace that the Johor Malay dynasty built in the upstream region of the Carang River. The Tanjungpinang municipal government supports the preservation of the palace site and the tombs of its royal occupants and celebrates these with a cultural festival. During the Festival Sungai Carang, the local government employs a number of boats decorated and named after Malay heroes whose tombs are found along the Carang River. In 2017 about fifty boats paraded from upstream of the river into Bintan Bay, watched by an audience congregated on the Tanjungpinang shoreline. A master of ceremonies briefly told the stories about the Malay nobles whose names were attached to the boats. This is an act of deploying selected historical narratives to accentuate the era regarded as the golden era of the local Malay kingdom and consecrate its former territory as the Malay land, that is, present-day Kepri with its capital Tanjungpinang.

The glorification of the former power center is a strategy to legitimate the act of invoking historical narratives to recreate a Malay cultural space. The Festival of Penyengat Island (Festival Pulau Penyengat) stages stories about the historical sites on the island as the former political and literary center of the Riau-Lingga dynasty of the nineteenth century. At the Festival Pulau Penyengat in 2018, Raja Malik Hafrizal, one of the members of the main aristocratic family and co-organizer of the festival, enumerated buildings and places on the small island to illustrate the glorious history of Penyengat Island and emphasize the achievements of his renowned ancestors, scholars of language and literature. Already imagined as one of the main pillars of Malay identity, the language as marker gains in significance to be highlighted in the case of Penyengat. As one of the region's three contributions to the pantheon of national heroes, Raja Ali Haji, a member of the viceregal family, was added because of his merits in the development of the Indonesian language. Nineteenth-century language authorities designated Malay as used in the islands to be the main source for its standardization in the nineteenth century, which later was used as an important basis for standard Indonesian.

In addition to local interests to promote Kepri's reputation as cultural and literary center in the Malay World (and attract tourists from other parts of the Malay world),[11] the Malay homeland with its landscape used in the story as backdrop implies a transnational space. This is used by Malaysian and Singaporean Malays to trace and ground part of their shared history. Moreover, both Festival Sungai Carang and Festival Pulau Penyengat amplify the significance of the Malay territory that they want to recreate.

Photo by Alan Darmawan

Fig. 1. A float with a marriage ceremony conducted by a group of school children in a parade during the Festival Tamadun Melayu in 2017 in Daik, Lingga Island.

We find a similar case in Lingga with the Malay Civilization Festival (Festival Tamadun Melayu) in 2017, which nostalgically reminisced about the rule of Sultan Mahmud Riayat Syah over the Riau-Lingga kingdom and parts of the Malay Peninsula (Johor and Pahang; r. 1761–1812). Even though the festival aimed to celebrate the bestowal of the title of Indonesian national hero on the sultan, the main focus of the narrative was the *territory* under Sultan Mahmud's rule with Daik as its center. Therefore, the organizers gave a prominent role to a rebuilt royal complex to serve as a backdrop for staging heroic stories about the sultan who commanded a "marine guerrilla" strategy against the Dutch based in Tanjungpinang. He is reported to have used nearby islands and Mount Daik as natural fortresses and a sago forest as food supply for the people. This narrative frames the festival as a place-making event by connecting the hero to the Malay land of Daik which he defended against the Dutch. Delegations from Terengganu and Johor took part in the celebration and consecration of this transnational space which, at the same time, represented the local ambitions of Lingga to recreate itself as the center by celebrating the hero status of one of its sultans.

Such entanglements of local and transnational interests are also reflected in the International Literary Festival of Mount Bintan (Festival Sastra Internasional Gunung Bintan/FSIGB). In 2018 the event promoted the Malay legendary hero Hang Tuah and, as the organizers implied, Sungai Duyung, a place near Mount

Bintan, as his place of birth. FSIGB is the manifestation of the local interests in promoting the former Malay kingdom called Bentan and its heritage site around a hill located in the area of Bintan Bay named Gunung Bintan (Mount Bintan). Yet, the interests in boosting the reputation of Bintan are intertwined with the transnational dimension of Malayness, in which the territory and the kingdom called Bentan were among the places where the Malay progenitor first settled in his migration from Palembang.[12] The organizers of the FSIGB also promoted an alternative story of Hang Tuah's place of birth that is imagined to be located on Bintan. In this festival, poets from across the Malay World gathered to discuss and publicize their creative work. Many of the performed poems reinterpreted the legendary figure of Hang Tuah and glorified him with the aim of keeping the figure alive as a role model for future generations. Festival Sastra International Gunung Bintan 2020 was held online at the end of September and comprised performances of poetry readings and an online seminar in zoom which was uploaded on YouTube. This format continued in the 2021 event and is being planned as live performances in 2022.

Fig. 2. The performance of mak yong by a troupe from Mantang Island at the Festival Mak Yong 2019 in Tanjungpinang. In the foreground we see a cross-dressed female actor as the king in a dance with the clown figure, Awang Pengasuh. *Source*: Institute for Preservation of Cultural Values (Balai Pelestarian Nilai Budaya/BPNB) Kepri, 2019.

Apart from associating place with sites and heroes, the festivals also connect place with traditions. These place-specific festivals enhance the relationship between places and traditions as we encounter in the Festival Sungai Enam, celebrating a subdistrict on the south coast of Bintan. In November 2017

the festival promoted and celebrated the local Malay traditions of a theater performance called Mak Yong and a social dance named Joget Dangkong,[13] as well as the local dish *otak-otak* (fish cakes), a snack known throughout the Malay World. The event clearly aimed to make the dish into an icon of the *kampung* and enhance its place identity. Such an iconic tradition related to a certain *kampung* is also what the Festival Mak Yong Mantang presents. By making a place identity for the island of Mantang, situated just off Bintan's south coast, the festival brings to the fore a narrative that connects the Mak Yong theater to Mantang Island and strengthens its reputation as the place where the theater form was initially developed in the Riau Islands. This does not mean that the people of Mantang do not realize that the tradition is a part of heritage shared with other Malay communities in East Sumatra and the Malay Peninsula. The narrative, in this respect, shapes the identity of place and links it to the rest of the Malay World.

The consciousness of sharing a rich heritage with other Malay communities while localizing and connecting them with particular *kampung* in Kepri piecing together a Malay homeland, is prevalent in and organized through cultural festivals. Within the above frames, the festivals exhibit traditionalized cultural practices, some of which are revived, such as performing arts, ritual practices, genuine *kampung* food, literary works, textiles, and martial arts. These commodified traditions are made and remade into a shared Malay heritage in the entire Malay World. The theatrical performances of Mak Yong and Bangsawan that center on the royal court life take a prominent position among the promoted art forms. They distribute and animate images of feudal power, loyalty, kingship, and territoriality, and in addition propose court etiquettes as cultured values of Malay propriety which the people may want to follow if they see themselves as "cultured Malays."

Mak Yong and particularly Bangsawan are widely distributed in the Malay World. These art forms are considered to epitomize the Malay language, music, costume, moral values, and most intriguingly, the Malay way of life. The repertoire is predominantly fictional although Bangsawan, especially, is known for the historical sources the stage plays are based on or refer to. An example of this is the play "Sultan Mahmud Riayat Syah," which narrates the move of the sultan from Riau to Lingga and his resistance against Dutch colonial rule.[14] If Mak Yong tends to contain slapstick humor and features a clown figure who, to a certain extent, may subvert the king's authority, in contrast Bangsawan contains dialogues in a refined style of the language, gestures, and manners of the royal family and its retinue at court. If Mak Yong manifests the image that emphasizes an intimate relationship with royalty, Bangsawan performs an image of the

Malay aristocratic family in its sublime majesty. Interestingly, in the current context of their revival, both amplify a sense of loyalty and submission to the king and his power. As the reconstruction of the Malay cultural realm requires justification of certain territory as Malay homeland, Mak Yong and Bangsawan become a vehicle to instantiate the stories and imagination of Malay kingship, kingdom, and territory. These forms preserve the basic idea of the social and political structure of Malay society of the past, which the present generation may want to revive.

The (Re)appearance of Royalty and a Global Sufi Movement

In this section we will discuss one of the other pillars that is pivotal in the configuration of Malay identity and the production of a territory that might be considered as the Bunda Tanah Melayu. The different strands of its imagery are localized but also have strong transnational connections which are instrumental to explaining the inauguration of a sultan without any royal credentials, thereby outweighing local aristocratic families who may have more authoritative claims to reinstate a sultanate in Kepri. In the discussion about this recent development in local cultural politics, we refer to Arjun Appadurai's work on transnationalism and his proposition about the importance of imagination and its distinction with sheer fantasy:

> The idea of fantasy carries with it the inescapable connotation of thought divorced from projects and actions, and it also has a private, even individualistic sound about it. The imagination, on the other hand, has a projective sense about it, the sense of being a prelude to some sort of expression, whether aesthetic or otherwise. Fantasy can dissipate (because its logic is so often autotelic), but the imagination, especially when collective, can become the fuel for action. It is the imagination, in its collective forms, that creates ideas of neighborhood and nationhood, of moral economies and unjust rule, of higher wages and foreign labor prospects. The imagination is today a staging ground for action, and not only for escape (Appadurai 1996, 7).

The imagination of royalty as presented in Mak Yong and Bangsawan (re)familiarizes Malays with the notion of kingship, and therefore enhances its position as part of their cultural identity. Therefore, these theatrical forms

would also be helpful in generating acceptance or other positive responses from the surrounding society about the revival of kingship in the twenty-first century. Here, too, the transnational premise of Malay culture comes to the fore in support of a general appraisal of the revival of the institution of the sultanate in Kepri. In the federated state of Malaysia, nine sultans have continued to be invested with a certain authority and governing capacity by the central government, particularly in the spheres of customs and religion. Even in Singapore, the defunct Malay royal institution was resuscitated to a certain extent by one of the members of the family of the Malay sultan installed by the British in the early nineteenth century. The descendant of the sultan's family, Tengku Mohammad Shawal Ibni Tengku Abdul Aziz, apparently does not carry the title sultan, but rather occupies the politically less sensitive function of custodian (*pemangku adat*) of Malay customs in a rather imaginary "Singapore, Riau-Lingga Sultanate." In this function he does, at least occasionally, bestow honorary titles on individuals, such as an Indonesian member of parliament, Arsul Sani, on his visit to Singapore in September 2019.[15]

This is similar, in fact, to what has been taking place in Indonesia on a much more regular basis since the turn of the new millennium, when President Suharto was forced to step down and consecutive new governments promulgated laws for administrative and political decentralization. One of the ramifications of this "communitarian turn in Indonesian politics" is that the "return of the sultan" has become such a common characteristic that Gerry van Klinken (2007, 149) suggests that "sultanship has become perhaps the symbol par excellence of local identity in Indonesia's autonomy era." According to his research, seventy of the more than three hundred principalities that existed in Indonesia at the beginning of the twentieth century had an incumbent in the early 2000s. Most of these were the result of recent revival activities of the following three types: an existing institution that raised its profile, a kingdom dismantled or destroyed in the first decades of Indonesia's independence that was resurrected or a principality that had disappeared in the more distant past and was now being reinvented (ibid.). The inauguration of a leader in the previously unknown sultanate of Bintan in Kepri is a clear example of the third type as there are only scanty indications that the island once was the seat of a Malay kingdom.

Based on her research into the change of power in Indonesia at the turn of the past millennium, Vivienne Wee (2002, 502) argues that atavistic tendencies of Malay elites in the islands have fueled efforts to recreate the idea of the Riau-Lingga sultanate as a cultural reality in contemporary times, which have also legitimated everyday practices of several customs and rituals derived from a feudal past. The Malay ruling house of Riau is considered the most senior

and legitimate cultural heir of the Melaka throne, as it was in Riau that the family eventually settled after its forced departure and peregrination when the Portuguese vanquished Malay forces and occupied the town of Melaka. The other Malay royal houses still in existence in Malaysia and Indonesia came later, while the royal pedigree may not always be generally acknowledged.

Therefore, the claim of the elite that Riau-Lingga is Melaka's rightful heir is not without reason, nor is it new, but what is emphasized in this latest atavistic revival of Malay royalty is that the family returned to the *root* kingdom where the family once started and changed the area into a thriving polity. As mentioned in the introduction of this chapter, the foundational text *Sulalatu 'l-Salatin* relates how a legendary descendant of Alexander the Great settled first in Bintan before founding the settlements of Singapore and Melaka, from which they were ousted by foreign forces after they had changed them into international entrepots. By contrast, in Bintan the Palembang prince Sri Tri Buana (also known as Sang Nila Utama) was welcomed by an already established royal house, with whom he entered a family relationship by marrying the daughter of Queen Wan Seri Beni—probably the most common line of argument found in traditional historiography.[16]

Archaeological explorations in the area indicate early settlements from the fourteenth century on the coast of Bintan Bay, where pot sherds, glass, and bronze items were found that suggest international trade between the islands and China (Miksic 2013, 377–78). Combined with the legendary tales of the *Sulalatu 'l-Salatin*, this information is normally interpreted as an indication of early cooperation between roaming Malay royalty with sea nomads for whom the Riau Islands was one of the places used as a temporary base. Local historians, however, go much further in their interpretation and apply their imagination to concoct stories to fill in blanks in the history which may also be used as "fuel for action" (cf. the above quotation by Appadurai). For instance, in one of the local histories we find Bintan mentioned as the direct heir of Srivijaya because the Palembang prince replaced the local queen and mother-in-law Wan Sri Beni in 1158, after which he moved the kingdom to Singapore (Abdul Malik, et. al. 2012, 3).

The historiography follows the peregrination of Malay royalty along the mentioned paths to eventually return to firmer ground on the banks of the Carang River or Hulu Riau, near present-day Tanjungpinang, where the Malay royal family settled and thrived in the early eighteenth century. This place became their power base from where they warded off attacks by Siak forces led by Raja Kecik with the assistance of Bugis mercenary forces whom the Malay aristocrats had engaged for this purpose. This cooperation and intermarriage between Malays and Bugis had a long-lived impact on the configuration of

the power relations in the Riau-Lingga sultanate lasting until 1911, when the last (Malay/Bugis) sultan, Abdul Rahman, was deposed by the Dutch colonial government. The sultan took refuge in Singapore while other members of the family went to Johor, Terengganu, or stayed in the island of Penyengat. In subsequent periods, certain factions within the sultan's family made efforts to reinstate the sultanate, but to no avail. However, in 2007, two families on Bintan who claim to be direct descendants of Tun Telanai—the caretaker of the former kingdom of Bentan after Sri Tri Buana had left on future missions—inaugurated a person without any royal credentials as custodian of Malay traditions (*pemangku adat*). Five years later, on December 12, 2012, at 12 o'clock midnight, this custodian of Malay traditions, Huzrin Hood, was installed as the first sultan of Bintan Darul Masyhur—the revived and renamed kingdom of Bentan. The surprising part here is that for some reason it was not the most eligible member of the official Malay sultan's family lineage, Tengku Husin, who was chosen to become the new head of a revived Riau sultanate. Instead, a local political figure who had led the local elite's struggle to elevate the administrative status of the region from regency (*kabupaten*) to that of province in 2004, was granted a position into the local aristocracy.

With an educational background as religious teacher and law student, Huzrin Hood went into politics in the mid-1970s and steadily made his way up the ladder in the governmental party ranks of Golkar to become the *bupati* (head of the regency) of the Kepulauan Riau by 2000. However, his term in office was cut short because of a two-year jail sentence for misappropriating funds from the regional budget after a legal process that, according to his own assessment, was fraught with political issues (*sebuah kasus hukum yang sarat muatan politis*) (Huzrin Hood et. al. 2015, 76). As champion of the struggle for the regency's elevated status, he was slated to become the first governor of the new province, but he was instead sent to Bandung to serve his sentence. The short stint he spent there obviously did not break his spirit to develop the region of his birth, and he returned with great fervor to continue where he had left off. He strengthened his network in the region designated as the growth triangle SiJoRi (Singapore, Johor, and Riau), taking the initiative to establish a youth organization, a business association, and become the founding father of the prestigious regional championship in martial arts (*pencak silat*), which is considered as a specific Malay identity marker. Huzrin Hood is also listed as director and commissioner of several companies and a number of social organizations, such as chair of the Kepri's regional branch of the Friendship Forum of Indonesian Archipelago Palaces (Forum Silaturahmi Keraton Se-Nusantara) and chair of the Indonesian Mosque Council (Dewan Masjid Indonesia).

Huzrin Hood and his assistants compiled a book about the resurrection of the Bentan kingdom and its historical background with the contemporary objectives of grounding an economy based on sharia laws. In this work, with the ominous title *Sesat di Ujung Jalan, Balek ke Pangkal Jalan* ("Lost at the End of the Road, Return to the Beginning of the Road"), Huzrin Hood stated that he wanted to revitalize trading activities as part of everyday life in accordance with Islamic law and elevate the dignity (*marwah*) of Malay customs and culture (Hurzin Hood et. al. 2015, 79).[17] In a section of the book that was summarized from an article by one of the main leaders in the global Murabitun sufi protest movement, Syeikh Umar Ibrahim Vadillo, it is explained that the Prophet Muhammad upon his arrival in Medina created two institutions: the mosque as a place of worship and a market (*souq muamalah*) as a place where people could exchange goods without paying rent for the stalls or taxes to any authority (ibid., 39–40). Fanned by the devastating financial crisis that severely affected Malaysia in 1997, the Malaysian prime minister Tun Mahathir Mohamad ogled the Islamic gold dinar as currency to fortify the nation against attacks from Western speculators, fight the near-monopolistic position of the American dollar in international trade, and unite Malaysia with its Muslim brother states in the early 2000s (cf. Abu Bakar bin Mohd Yusuf et al, 2002). In December 2019 Dr Mahathir reiterated his intention to introduce this setup, which, in his view, was an effective cure against Western economic dominance. At the end of the summit of the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), he revealed that Iran, Malaysia, Turkey, and Qatar were seriously considering trading among themselves using the gold standard and a barter system to guard against economic sanctions (Lee 2019).

Ironic in the context is that the return of the Islamic gold dinar from before the early Muslim caliphates originates in, and was promoted globally by, a relatively small movement that predominantly consists of European converts to Islam. The Scottish convert and charismatic Syaikh Abdalqadir as-Sufi (1930–2021) established this Murabitun movement in the United Kingdom in 1969 and ever since has functioned as its spiritual leader. The Murabitun movement is a mystical order branched off from the Darqawi order in Morocco and particularly targets minorities in regions outside the core area of Islam, such as South Africa, Mexico, and the United States, to cater to "protest converts" and to prepare for a global Islamic revolution (Bubandt 2009, 108–9). The more worldly and political program of the movement is designed and led by the abovementioned Syaikh Vadillo, a Spanish convert who has settled in Kuala Lumpur. He is the chairman of the World Islamic Mint, the organization responsible for the issuing and the standards of gold and silver coins and was the founding president of the World Islamic Trading Organization. He has authored many books and travels around

to promote the cause. The overall goal of the movement is to cancel the use of paper money as it leads to usury and inflation and break the control of the banking system on the exchange of goods. After this is achieved, they would be able to recreate a society that is supposed to resemble the one at the time of the Prophet Muhammad. Clearly the gold dinar and silver dirham that were introduced to pay *zakat* and other obligatory expenses related to Islam, eventually would replace the local currency. Unsurprisingly, this causes big problems for the introduction of the sharia exchange system even in majority Muslim nations, such as Malaysia and Indonesia. In a recent move by the Indonesian government, the main Indonesian representative of the movement, Ir. Zaim Saidi, who wrote the foreword in Huzrin Hood's book (2015, iv–v), was arrested and the *muamalah* market in Depok disbanded because all financial transactions should make use of the official currency, the Indonesian rupiah, as Vice-President Ma'ruf Amin explained to news agencies and on his official website.[18]

Source: Photo by Alan Darmawan.

Fig. 3. Silver coin (Dirham) with a weight of 2.975 gram valued as 1 dirham, which was minted by Sultan Huzrin Hood of Bintan Darul Masyhur in 2013 (1435 A.H.). The standard of this coin (purity of its silver and weight) is authorized by the World Islamic Mint led by Syaikh Umar Ibrahim Vadillo.

The Murabitun sufi movement has been quite successful in propagating the use of the gold dinar and silver dirham among sultanates in the Malay World, such as Ternate, Cirebon, and Bintan in Indonesia, Sulu in the Philippines, and Kelantan, Kedah, and Perak in the Malay Peninsula. These kingdoms have all minted coins in the name of their sultans which are used for the payment of *zakat*, alms, dowry, and in *muamalah* markets. Shortly after he was inaugurated as the first sultan of Bintan, Huzrin Hood opened a *muamalah* market near his house with rules as stipulated by Shaikh Vadillo on the principle of creating public marketplaces as opposed to private institutions, such as supermarkets. At his Sultan's Market, nobody paid any rent for the stalls and people would

trade by using the gold and silver coins that were minted with silver and gold obtained from the state-related mining company PT Antam and donations from abroad, as Huzrin proudly acknowledged in an interview in 2019.[19] He also set up a scholarship program for young people (Pendidikan Perwira Bintan) to get an education in accordance with the basic rules of the Murabitun movement so that the common people would be enabled to retrieve the power hijacked by the banks and big companies (cf. Vadillo 2002 as quoted in Bubandt 2009, 112). Another project that he has planned and is building is an integrated center referred to as Imaret, where a mosque and Islamic boarding school will be joined by small business enterprises to enhance the wellbeing of the people (Huzrin Hood et. al. 2005, 61–64). At the time of editing this volume, the Imaret was still under construction.

It is debatable how far the influence of the new sultan reaches and to what extent he will change or fortify the cultural identity of the local and translocal Malays, but many networks come together in this figure who is widely connected with other revived sultanates and principalities in Indonesia (that partly also follow the Murabitun guidelines). He is clearly a figurehead whom the local government respects and supports by financing the building of his palace and other facilities. For some unknown reason, Huzrin Hood dropped out of the 2020 provincial elections. However, it seems only a matter of time before he will combine his Sri Tri Buana's crown as sultan of Bintan Darul Masyhur with the Malay headdress, *kopiah* or *tanjak*, of the Kepri governor.

Conclusion

In this chapter we have tried to capture and explore the dynamics of Malay identity works in the relatively recently established administrative area of the province of Riau Islands (Kepri). The configurations are a good example of how local, transregional, transnational, and global forces come together in one Indonesian region, which itself borders on two other nation-states. Since the elevation of its status to an autonomous province in 2004, the local authorities have been active in reconfiguring the image of the region and its population from a backwater collection of islands strewn in the sea (Segantang Lada) at the edge of the nation populated by marginalized and destitute Malays into an island province imagined to be the center of the transnational Malay world, where the many immigrant groups will learn what it is to be a Malay by learning its literary and cultural productions. We highlighted two indicators used by the authorities, as well as by grassroot cultural activists, to manifest and propagate

this new status of Malay identity, namely art festivals that help to produce place of certain sites. Performances commemorating certain historical events that took place at the site, such as the Festival Sungai Carang, augment the significance of these sites. This festival memorializes the return of the Malay sultan's family to the region by settling at the Carang River in the beginning of the eighteenth century. Such commodification of cultural expressions not only present this heightened meaning to groups of naïve tourists, but also try to persuade the multiethnic population of the region to become local subjects through a series of performed rituals (cf. Appadurai 1996, 185). Approached from a transregional and transnational perspective, people living outside Kepri who self-identify as Malay will recognize the style and may feel at home with these commodified cultural productions.

These performances are not only staged by professional cultural activists but are taught as part of the curriculum of local schools and have experienced an increasing popularity among the younger sections of the population, many of whom will not have ethnic Malay roots in the province. There seems to have been a change in the appreciation of the local culture among the local youth, who in the early 2000s were reported to opt for Indonesianess over the local Malay forms (Faucher 2006). In Kepri there are many arts training centers (*sanggar*) that specialize in Javanese, Sundanese, Balinese, and other regional cultures in Indonesia, but the Malay culture is considered as a relevant part of living in the Riau Islands.

Another significant marker of local identity is having a sultan who symbolically rules over his people, bestows the occasional title, and is a special public figure in the sociopolitical configuration of society. Since 2012 Riau officially has a new sultan after 101 years of absence and many efforts have been made to revitalize the institution during this century of absence. The fact that the incumbent has no royal credentials and that his ancestors are Javanese rather than ethnic Malay does not seem to be big issue for this public figure who is widely connected to sociopolitical organizations and private companies. He focuses his efforts on purifying the Islamic economic exchanges and returning the people's faith and dignity in their local traditions and culture. His efforts are parallel to those of the local authorities who albeit fear his power and influence, also appreciate his endeavors. With him as the sultan, they have a figurehead who can enlarge the chances of the province becoming the imaginary Bunda Tanah Melayu.

Endnotes: Transnational Malay Identity

1. The research for this chapter, comprising fieldwork in Tanjungpinang and other parts of the Riau Islands, was carried out in the framework of the EU-funded Competing Regional Integrations in Southeast Asia (CRISEA). We are grateful for being granted the opportunity to conduct the research and want to thank the members of the Research Programme for their constructive comments, particularly Volker Grabowsky and Jayeel Cornelio, whose feedback has been instrumental in improving this chapter. Any mistakes and errors are, of course, our responsibility.

2. In this chapter we use Kepri (Kepulauan Riau) to refer to the province of Riau Islands formed in 2004 and Riau Province for the province on the mainland of Sumatra with Pekanbaru as its provincial capital.

3. This information is based on the documentation of the regional dialog forums "Dialog Utara" in the form of programs and proceedings. See Dialog Utara IV 1989, Dialog Utara VII 1997, and Dialog Utara VIII 1999.

4. Zaini-Lajoubert (1992) reported on the first Dialog Selatan held in Johor. See also Dialog Selatan II 1995.

5. See the following sources: Simposium Jaringan Melayu Antarbangsa 1996, Malay World Conference 2001.

6. DMDI's vision was also reiterated in the following conventions. See Konvensyen Dunia Melayu Dunia Islam IV 2003 and Konvensyen Dunia Melayu Dunia Islam V 2004.

7. Riau Province took the first initiative to develop Sumatran Malay networks in 2006 (see Musyawarah Lembaga Adat Melayu Se-Sumatra 2006. In addition to this, see https://www.riauterkini.com/hukum.php?arr=9257). The last gathering of Sumatran Malay networks so far documented was the third conference which was held in Jambi in 2014. See https://acehprov.go.id/berita/kategori/umum/rumpun-melayu-se-sumatera-persiapkan-musyawarah-paripurna-iii.

8. In Malay *pantun* and other genres, Mount Daik (Gunung Daik) features prominently for its peculiar three summits which are ascribed legendary, magical powers and are imagined to be the abode of invisible creatures (*orang bunian*). That the belief in such forces is still alive emerged in an interview Alan Darmawan had with a Mak Yong actor who, after having staged a Mak Yong performance in Daik, was driven to the verge of suicide. He could not cope with tensions caused by *orang bunian* who had watched the play and were enraged with him because he had failed to pay proper respect to them (interview, September 6, 2018).

9. This sobriquet of Lingga, Bunda Tanah Melayu, was officially made and included in the official logo of Lingga district following the local bylaw No. 20 of 2012 (Peraturan Daerah Kabupaten Lingga No. 20 Tahun 2012 tentang Perubahan Atas Peraturan Daerah Kabupaten Lingga No. 3 tahun 2005 tentang Lambang Daerah, Motto dan Slogan Kabupaten Lingga).

10. Summarized from the interview Alan Darmawan had with Tengku Ryo on September 27, 2020.

11. Local authorities sponsor these festivals as they are expected to have a positive impact on foreign tourist visits to Kepri who predominantly hail from Singapore (48.5 percent) and Malaysia (10.5 percent), making a total of 1.3 million visitors in 2019 (Wilda Fajriah 2020).

12. See below for a more elaborate discussion about this. As for the spelling of the name of the island and the kingdom once located on it, Bentan is used to refer to the old kingdom while Bintan is used as the present-day name of the island. The revived Kesultanan Bintan Darul Masyhur seems to make use of both interchangebly.

13. Mak Yong is a theater form that combines dance, music, slapstik comedy, acting, and storytelling. It exists currently in the Indonesian provinces of Riau Islands and North Sumatra, the northern states of the Malay Peninsula, and the southern provinces of Thailand. Joget Dangkong is a dance performed by a group of females, who in some part of their performance, invite male members of the audience to join the dance.

14. A Bangsawan theater group in Lingga, Sri Mahkota Lingga, performed this play in November 2017 at the Festival Tamadun Melayu held in conjuction with the celebration surrounding the inclusion of Sultan Mahmud into the pantheon of national heroes of Indonesia. Alan Darmawan made a copy of this play script and recorded the stage performance of the troupe at the festival. Another play about Sultan Mahmud was composed and performed by a troupe from Dabo-Singkep, Lingga, at Festival Tamadun Melayu in 2013 in Tanjungpinang (Kornhauser 2019).

15. Around 1819 a conflict about the successor of the Malay sultan in Riau-Lingga resulted in one of the contenders being inaugurated as sultan of Singapore, but there was never a sultanate under the name of Singapore, Riau-Lingga. Another contender to the throne was installed in Lingga as Sultan Abdul Rahman, who continued the family's reign as might be expected, under the watchful eyes of colonial officials. Tengku Shawal bestowed the title as part of the festivities to commemmorate the 200th anniversary of the establishment of modern Singapore, which was also the start of the Malay sultanate of Singapura (see Agus Setiawan 2019, "Sekjen PPP dapat gelar datuk di Singapura").

16. Unsurprisingly, the local and traditional stories differ in some details: in certain versions it was the daughter, in others it was the queen herself who married the prince from Palembang. The continuation of the local historiographic tradition also makes use of different versions, frequently without any attempt to verify the information that is provided.

17. In the book and other Malay sources that refer to the global dinar movement, the term *muamala* is used, often spelled with a final -h or -t. This Arabic word *mu'amala* refers to social life and intercourse as well as business transaction (Wehr 1976, 646). It may be that the Murabitun movement coined the special meaning, and in the Malay World it is used with the religious connotations, also for Islamic banking which is one of the institutions the Murabitun movement vehemently opposes (Bubandt 2009,112).

18. See website Cabinet Secretariat of the Republic of Indonesia, February 4, 2021.

19. Part of the interview can be viewed in the CRISEA documentary Malay Identity on Stage (CRISEA Website).

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