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Asia Week 2008

From Monday 20 October to Thursday 23 October Asia Institute will showcase a series of Asia-themed events, demonstrating the diversity of intellectual, artistic, and cultural activities of the Institute and its partnering institutions. Many of these are Indonesia-focussed (music, book launch, seminar, and workshop). For details online please visit the Institute's homepage at www.asiainstitute.unimelb.edu.au.

Indonesian Film Festival 2008

Melbourne University Indonesian Students' Association (MUISA) will present an Indonesian Film Festival at the RMIT Capitol Theatre on 11 October. For more information, please contact Suhandy on 041 2486 634. Films to be screened will include: *May* (2pm), *Lost in Love* (5pm) and *Fiksi* (8pm).

Commemorating Sumpah Pemuda

The Indonesian Students' Association and Community at La Trobe University (KILaT) will be organising an Indonesian Week Program on the 12 October to commemorate Sumpah Pemuda and the 80th year of Indonesian as the national language. An Indonesian speech competition and various workshops will be held. To register for the speech contest or to get more information, please contact <dgie8@yahoo.com>, <adiwwaluyo@yahoo.com>, <mnkearney@students.latrobe.edu.au>.



Laksmi Pamuntjak (photo N. Heryanto)

Indonesian Teaching Position Available

Highview College is seeking a full-time Indonesian teacher to commence from Term 1 2009. Applications including resume and contact details of three referees should be sent by 8 October 2008 to The Principal, Highview College, 21 Kars Street, Maryborough 3465.

Islamic Studies Postgrad Conference

The Centre for Islamic Law and Society's 4th annual Islamic Studies Postgraduate Conference will be held on 17-18 November 2008. For details and registration online: www.cils.unimelb.edu.au/activities/pgrad-conference-2008/index

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Laksmi Pamuntjak speaking in Melbourne, photo Nina Heryanto

Between Black and White

The *Blue Widow* is one of very few literary works by an Indonesian originally written in English. In this interview with Justin Wejak author Laksmi Pamuntjak discusses her experience writing this novel-in-progress, which may challenge not only the historical discourse of the 1965 political turmoil, but also the male-dominated practice of history writing more broadly.

Why is the title of your novel *The Blue Widow*?

Blue is a state of mind, really. And in saying this I am very aware of the way meanings are historically attached to words, and how in this case I am using the English language as a point of reference: blue as melancholy, as sadness, as grief, as a widow, even as subversion as in "blue film". It recently struck me that I almost invariably write about difficult love, doomed relationships, loneliness, motherhood - all of which have about them what Kate Walbert calls "l'heure bleu," the blue hour, which is always shot through with a sense of the ephemeral, of loss. Blue is also about the state of being between black and white. The writing of history in the Indonesia in which I was born and bred was very much a black and white one.

Tell us about the widow referred to in the novel.

She is Amba, a character from the Hindu epic Mahabharata. She is the princess who is swept off the swayamvara by Bhisma along with her two younger sisters to be married off to the underaged King Wicithawirya. She is the woman who is twice rejected, first by her betrothed, Salwa, on the ground of her being impure, and by Bhisma, whose vow of celibacy and sense of duty couldn't permit him such pleasure. In my reading, Amba's rancour at being rejected, which culminates in her reincarnation into the warrior princess Sri-kandi, bespeaks a fiery passion, a virile force that can only have come out of a great love.

*There is also a rich mother-daughter theme that threads the story. The idea that a daughter ransoms her mother - a point once raised by Roberto Calasso in his book *Ka*, a powerful retelling of the Mahabharata.*

Your novel deals with the historical memory of 1965, right?

My novel deals with the historical memory of 1965, in which 1 million Indonesians were killed in one of the largest communist purges of the 20th century, and in which some 12,000 alleged communists were carted off to the tropical gulag of Buru in the Maluku Islands and detained there for a decade without due process.

You mention the character Bhisma in your novel. Who is he?

In the novel, Bhisma is an ex-political prisoner who may or may not have been murdered there in 2006. The story revolves around the quest of his lover, Amba, by then 60 years old, to find out the truth. It also tells the story of Srikandi, their illegitimate daughter, who is a globetrotting performance artist. She struggles, both personally and professionally, with multiple identities, borders, tolerance, difference. Through her, we get a sense, I hope, of a generation born out of pluralism, but denied the resources with which to access the past.

What initially sparked your interest in this topic?

Two things: Growing up in Indonesia in the 70s and 80s with the absence of historical memory, and my fascination with mythology. I was born in 1971 and raised in Jakarta. This was a time in which history seemed to have been divided, or indeed, conscripted, into Old Order or pre-Suharto era and New Order or the Suharto era. My generation was fed only one version of the "politicide" of 1965 — and a very one-sided, "black" and "white" one at that.

So you didn't experience directly the 1965 events.

Even if I didn't have "direct" experience with 1965, either through family or relatives, I did bear witness to the way events in 1965 had put into place obsessive internal security systems that eliminated political freedoms and continued to constrain many thousands of Indonesians through suspicion of communist contamination. My subsequent friendships with ex-political prisoners reveal that history is not just about some grand political narrative. It is often about the story of ordinary people. I find that the novel, as a form, lends itself much better to these stories, to the "tiny spaces" often overlooked by the panoptic gaze of history with a big H.

My research into that part of history also reveals horizontal tensions, especially of the socio-economic kinds, that existed long before language came into the picture. Land conflicts, for instance, that flared up like an angry pimple when stoked by an ideological war. And suddenly friends and neighbours started killing each other. All sides experienced loss. That, to me, is the real tragedy.

You mentioned mythology earlier. How do you look at the 1965 events from the perspective of mythology?

Looking at 1965 from the perspective of mythology has been useful. It is not to deny that a systematic, politically-charged pogrom of members of the Communist party and its affiliated organisations and sympathizers did take place. It is not to deny that so many Indonesians were killed, and that the Suharto regime should be held responsible for what was perhaps one of the most terrible bloodbaths in the 20th century.

*But often the effectiveness of a political project such as the New Order relies on the way it feeds into human nature. Milan Kundera reminds us in *The Art of the Novel* that "Man desires a world where good and evil can be clearly distinguished, for he has an innate and irrepressible desire to judge before he understands. Religions and ideologies are founded on this desire." We often require that someone be right: either the Kurawa of the Mahabharata was evil and the Pandawa was good, either Indonesian communists were evil and the New Order was good. We often demand an "either-or".*

True. What does mythology really do in your own experience?

In my experience, what mythology does, aside from exploring our desires, fears and longings, is also to help provide narratives that remind us what it means to be human; it highlights doubt, ambiguity, vacillation, and lack of definition as the essential human condition. It reminds us that no one side is just bad, or just good, or unequivocally this or that. That no one side is monolithic, such that we can have only one "Islam", one "Communism", one "army", the way the New Order drew up the universe and shoved it down our throat.

In this context, the story of 1965 cannot be couched in terms of "good" and "evil", "right" or "wrong", but rather, of human tragedy, in which everyone, bar none, perished, and in which everyone, bar none, was, in a sense, a victim. People forget that the army and the local authorities were just as helpless and as confused as the suspects were during the chaos of that period; what reigned were fear, suspicion, and doubt. Countless innocents were severely penalized.

So you're drawing parallels between the Mahabharata and historical events of 1965?

The Mahabharata, which, after all, is a timeless allegory of war within a family, accommodates such penumbral areas. It provides a host of opportunities to "body-forth" characters and invest them with internal dialogue. Only when we accept ambiguity as the human condition are we more open to stories of ordinary people. It also highlights the ways in which human

beings attain their highest lucidity at the point of destruction. I saw much evidence of this: the extraordinary instances of empathy and compassion, of genuine friendship and forgiveness between the oppressor and the oppressed.

What sort of research did you do for this novel?

I had the good fortune to visit Buru Island in July 2006 with a few good friends. One of them is an ex-Buru political prisoner or 'tapol' for tahanan politik. We had the advantage of his rich perspective, as well as the realities of the new Buru, so much of which have been shaped by what happened before. By which I mean not just a decade of penal colony, and the ways in which 12,000 strangers ushered in a new way of life and irrevocably altered the island, mainly through agriculture, but also the more recent religious conflict of the 2000's, traces of which are still felt in the charred remains of mosques and churches burned to the ground, and in the way we were tailed not just by intelligence agents from the military but also from the police. And the two aren't exactly best friends.

It was also interesting to observe how old ingrained habits die hard. One day, also in 2006, a unit commander who had actually been quite well-liked by the tapols—in the days of the penal colony, he used to smuggle Tempo and Time magazine to the literati among them!—went back to visit. As you know, some tapols had elected to remain in Buru after the dissolution of the penal colony. When he entered the room filled with ex-tapols, it was clear from their body language that the old power dynamics hadn't died. They were huddling on one side, in an "inferior" position, as though in a classroom, waiting for the authority to assume command. Such power structure was indented on them, like a second skin.

In many ways, Buru is a festering wound, a giant, pus-filled pimple. There is a strong feeling of things never being laid to rest. I should like very much to be able to go back to Buru once more. I also plan to go to Bliitar and Kediri, two regencies in East Java where many of the killings took place.

Were there any difficulties in obtaining materials and approaching people for interviews, and how did you tackle them?

I have been blessed with a few sources who have been generous—with their memory, with their trust. In all such cases, however, it didn't happen instantly. There is so much silence around this subject. Both as a pre-condition as well as an outcome.

I am always reminded by a line in Sorry, a novel by Gail Jones, one of the Australian authors I most admire: "There is a hush to

difficult forms of knowing, an abashment, a sorrow, an inclination towards silence."

Yes, there is so much silence. I can "hear" it everywhere: in a recent dinner with Indonesian communist exiles in Paris, some of whom, despite the lift of the ban to return to Indonesia, have not come home for nearly forty years since the start of the bloodshed. In the children and grandchildren of lost communists, too fearful to talk. Even now, when there is relative freedom to talk about that dark episode of our history. So I listen and wait. Until they open up.

Other materials are harder to get by. Many records in the National Archives are still difficult to obtain. Many records on communist activity are scattered in various government departments rather than gathered in the central archive.

Re-telling of stories can be challenging, especially when doing so imaginatively.

Whichever way you look at it, man cannot escape History. As Kundera says, "History is impersonal, uncontrollable, incalculable, incomprehensible, and we are all in its clutch." And because my novel is essentially a historical novel, I find that I am still tied to the imperative of verisimilitude, to realistic settings, to chronological order. I try not to tamper with dates, places, and real people. I try to think in period, and be as faithful to historical details.

But there are so many spaces within such boundaries for storytelling, for new explorations, for possibilities of human existence. In a way, this is the same as reading ourselves as fiction. I find so much liberation and fun in "reinterpreting" characters from mythology—giving them a new voice, as it were. I also think in music, as in a performance, in pictures, as in an exhibition, in scenes, as in the cinema, or a play. I think culinarily.

In a way all telling is retelling; it becomes fiction. And when you finally see the novel as a place where the imagination can explode as in a dream you realise that fiction is a more complete truth, because it is never about a single truth.

When you would like to complete the novel?

By 2008, I hope. Though discipline often eludes me in the process, more than with any other writing I have done. Perhaps because a novel is like a big canvas—you almost don't know how to begin and end. Also, there comes a point when words take over and one ceases to have control over one's work. This must be what Roland Barthes meant by "The author is dead."

Has the decision to write in English come matter-of-factly?



photo by Francois May, reproduced here with permission of Laksmi Pamuntjak

I was raised bilingual and as I grow older, English comes more naturally to me. Also, I have always been an avid reader in English. As Jeanette Winterson says, "Books speak to other books; they are always in dialogue." In fact, one has to be a little in love with a language to write in it; I believe I am.

Have you ever been questioned disapprovingly for publishing in English?

I think it's not so much about being disapproved of as it is about not being read. Except for my Jakarta Good Food Guide series, now in its third edition, not many people read my books in Indonesia. The main reason is because they are in English. Not to mention that two of them are poetry collections. Nobody reads poetry, and one is an almost willfully difficult collection of stories on paintings. Not everyone's cup of tea.

Once or twice, I came across comments that I am unrooted, that my heart is not in my homeland, that I want something that has no connection with "Indonesianness." My references and choice of metaphors are deemed "un-Indonesian."

In some ways we've seen the same sort of chauvinism in accusations levelled against writers from the post-war generation, notably Chairil Anwar and Asrul Sani, whose desire to escape, to go to sea — to a space of journey, adventure, challenge, a space that knows no boundary — was deemed "half-caste", being neither completely Indonesian or completely something else.

And how did you respond to such a charge?

My response to such a charge has always been that no one subject is ever of one root, one home, one language. Identity, especially "national identity," is a very porous thing. We are always a subject in process — hybrid, fluid, ever-changing—and in whose process always struggles to preserve that ungraspable, private "I".

Furthermore, we should question what "Indonesia" is. Ben Anderson reminds us in Imagined Communities that the concept itself is a 20th century invention, imposed upon a nation that now consists of 17,000 islands, some 450 languages, a space that is constantly in flux and never the 'one' thing.

I am aware, however, that in my case, I am a sort of the "Double Other." Because the English language demands an English-speaking audience, in my own country, I am different because I occasionally write in English, in an English speaking country, I am different because I am an Indonesian. To a degree, Indonesians expect me to write about things Indonesian to represent "us." English-speaking audiences expect me also to write about things Indonesian to affirm "them."

Would you like to encourage more Indonesians to produce more publications in English? Why? How?

Absolutely. Mainly because Indonesia is not on the global radar, or part of the world consciousness. Not yet, anyway. There is too small a diaspora, too little exposure, not enough English translation.

The world does not know enough of its recent accomplishments, especially in art, literature, science and philosophical inquiry. The culture of discussion, the myriad interesting works on the reinterpretation of Islam. The relative freedom of the press, the vibrant publishing scene. The many faces of Islam, and a long history of tolerance and living with difference. Its amazing food. The lessons it can impart on diversity, on the miracle of its "oneness", despite its artificiality — a patchwork of old/new, here/there, high tech/low tech, and shot through, always, with a sense of bricolage.

And also because the world does not know enough of its pain, its struggle, the scars of its history. Victims of so many causes and constituencies, each needing, one way or another, some kind of historical clarification, public reckoning, national efforts to "get to the bottom of", to end impunity and to help recover a common humanity.

What sort of audience do you have in mind when preparing *The Blue Widow*?

This is the hardest thing. There is always the spectre of a dual audience. Indonesians, on the one side, to whom the work is dedicated, and who deserve a freshness and originality of perspective. Foreigners, on the other side, for whom Indonesia registers barely as a blip, and who require, therefore, a lot of background. Navigating between the two imperatives is not easy. The last thing you want in a novel is to be rambling and pedantic, or to give potted lessons in history.

Can you comment on literary works by other Indonesian writers with similar

themes? How does yours differ from others?

*For one, I am coming from an entirely different era, with a different sensibility and aesthetics. Added to which mine is not an eyewitness account the way of Pramoedya Ananta Toer's *A Mute Soliloquy* or Hersri Setiawan's equally rich memoir, both indispensable testimonies to history and to the human spirit.*

I have always fallen, whether I like it or not, into a mixture of styles and perspectives. There is also the poet in me, which is both a bane and a blessing. The imaginative risks of poetry, with its celebration of language, and the ambition for the form itself, can enrich a novel. But they can also ruin narrative momentum. It is always my goal, in this novel, to combine the precision of poetry and the elasticity of storytelling. Whether I succeed to or not remains to be seen, and is not for me to judge.

Finally, what is your next project? Another novel?

I want to go back to poetry, where I am most liberated, where I am most at home. But I also look forward to being surprised anew, once I've moved past this novel. I look forward to the new person I will have become because of writing this story.

Laksmi Pamuntjak has written columns and articles on politics, film, food, classical music and literature since 1994. She has also published two poetry collections, translated various works of Goenawan Mohamad and has co-founded Aksara, a bilingual bookstore in Jakarta.



Laksmi with some of those attending her talk in Melbourne 1 May 2008 (photo A. Heryanto)

Beyond the Shadow Puppets:

By Amber Earles

Ten years of studying Indonesian could not prepare Amber Earles, graduate of The University of Melbourne, for her experience of living in a Pesantren. Below she tells us of how she discovered a 'real' Indonesian culture, and realised how many other different 'Indonesias' the diverse archipelago has to offer.



Amber Earles among her friends (courtesy of the author)

Recently, on catching up with a friend and former colleague I had worked with in Islamic schools from 2004 to 2006, our conversation turned to the fact that before arriving in Indonesia both of us thought that we knew what to expect. I had studied Indonesian language and culture since grade five at primary school and had just completed a Bachelor of Arts saturated with subjects related to Indonesia. My friend had spent almost twenty years teaching Indonesian in Victorian schools and was also very confident in her ability to understand the language and culture.

In retrospect, this exposure had only served as the briefest of introductions. Our background in the language assisted in communication in the initial stages but we quickly had to adapt to the way language was used in our respective communities in order to ensure we avoided embarrassment and were understood. This not only involved learning colloquialisms but also Javanese, a completely different language. Our brains stretched and screamed as we sought to live and work using a second and third language.

A culture of puppet theatre (wayang) and dancing was idolised throughout our Australian experience of Indonesia and even during brief visits we had made to the country. However, in two years of living in a rural Javanese town particularly renowned for its pesantren, I only ever saw one wayang performance, and that was on Independence Day. There was never a dance to be seen.

The community had its own personality distinctly different to anything described in

books that informed me of what to expect from Indonesia. People woke early in the morning to pray and exercise before the heat of the day. Pesantren were places where the sexes were segregated and boys bounced about in the classroom while girls sat primly in their seats. Teachers worked up to four jobs each, for little pay, and still had a thirst for learning. Boys played soccer in tartan-style sarongs of an afternoon while girls went shopping or spent time with friends. Night time brought a carnival atmosphere to the town with foodstalls popping up along the streets and in the town square. Parents sat at the stalls sipping sweetened coffee or eating *nasi mawut* while children honed their skills on a miniature motorbike course weaving around the stalls. The strumming guitars of young male neighbours soothed the ears at bedtime.

This Indonesia is specific to the area where I lived. Travel to another area in the archipelago and you will have a completely different experience which will disprove everything you have heard or read about Indonesia in the past, including this piece. You'll learn a great deal about an amazing place, as well as about yourself and your own culture and background.

Amber is a graduate of The University of Melbourne and formerly worked at the Aceh Research Training Institute, an initiative managed by the Asia Institute. She worked as a Teacher Trainer on the Islamic Schools English Language Project based in East Java as well as an Education Consultant on the Dayah Development Project in Aceh.

Democratisation, Islam, and Human Rights

By Nur Hidayah



Nur Hidayah (photo A. Heryanto)

Nur Hidayah explores the transformation of the democratic landscape of Indonesia since 1998. She argues that more interfaith dialogue, plurality and human solidarity are urgently needed to protect human rights in Indonesia.

Does democracy necessarily promote human rights? This question has gained greater significance in several Muslim-majority countries with a strong desire for democratisation. A transition from an authoritarian regime to a more democratic one has produced unintended consequences such as conflict, violence, political-economic instability, and tyranny of the majority. Such tyranny exists when the regime adopts the Islamisation of law on the basis of majority rule.

The cases of Sudan, Algeria, and Northern Nigeria, illustrate the point. The implication of such tyranny of the majority is not only the strict Islamisation of the law at the expense of human rights but also the marginalisation of universal Islamic values respecting equality, liberty, and justice. This happens when the state fully controls the implementation of shari`a based on a conservative interpretation.

The Case of Indonesia

Indonesia's democratisation since 1998 has not resulted in much significant protection of human rights, although legal reforms have been undertaken. These reforms have started with the series of amendments to the 1945 Constitution, because this Constitution was deemed as the root of New Order's authoritarianism. The amended Constitution stipulates the protection of human rights in article 28. Unfortunately such an amendment still has loopholes.

The mention of religious values as a consideration in upholding the human rights in this article is vague because the term is open to various interpretations. One can interpret that the efforts to promote and protect human rights must not contradict religious values. The vague statement is also open to conservative Muslims to pursue their agendas to implement formal shari`a in Indonesia without due consideration that such agenda might contradict the spirit of the amended Constitution by violating individual rights and fundamental freedoms that the Constitution is meant to protect.

This concern is well founded as attested to by the experience of democratisation in Indonesia. There seems to be a persistent agenda for shari'a implementation from conservative Muslim groups. Having failed to reach their aim at the national level by reinserting the seven words of Jakarta Charter "the obligation to implement shari'a for its adherents" into the amendment of 1945 Constitution, they now take advantage of regional autonomy policy at the local levels.

Aceh is the first province to enjoy the authority to apply the shari'a. Soon afterwards many other predominantly Muslim regions followed suit. By 2006 no less than 53 districts or cities - and this number is growing - ratified the so-called *Peraturan Daerah Shari'a* (shari'a-based bylaws) into their local district regulations.

Several aspects of human rights protection have been severely affected by the shari'a implementation, such as religious freedom, women's and minorities' rights. In Aceh, based on Qanun No. 11/2002, only *Ahlus Sunnah wal Jam'ah* doctrine of Islam is recognised. Both in Aceh and several other regions implementing shari'a, a new dress code has been interpreted to mean the obligation to wear veil (*jilbab*) for Muslim women. Several raids against non-*jilbab* clothed women have been conducted. It was revealed that even non-Muslim female students in state schools and civil servants

in the city of Padang, West Sumatra, are required to wear veil.

Furthermore, women's freedom of movement is restricted by the raids of shari'a police on women going out unattended by a qualified adult male at night as happened in Tangerang city and other regions. Such shari'a-based bylaws have not only contradicted the Indonesian higher laws but have also gone beyond the regional governments' authorities because religious affairs in fact remain the jurisdiction of central government.

The problem actually lies beyond the immediate context of shari'a implementation. Although the 1945 Constitution guarantees religious freedom, the implementation is far from satisfactory. Yusman Roy, for example, was sentenced in 2005 to two years in jail for conducting a reading of *Al-Fatihah Sura* in Indonesian translation during his prayer. The controversial trial against him stood unheeded, despite the fact that praying with non Arabic language is considered valid by the *Hanafi* Islamic law school.

In the same year, Indonesian Ulama Council (MUI) issued a fatwa labeling Ahmadiyah - a sect in Islam that believes *Mirzu Ghulam Ahmad* as a promised *messiah* or a *mahdi* (rightly guided leader) - as a deviating sect, whereas a Prophet's hadith states that "The differences of opinion among the learned within my community are [a sign of] God's grace." The MUI in fact went so far as explicitly banning religious pluralism although the definition of pluralism in this fatwa is highly debatable. These cases reflect the vulnerability of human rights protection in contemporary Indonesia's democratisation.

What's Next?

What actions must then be undertaken to ensure that Indonesian democratisation sails smoothly and simultaneously with better protection of human rights? First, there is an urgent need to build a stronger democratic political culture that respects plurality, toler-

ance, freedom, and interpersonal trust. This is particularly critical within the regional autonomy context because many local rural elites appear to be so conservative and preoccupied with identity politics. Therefore democracy as a system of rule based on free and multi-party elections must be accompanied by constitutional liberalism as a system of rule based on the separation of power, rule of law, and protection of human rights. To achieve this, democratisation must come with political and economic reform, as well as capacity building, in order to produce an independent middle class as a pillar of democracy.

Second, Islam as an ideology must transform itself. It must offer moral and cultural legitimacy for its adherents to grow democratic political culture and the respect for human rights. Islamic universal values, with emphasis on humanity, must be contextualised through *ijtihad* (independent reasoning in Islamic jurisprudence) by re-actualising classical Islamic legacy while at the same time being open to the challenges of modernity. Interfaith dialogue and synergy among religious groups must continue to build respect for plurality and human solidarity, which are crucial for human rights protection.

To sum up, as democratisation opens space for the freedom of speech, some forces in the society, including those using religious primordialism, might emerge and inadvertently pose a challenge to democracy and the promotion of human rights. Therefore democratisation needs to follow with the civility of the people so that it can support the protection of human rights.

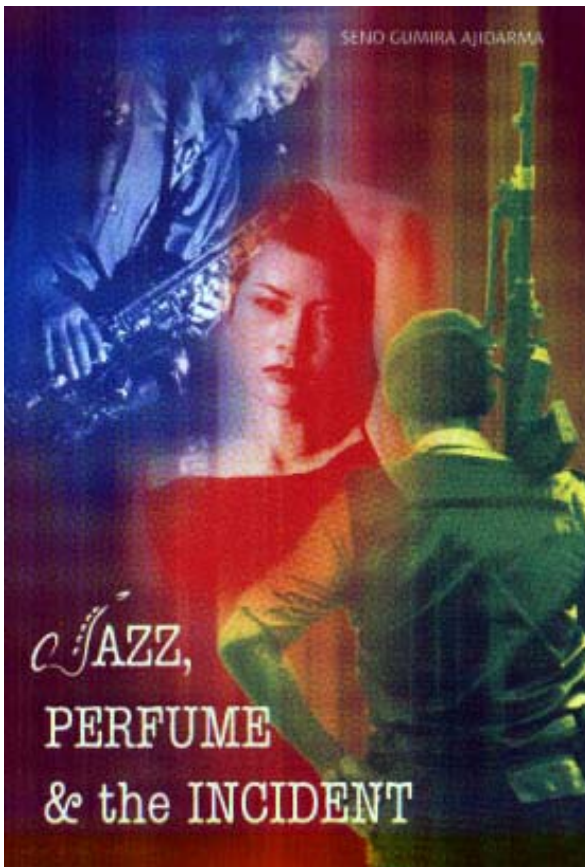
Nur Hidayah is a PhD candidate at Melbourne University. She obtained her MA in Islamic Politics from Durham University, UK. She was active in the International Center for Islam and Pluralism (ICIP) as a researcher and a program coordinator.



Secondary school students in East Java (photo A. Heryanto)

Jazz, Seno, and Jakarta

By Andy Fuller



The narrator of Seno Gumira Ajidarma's *Jazz, Parfum dan Insiden* is a journalist based in Jakarta. Late at night he reads reports of the massacre which took place in Dili, November 12, 1991. While doing so, the journalist listens to jazz recordings. He wears headphones attached to a walkman. (If the author were writing this book in the early 2000s, perhaps the character would be using one of those thin white contraptions with white headphones and without any buttons and without a 'stop' button.) The jazz the narrator listens to facilitates his escape from the immediate context of his surroundings (Jakarta late at night) and allows him to concentrate on distant matters (the shooting of unarmed civilians and the history of a way of making music).

Michael Bodden, a scholar of Indonesian arts, has written on this book in Foulcher and Day's *Clearing a Space*. He aligns the postmodernist discursive practices with that of postcolonial criticism. The narrator intermingles his reflections on jazz – a way of “musicking” (to follow Christopher Small's phraseology) borne of social struggle - with notes on a more contemporary political struggle. Seno ‘writes back’ to the centre,

from the centre. Both postmodernism and postcolonialism, Bodden claims, are aimed at destabilising singular narratives, singular claims to 'the truth'. In the case of *Jazz, Parfum dan Insiden*, these interventions take aim not only specifically at the New Order government, but also interrogate the ways in which notions of truth are constructed. Bodden writes:

this Indonesian (my italics) postmodernism was both an effort to produce new discourses and practices of resistance to the pervasive social and cultural manifestations of President Suharto's authoritarian regime, and a response, either alienated or celebratory, to new conditions of life and artistic production.

In the opening pages of the first section on jazz in *Jazz* there are, for me, a couple of key passages and ideas. The first concerns 'what jazz is'. This passage suggests that the meaning of jazz is fluid and shifting.

Some people say jazz can mean anything. It depends on the starting point. Some have said that jazz can mean 'sex'. Heck. That's not what I'm looking for. No one has ever given a satisfactory answer. Or, more precisely, there has never been a final answer.

And a moment later the narrator claims, 'we don't need to be experts in music to like jazz.' On the following page, the narrator points to jazz's origins as a music which allowed for a marginalised social group to claim a broader social space. That narrator states:

That is the uniqueness of jazz for me. It is like entertainment, but it is a bitter kind of entertainment. It is melancholy, it stirs up feelings of sorrow. There is always pain in jazz; always a kind of poignancy. [...] A jazz singer doesn't become free because he or she sings, but there aren't any chains that are able to stop someone from singing. That is the reality of jazz: freedom of the soul.

This reading of jazz suggests a persistence of strong modernist tendencies. 'Jazz' if we look at it in all of its current varieties, doesn't seem reducible to this liberative function. Music gives expression to the feelings, emotions, soul of the performer. This rubs against the grain of postmodernist critiques of individuals having centered beings, having a 'true self'. These are ideas explored elsewhere in Seno's writings.

Seno locates, within jazz, a relevance to the position of silenced and absent voices throughout the New Order. Jazz is the music of the night, echoing the way in which the narrator knows women through their perfumes. Jazz reminds him of 'the scent of

a woman', the night life of a 'metropolitan' city, and is also related to the distant murders of unarmed civilians. The narrator asks, 'what type of music would Chick Corea create were he to hear this story? I don't smell any perfume. I smell the stench of blood.'

For Seno, jazz is different from other forms of music because it allows for the instruments to be in dialogue with one another. Each instrument is supposedly equal; each instrument reacts and responds to the changes in pitch and rhythms of the other.

This seems to be the criticism that Seno is making to the centralist and singular-voiced Indonesia of the New Order era: it was an era in which the voices from the margins were subdued and removed from public discourse. Just like the wag who commented 'my favourite Indian instrument is the bass guitar', jazz, in Seno's novel is imagined as 'Indonesia's national music'.

Andy Fuller is a PhD student at the University of Tasmania.



Trekking Mount Bromo

By Carla Evans

A visual journey from the 'Sea of Sand,' up the winding path, past a Ghost Market, a Hindu Temple, right to the very tip. Images, except the last, in this article are courtesy of the author.

As the night slowly gave way to dawn we began to make out our destination in the distance, a huge crater billowing white sulphuric smoke. As we crossed the expanse of sand known as *Laut Pasir* (Sea of Sand) various other weird and wonderful rock formations came into view. The landscape could only be described as unearthly. If it were not for the Hindu temple tucked down beside the crater and the set of stone steps leading up the side of the crater one could easily be mistaken for thinking they were on the moon.

Actually we were in the middle of the Tengger Caldera in East Java. The Tengger Caldera is the largest in Java with its sea of sand measuring 10km. The immense crater was formed when a massive explosion 8000 years ago caused the top of the Ancient Tengger volcano to be blown off. The Tengger caldera derives its name from Roro AnTENG a fifteenth century princess from the Hindu Majapahit Kingdom and her husband Joko SeGER who started the principality after fleeing their kingdom to avoid converting to Islam.



People climbing the mountain (top right) look like ants moving from the distance

We finally made it to the base of the crater and started the very slow climb to the rim with many stops along the way as the sulphuric smoke made it harder and harder to breathe. At the back of my mind was the news of the six school children that died in July 2007 after inhaling poisonous gases when camping close to Salak Volcano just south of Jakarta. But there were already a few locals waiting at the top to sell offerings so we thought it must be safe enough to continue to the top.

The offerings were small bouquets of wildflowers from the nearby *Gunung Semeru* (Semeru Mountain). The local Tenggerese explained I was to pray as I threw the bouquet into the smoking crater. They then proceeded to tell me about the annual *Yadnya Kasada* festival.

The Tengger principality was flourishing under the rule of the princess and her husband, but as the years passed they began to worry, as they had not produced a child. They climbed to the top of *Gunung Bromo* (Mount Bromo) to pray to the gods who granted them help but requested that the last child be sacrificed to the gods. The couple agreed and went on to have 25 children. When time came for the sacrifice the princess refused and the gods threatened the kingdom with ruin. Knowing she had no choice the young boy was flung into the crater. Each year offerings of flowers, fruit, vegetables and livestock including goats are thrown into the crater to commemorate the sacrifice.

The next day we set off at 3.30am for the supposedly two hour climb to view point two, one of the highest points on the outside caldera. We had been told that the path was easy to follow and if we left early we would make it there in time for sunrise. At that time of the morning the wind was icy. The walk started off easy enough along a moonlit road that meandered through plots of land growing all kinds of vegetables. The road suddenly diverted onto a forest track that slowly became more and more overgrown and enclosed by bushes and grass higher than my waist. My thoughts started to wander to the stories I had heard from a friend in Yogya about the *Pasar Hantu* (literally Ghost Market) that was meant to exist in the area. As we continued walking the possibility of ghosts did not seem as frightening as the prospect that we were lost.

Since entering the forest the path had never been easy to follow, but we decided we had definitely taken a wrong turn when we started climbing up the side of a steep cliff, grabbing hold of tufts of grass to stop ourselves tumbling down 100 metres. Thinking it may be better to stop and wait until the sun was out, we sat down where we were. After only five minutes we started shivering and realised we'd freeze if we sat still for the next hour waiting for the sun. We very slowly started making our way back down the cliff and hoping desperately we hadn't taken any more wrong turns. We eventually came to a set of stairs that were almost completely overgrown and knew we'd found the track.



Although we didn't make it to view point two in time for sunrise, we did make it to view point one, which was not quite so high. We couldn't see the sun emerge from the horizon, but we did enjoy watching the sun's rays turn the sulphuric smoke cloud hovering above Gunung Semeru, the tallest peak in Java (3676 metres above sea level), from white to pink.

When we at last made it to the highest view point the sun had well and truly risen which meant we could enjoy one of the most amazing views I have ever seen without the hordes of tourists that usually zip up there in their jeeps for the ten minutes of sunrise.

Carla Evans is an Indonesian Program student at The University of Melbourne.



Sunrise at Mt. Bromo in 2008 (photo A. Heryanto)

Do Chinese Indonesians Have Their Own Media?

By Stanley Y. Prasetyo



Stanley (fourth from right) with locals at Wamena Valley, photo courtesy the author

Since 1998 it has often been suggested that the ethnic Chinese communities in Indonesia have regained their liberty, including the freedom of expression and publishing their own mass media. How true is such a widely held view? Has there been any media of reasonable quality by and for this ethnic community that resembles its predecessors before their being banned by New Order government (1966-1998)? Can it be the case that the current re-emergence of Chinese-focussed media is a marketing strategy to capture the potential advertising revenue among business circles of this ethnic community?

The political freedom in Indonesia after the fall of Suharto on the 21st of May 1998 has undergone various fundamental changes. President Abdurrahman Wahid (Gus Dur) who replaced B.J. Habibie in 1999 helped to liberalise the political space. He declared his commitment to freeing society from state control of information and of matters pertaining to social work. This was achieved by, for example, demolishing the state ministry of information and that of social affairs.

In 2000 President Gus Dur issued his Presidential Decree No. 6 in 2000 which allowed Chinese people to express their Chinese cul-

ture and language. His successor President Megawati declared in 2002 that The Chinese New Year would be a national holiday from 2003. Traditional dances such as *Barongsai* and *Liong* have now been enjoyed by many different people, including political parties who claim to be committed to cultural pluralism.

The mass media soon followed suit. The tabloid *Naga Pos*, the daily *Glodok Standard*, the daily *Indonesia Shang Bao*, the tabloid *SuaR 168* and many others, saw the opportunity to capture a flourishing new market. There were approximately ten media outlets in the beginning of the reform era, but only a few survived. The tabloid *Naga Pos* only published for 6 months and the daily *Glodok Standard* only lasted one year.

By early 2008, there were only nine media outlets that specifically focussed their readership on the Chinese ethnic segment of the population, including *Indonesia Shang Bao*, *Guo Ji Ri Bao*, *Suara Indonesia*, *Harian Indonesia (Re Ji Ri Bao)*, *Kun Dian Ri Bao*, *The Universal Daily News*, *Era Baru*, and the magazines *Sinergi*, *China Town* and *Suara Baru*. On top of one online media, five print media use Mandarin, three use Indonesian, and one English. The Chinese audience

segment also appears in television programs from networks such as Metro TV. However, this is merely tokenistic. The same is true with features in the newspaper *Lampung* which is owned by Metro TV- Media Indonesia Group.

From a strictly journalistic perspective, the newspapers which aim to capture advertising revenue from the Chinese Indonesian business circles are no different from their mainstream media counterparts. They heavily rely on what locals call "talking news", where quotations of comments and opinion from prominent figures dominate the presentation of a piece of current news report, instead conducting a professional journalistic investigation. They follow the principles of "big name big news, no name no news"

The management of media in Mandarin, such as the newspaper *Indonesia Shang Bao*, believed that they would reap a sizeable sum of profit from this ethnic minority that constitutes no more than 5 per cent (or about 10 million people) of the total population of Indonesia. It should be noted that the younger generation of Chinese Indonesians, brought up and educated under the New Order, speak no Mandarin.

Chinese-Indonesian focussed media have one common feature of interest. Many of the photos they publish are ceremonial in nature, showing people shaking hands, gift giving, or people posing for group photos. These Chinese Indonesians appear to enjoy having their picture taken and published in

the newspapers. In many newspapers, photos of prominent figures and Chinese business people are in great demand.

A large portion of products being promoted in the advertisements published in these print media are many Chinese products including Chinese motorbikes, pumps, machines and books in Mandarin. This suggests that the media which specifically focus on this ethnic segment aim to capture advertising revenue from the business circles of this community whose profession has traditionally been restricted to trade and commerce.

Ten years after the Indonesian Reform, there remains an absence of media outlets that provide meaningful public debate and political education for Indonesians of Chinese descent who read Mandarin. Like their mainstream counterparts in the national language, media outlets in Mandarin are merely subject to the law and logic of the business world, namely maximising profit by selling sensationalist news.

Stanley Prasetyo is a commissioner for the Indonesian Human Rights Commission. He will be making several presentations at the University of Melbourne during his stay from 21 to 23 October. The text above is a translation of his talk for the public discussion on "Contemporary Expressions of Minority Groups in Indonesian Mass Media". on Tuesday 21 October, at 6:00-7:30pm, in the Yasuko Hiraoka Room, Level 1, Sidney Myer Asia Centre, The University of Melbourne.



Stanley Prasetyo, photo courtesy the author

For the Record



Sitok Srengenge (left), Jan Cornall (top right) and Justin Wejak (right bottom), photo: A. Heryanto

Poetry Meets Jazz

Indonesian Program (Asia Institute) hosted poet Sitok Srengenge and jazz singer Jan Cornall who performed and discussed a selection of works from their collaborative jazz poetry CD, *Singing Srengenge* on 30th September to an attentive audience at the Sidney Myer Asia Centre. Senior Tutor Justin Wejak was invited to read one of Sitok's poems. A live dialogue with the audience interspersed the very intimate performance.

Celebrating 20 years of Radio Kita

Radio Kita celebrated its 20th anniversary on August 2nd at the Indonesian Consulate. The celebration featured Indonesian food, live bands and cultural performances. For the last 20 years Radio Kita has been broadcasting fascinating programs discussing issues relevant to both Australia and Indonesia. The program can be heard every Friday 8-9pm on ZZZ 92.3FM (Melbourne).

Accomplices in Atrocity: The Indonesian Killings of 1965

Researched and produced by Tom Morton, this podcast features Kate McGregor and John Roosa. The program discusses one of the worst mass murders of the later 20th century, which happened on our doorstep - yet few Australians know about it. In late 1965, the Indonesian army orchestrated the killing of half a million communists and suspected sympathisers in reprisal for what they claimed was an attempted Communist coup. Historians who have studied thousands of declassified Australian, British and American documents say they reveal a shocking truth: the Western powers not only knew about the killings, but were accomplices in atrocity. The podcast can be downloaded from the following URL www.abc.net.au/rn/hindsight/stories/2008/2356330.htm

In The Next Issue:

- An interview with Dirk Tomsa, researcher of Indonesian politics, society and democratisation at The University of Tasmania
- Harry Bhaskara, Senior Editor of The Jakarta Post offers his views on the media and Australian-Indonesian relations, and internship opportunities for students from Melbourne
- An exploration of the village life experience in Sigerongan by Nicholas Brown
- Cultural clashes and computer crashes in One Night in Yogya by Madeleine Macfarlane