



Lontar Newsletter

Email: contact@lontar.org

December, 2023

Greetings from the ED

Reviewing the activities of the past year is always a challenge, particularly when it involves a vital yet complicated developmental theme such as education. Despite the evolving structure of schools and their curricula over the past decades, the spotlight at this year's end will most likely focus on the "Freedom to Learn" (Merdeka Belajar) policy launched by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research and Technology last year and how its implementation has fared since.

Generally welcomed for its novel and fresh approach towards the decades-old system of "learning by rote and repetition," the new policy had instilled hopes of more creative methods for students to successfully understand and grasp the three fundamentals: literacy, numeracy, and logical thinking. Lagging behind in the global ranks of educational standards, the government introduced this new policy with the hope of catching up on lost time and opportunities. However, like anything that is new and untested, the nation-wide program encountered monumental challenges with its infrastructure, administration, and, in some cases, political obstacles.

Launched right after the end of the Covid years, the new program was introduced without adequate preparation. Teachers and educators needed the proper orientation and the appropriate tools and materials to be acquired. Given the online nature of lessons to be taught, technological hardware and software had to be made available to all schools. For those located in some faraway regions, this took time. Most importantly,

Ruminations

A Living Saint ^{*)}

As a good Catholic boy, I was raised with the goal of one day making it into Heaven, the most sure way of which was to become a martyr. They got automatic entry! So I studied the list of early martyrs, looking for an easy martyrdom. No luck. Saint Bartholomew, was skinned to death; Saint Antipas was cooked alive; and Saint Agnes was burnt at the stake. Not my style. Because a sin-free life was another way of getting through the pearly gates without first having to go to jail, I then decided to become a living saint but, as years passed and time went on, hormones and basic nature got in the way.

On June 5, 1981, the Center for Disease Control and Prevention in the United States reported that five homosexual men in Los Angeles, California, had contracted a rare form of pneumonia seen only in patients with weakened immune systems. These were the world's first recognized cases of AIDS. At that time and until 1983 (when I decided to settle in Jakarta) I was living a peripatetic existence, shuttling back and forth between Indonesia, where I was hoping to find paid translation work, and the U.S. where I was working as an escort-interpreter for the Department of State. This latter job involved escorting and interpreting for official Indonesian guests on month-long tours.

A typical tour would consist of stops in Washington, D.C. and New York City on the East Coast; Los Angeles or San Francisco on the West Coast; and several rural and metropolitan areas in between. During the day I'd be glued to the side of my Indonesian visitor but at night, after the visitor had retired, I would prowl the streets, inspecting the nightlife of the city I was in and hobnobbing with friends I had met on previous trips. It was from friends in D.C. in late 1981 I first learned of the mysterious disease that had begun to invade gay communities and which would, in the months to come, claim an ever-faster growing list of victims.

Although the U.S. government was acting too slowly in trying to stop the spread of this disease there was in the U.S. a well-established network of gay activist groups as well as numerous newsletters and "zines"

*) A shorter version of this article was published earlier this month in *Saint Dédé; Writings on the Occasion of Dédé Oetomo's 70th Birthday*. Sydney: Evi-O.Studio. ISBN 9780648613206

critics also decried the lack of public discussion on what Freedom to Learn was all about, leaving some parents and tutors in a state of confusion for some time, unable to provide the required extracurricular support. Hence, as well intended and vital as the program may be, it is perhaps too early to make a judgment call at this time. As this is the last year in office of the current administration, here's hoping the new elected government will continue to implement this much-needed educational program.

Another initiative the current administration launched is a program titled "DanaIndonesia" which provides funding for activities in the cultural sector. Lontar is pleased to announce that it was chosen as one of the recipients of funds in the year ahead. With assistance from this program, Lontar is able to guarantee the publication of at least five new titles and will be able to undertake a number of public-oriented cultural activities. Check out the announcement column in this newsletter in the coming months and join in the planned activities.

Even with this much needed funding from the government, Lontar remains reliant on corporate and individual contributions for its continued sustainability. Please consider giving to Lontar.

In closing, we wish all our friends and supporters the very best for 2024.

Yuli Ismartono (yismartono@lontar.org)

serving to get the word out and to educate both the general populace and the country's gay communities on the urgent need to engage in safe sex only. Having spent 2.5 years in Indonesia, from May 1976 to November 1978, during which time I had discovered not a single gay organization or magazine, as I contemplated settling down in Indonesia, I feared what might happen in this land where ignorance was bliss in most all matters related to sexual health.



Dede at Juanda Airport in 1978 on the day he left for the U.S. to study at Cornell University. Photo courtesy of Dede Oetomo.

I first met Dede Oetomo in mid-1976 when I participated in a 10-week advanced Indonesian-language program at the Malang Teachers College (IKIP) in East Java. My gaydar beeped when I met Dede but it was not until several years later, when he was a graduate student at Cornell University and we had begun to correspond more frequently my initial inkling was confirmed. Dede had "come out" and, not only did he now accept his gay identity, he was an active member in Lambda, a gay advocacy organization. He told me of his intent to establish a branch of Lambda in Indonesia, which he did upon his return to the country in 1982, thereby making history. I was proud of Dede—Finally, the country had a spokesperson for gay rights!—and in 1983, when I was house-sitting at the spacious home of friends from the U.S. embassy, I hosted a gathering of friends at their home to garner support and raise funds for this new organization.

Lambda Indonesia soon morphed into a completely local organization, *Gaya Nusantara*, and, with Dede at the rudder, began to produce a newsletter-journal by the same name, the first of its kind in Indonesia. At last, I once more thought, Indonesia now had an alternative means for disseminating gay-related news outside Indonesia's too-often sensationalistic mainstream mass media. (The term "LGBTQ" was not in use at that time.)

From its outset *Gaya Nusantara* (GN) served as a voice of reason and a source of accurate sexual-related information for Indonesia's gay population. Safe sex was not a common practice among gay men in Indonesia in the early 1980s—Nor elsewhere in the world, for that matter, until the rise of AIDS—and the "boys of Banteng" in Jakarta and those who milled in pick-up places in other cities were, by and large, oblivious to the rapidly-rising number of AIDS victims outside the country. As the disease reached pandemic proportions, my fears for "people-like-us" in Indonesia rose in tandem.

Author of the Month



Purbo Asmoro (Photo by Djajusman)

PURBO ASMORO, whose birthday is December 17, is one of the most popular and respected Javanese puppet masters today. He is in high demand as a performer in Indonesia and has toured in more than a dozen foreign countries. His YouTube site, which contains over 200 performances and tutorials of his work, has 64,000 subscribers and over six-million views. Born in Pacitan, East Java, to a long line of *dalang*, he now resides in Surakarta, Central Java, where he is a senior professor at that city's Conservatory of Arts (Institut Seni Indonesia) in which position he has, for 25+ years, guided generations of young *dalang*.

From 1989 to the present, he has been developing a new form of *wayang* performance practice, known in the field as “interpretive” *wayang* performance, in which he prioritizes the exploration of philosophy, debate, mysticism, the inner self, current events, and the beauty of music, poetry, and shadow-play over traditional constraints in the form.

In 2013-2014, Lontar published a six-volume tri-lingual (Javanese, Indonesian, English) exploration of his interpretive *wayang* performance scripts along with a complementary volume of gamelan scores and a 32-hour DVD collection of his performances—a massive undertaking spearheaded by renowned Javanese-English translator and *wayang* expert, Kathryn Emerson.

Soal “malam dana” itu, saya rasa saya kurang punya pengaruh langsung pada anak-anak Gay Jakarta. Mungkin nanti ketika saya di Jakarta kita bisa berbincang-bincang dengan sebagian dari mereka?

John sampai kapan di Indonesia? Saya sendiri akan setahun lagi di Cornell, walaupun ada kemungkinan di tengah “write-up period” saya nanti ada waktu untuk ke sini lagi mencari data tambahan, kalau disetujui oleh funding agency.

Saya pikir sekian dulu surat ini. Salam hangat saya buat John, dan juga salam buat teman-teman di Jakarta yg saya kenal. Sampai jumpa bulan Juli nanti, ya.



Fragment of a letter from Dede dated 13 April 1983 in which he writes about our plans for a fund-raiser in Jakarta.

The first death by AIDS in Indonesia, a Dutch tourist in Bali, is reported to have taken place in 1987 but I know for almost certain there were other AIDS-related deaths before that time. How else to explain the wasting-away and lesion-covered bodies of several young men I knew? Their deaths and then that of a French friend who, in June of that year was evacuated to France where he died (and thus did not become an “Indonesian” statistic) drove me to produce a brochure on safe sex which I intended for distribution at cruising places around the country. Ten thousand copies were printed.

Designed and produced with the help of a friend, I wrote the text of the brochure, peppering it with gay slang and sexual terms commonly used within the gay community and on the street but never in polite society. The brochure was graphic in its description of how to protect oneself and one’s partner. Too graphic, it seems for the powers-that-be at Persektuan & Pelayanan Injil Metropolitan (Metropolitan Fellowship & Ministry) the short-lived Jakarta-based gay church which had initially promised to distribute the brochure. Balking at the language, the church refused to be associated with the brochure and though credited in the fourth edition of *Gaya Nusantara* as having produced the brochure, which was included as an insert in that edition, the church had, in fact destroyed most of the brochures whose production I had paid for.

Over the months and the years ahead *Gaya Nusantara* would continue its work of raising sexual awareness and promoting safe sex. From public medical records, it might be possible to estimate the number of people who have died from a particular disease but it would be far more difficult, if not impossible, to count the number of people whose lives were saved because of timely information. The Catholic Church defines “living saint” as someone who is capable of performing miracles while still alive. I certainly don’t fit that category but I am certain that through *Gaya Nusantara*’s work, with Dede as its head, the organization did save countless innumerable lives, a miracle which I credit to my friend, Dede Oetomo, a living saint.

John McGlynn (john_mcglynn@lontar.org)

ANNOUNCEMENT!



For years Lontar worked with Give2Asia-USA, a non-profit entity based in San Francisco, to raise tax deductible contributions from U.S. taxpayers. Recently, Give2Asia-USA merged with the King Baudouin Foundation USA to form a joint endeavor called Myriad USA.

Beginning January 1, Myriad USA will be the new host for Give2Asia's Friends Funds and all contributions made by US taxpayers to Lontar should be deposited with Myriad USA.

Lontar's Give2Asia fund page will be ported to Myriad USA at that time and donors will be able to make online contributions.

For contributions in the form of checks and wire transfers, make your check payable to Myriad USA, write the name of "The Lontar Foundation" in the memo section, and send your check to:

Myriad USA
551 Fifth Avenue, Suite 2400
New York, NY 10176

To give via wire transfer, send your contribution to:

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- Account Number: 939282908

For any questions contact Brenda Orellana at (212) 713-7660, brenda@myriadusa.org. Provide her your name, contact information, date of transfer, amount of contribution, and use of contribution. Questions regarding other kinds of contributions — Bequests, Securities, Donor Advised Funds, and so on — should also be directed to her.

Surat dari Pejompongan

RAHAYAT

Kawan Moer,

Jika ada satu kata yang hari ini jadi sangat banyak disebut, diucapkan dengan penuh nafsu—nafsu berkuasa, tentu saja—kata itu adalah *rakyat*. Mereka yang hendak berkuasa tengah mengais-ngais suara rakyat. Bukan sekali-dua kita membaca, "Mohon doa dan dukungannya. . . ." Meski tidak jelas siapa "nya" di situ, tapi baiklah kita percaya bahwa usaha mereka agar bisa dikenali bukan kepalang tanggung. Gambar wajah mereka terpampang di tepi jalan, di batang pohon, di pagar halaman, di papan iklan, di layar televisi, di bendera yang menjulang hingga yang terjungkal di got, berhimpun bersama sampah kota.

Tidak cukup dengan wajah yang manis, mereka juga memasang gelar akademik dan prestasi sebanyak yang bisa ditampilkan—sehingga dari situ kita bisa bertanya, "Apakah seumur hidupnya ia hanya kuliah dan kuliah?" Tidak cukup, ada yang menyebut dirinya "anak si fulan" atau "pernah main film anu" atau "seber" (selalu bersama rakyat). Ia yang memegang boneka sama lucunya dengan yang memegang cangklong, yang tersenyum sama manisnya dengan yang menyusuri gang sempit dengan agak tertatih-tatih. Dan seterusnya. . . .

Semua usaha itu ada pamrihnya. Mereka ingin sekali dipilih. Sebab, tanpa dukungan rakyat, mereka tidak akan bisa menjadi apa-apa. Yang tidak siap akan nasib buruk ini, bisa menjadi gila—dari sini, layak pula dimulai studi "politik dan kesehatan jiwa".

Sebenarnya, rakyat adalah posisi yang sangat dilematis. Kata rakyat dalam bahasa Indonesia diturunkan dari kata Arab *ra'yya* yang berarti "yang dipimpin oleh penguasa". Jadi, memang sudah dari sananya, rakyat mesti dikuasai agar seorang pemimpin bisa mendapatkan legitimasi atas kekuasaannya. Tanpa dukungan rakyat, seorang pemimpin seperti balon tanpa angin. Rakyat adalah angin yang bisa membuat calon pemimpin membesar dan membesar—bayangkan jika suatu ketika sang pemimpin menjadi gergasi.

Seorang penguasa bisa dengan mudah menguasai sebuah wilayah, tetapi tanpa rakyat di dalamnya atau dukungan rakyat atas kehadirannya sebagai penguasa kawasan itu, maka ia hanya tuan tanah belaka. Seorang tuan tanah sekalipun pada akhirnya membutuhkan anak buah. Yakni, beberapa orang—bagian dari rakyat banyak—yang dengan kesadaran sendiri atau terpaksa membiarkan dirinya dikuasai demi memperoleh imbalan ini dan itu.

Begitulah kodratnya: Yang lemah akan berlindung pada yang kuat; yang di bawah akan mencari pertolongan pada yang di atas—baik dalam wujud manusia maupun sebagai kekuatan adikodrati atau ilahiah.

In Memoriam



John McBeth and Yuli Ismartono, December 2018

JOHN MCBETH, one of Asia's pre-eminent journalists died on the morning of December 6. He was 79. Though John was not a Lontar author or translator, he spent much of his life in Indonesia and actively contributed to the intellectual life of his adoptive country.

Born in New Zealand in 1944, McBeth began his career as a journalist in 1962 when he began work for the *Taranaki Herald*. After three years at that paper, he decided to seek work in London but the cargo ship that was to take him there became grounded upon its entry to Tanjung Priok harbor in Jakarta, one of the stops on the way. Stepping off the boat he changed his mind about going to London and spent the rest of his his life covering news from Asia.

After an initial stint in Jakarta and then in Singapore, McBeth settled for many years in Thailand, where he met his future wife, Indonesian journalist Yuli Ismartono.

In Indonesia, John is best known for his work in the late 1970s and 1980s at *The Far Eastern Economic Review*, the most influential news magazine in Asia at that time.

McBeth's 2011 book *Reporter: Forty Years Covering Asia* describes many of his stories. His 2016 book *The Loner: President Yudhoyono's Decade of Trial and Indecision* reviews the decade that Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono spent in power.

May John rest in peace.

Credit for much of the information in this article goes to Luke Hunt and his obituary on John McBeth in *The Diplomat*.

Namun, hubungan ini bisa memicu masalah. Yang berkuasa bisa sangat tiranik, sehingga yang dikuasai tidak bisa melakukan apa-apa, kecuali berpasrah kepada sang patriakh. Yang sudah telanjur lemah akan dibuat bergantung terus kepada belas kasih sang penguasa—hingga pada suatu ketika ada satu atau sekelompok orang dalam massa rakyat itu yang menyadari bahwa mereka harus bangkit, membebaskan diri dari cengkeraman sang penguasa.

Itulah masa untuk revolusi!

Aku ingat bagaimana kaummu di masa lalu menyebut rakyat adalah inti dari perjuangan semesta. Perjuangan mencapai kemerdekaan dan mempertahankannya hanya bisa dilakukan bersama rakyat. Para pemimpin harus ada di tengah rakyat; harus menyelami jiwanya rakyat. Rakyat adalah juga pencipta kebudayaan yang sebenarnya. Ya, itulah kebudayaan rakyat. Kau tahu ke mana arah bicaraku ini, bukan?

Tapi itu dulu, ketika kita sama hidup dalam situasi perjuangan. Kita merasa bahwa negeri ini bisa dibangun dengan peran serta seluruh rakyat, sebelum akhirnya kita melihat bagaimana para penguasa yang dipercaya itu melenceng satu per satu. Mereka telah mengkhianati apa-apa yang kita amanatkan. Mereka harus diturunkan!

Inilah masa ketika anak-anak muda dari kaum terpelajar yang merasa mewakili suara kita turun ke jalan. Kaum seniman seperti tidak mau ketinggalan, ikut pula menyuarakan ketidakadilan itu. Mereka mengambil alih rakyat sebagai suara dominan dalam puisi, tokoh utama dalam sebuah roman, dalam lakon revolusi yang gagal. Tapi itu dulu, bukan?

Tapi, masa itu kini datang lagi. Lihatlah, bagaimana para pemimpin yang semula dipercaya, menunjukkan wajah asli mereka yang mengerikan. Lebih menyeramkan dari gergasi, lebih rakus dari setan Tasmania. Apakah kita mesti turun ke jalan, seperti dulu? Berkisar antara rakyat? Ah, kakiku gemetar. . .

Aku tidak sanggup lagi melangkah ke kakiku ke tengah massa, Bung. Bukan karena kena encok atau asam urat, sejujurnya, aku tidak percaya pada kerumunan. Setiap kali berada di dalam massa, bersama rahayat itu, aku selalu merasa asing. Aku seperti sosok iblis yang terlempar dari neraka. **Zen Hae** (zenhae@lontar.org)

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