



Lontar Newsletter

Email: contact@lontar.org

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Greetings

In Indonesia, the struggle to put in place a quality education system that ensures progress and development seems endless. In the midst of an ongoing corruption case involving former officials in the former Ministry of Education, Culture, Science and Technology, comes more distressing news—that the education budget is to be cut back by 47.5 percent or Rp. 223.5 trillion (US\$13.2 billion). Reportedly, these funds are to be reallocated to the government's newest pet project: the free nutritious meals program (*Makan Bergizi Gratis* or MBG). While recognizing the importance of ensuring nutrition for all, the question is whether it should be done at the cost of equipping youths with the proper intelligence and acumen to face their future.

The furor over how this would impact current efforts at improving the nation's schooling system has been immense. After all, it would not only affect plans to improve the infrastructure of schools throughout the nation, in particular those in remote areas, but also the fate of hundreds of thousands of underpaid teachers. Further, diversion of funds from the education budget to the MBG program may be in violation of Article 31, Paragraph 4, of the 1945 Constitution, which mandates that at least 20 percent of national and regional budgets be dedicated to education.

Indonesia has the fourth largest education system in the world, with over 50 million students, 3 million teachers, and over 250,000 schools spread across the country. If the nation is to progress, the government must endeavor to raise the collective

Ruminations

Come Out, Come Out

In the summertime in Wisconsin in the 1950s, when my siblings and I could play hide-and-seek outside on the grounds of Glynnspring, the family farm, there were many more places to hide and a far larger area in which to conceal ourselves than in the winter months. During those colder days, confined to the house, options were much fewer: under a bed, behind the couch, in a closet, beneath the cellar steps.... Whatever the case, after the seeker-sibling closed her eyes and began to count to 100, the hider-siblings would race to find a hiding place. And when the seeker called, "Ready or not, here I come!" we froze and tried to remain as quiet as possible.

Sometimes, the seeker would taunt us, shrieking: "Come out, come out, wherever you are!" Those words always sent a chill down my spine as I crouched in the corner of the broom closet or wherever I was hiding that day. The taunting words immediately brought to mind the Wicked Witch of the West in *The Wizard of Oz*, which aired annually on television and never failed to scare me—particularly when the Wicked Witch and her troop of winged monkeys were pursuing Dorothy. I was a Munchkin, and to come out from my place of concealment would mean certain death.

Of course, by the time I reached adulthood in the 1970s, the verb "to come out" had taken on an additional meaning.

On the morning of June 1, 1976, my first full day in Indonesia, I walked from the home of Pastor Isak Siagian on Jalan Kramat II, where I had spent my first night in Indonesia, to the U.S. embassy on Jalan Merdeka Selatan. Ahead of me, on the sidewalk bordering Jalan Kramat-Kwitang, were two young policemen walking in the same direction as I and holding hands. A week later, I was in Malang, East Java, attending a *wayang orang* performance of *Arjuna Wiwaha*. Two of the female dancers sat behind me after their performance on stage. Now dressed in street clothes, they squeezed together on the same chair, their arms around each other. In July, at a *losmen* in Yogya, most of the single beds were occupied by pairs of males, some even sleeping inside the same sarong.

Initially, I assumed that this overt display of same-gender affection meant I was in a country where it was OK to be gay. I was wrong. Indonesia was, very much, a don't-ask-don't-tell country. Nonetheless,

intelligence and character of society through education.

There are now efforts by a number of schools, institutions and foundations to challenge the government's decision on diverting education funds to other social programs, at the Constitutional Court. It will be yet another attempt at ensuring that the road at cultivating and creating a learned society remains on course.

Yuli Ismartono (yismartono@lontar.org)

PS: Books are a gift that keeps on giving. Recently, through the Basaudara Language Community in Maluku and with assistance from James Castle, Lontar donated a large number of books to Muhammadiyah University of Maluku.



We also donated a large number of periodicals and art catalogues to the Library of Congress who will preserve them in posterity.

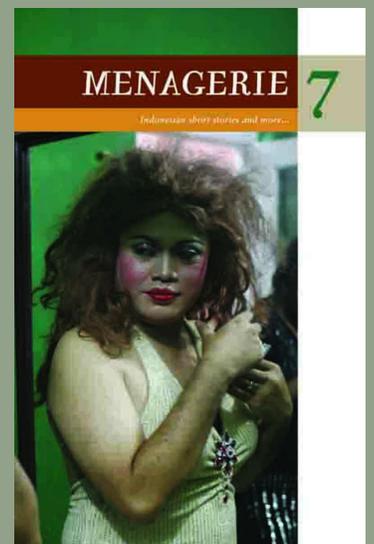


I soon discovered there to be gay men, at least. One evening, just days after my arrival in Malang, a *becak* driver who was pedaling me from the *alun-alun* city square to my temporary lodgings at IMKA Guest House suggested a detour. A couple weeks later, when leaving the Ria Cinema, a Vespa pulled up beside me and its young male driver invited me to go for a ride with him. At IKIP, the Teachers College, where I was studying, a male student furtively handed me a message asking if he could see me “beneath four eyes” (*di bawah empat mata*).

In the years ahead, I would meet numerous transsexuals, cross-dressers, lesbians, and all kinds of AC-DC men and women—all of them Indonesian-born and few of them friends with many foreigners. I came to see that the Indonesian archipelago was as multi-sexual as it is multi-ethnic. Yet the thing I found most frustrating, especially after the advent of AIDS on these shores in the mid-1980s, was that religious and political leaders especially often espoused the falsehood that all forms of sexuality and sexual behavior outside the norm of accepted heterosexual behavior were the result of negative foreign influence.

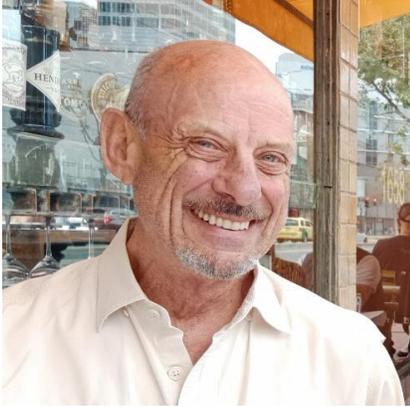
Seeking to rebut this argument, in 2008 or thereabouts, I sought the assistance of Erza Setyadharma, an Indonesian author, to work with me on a collection of “gay-related” short stories. Together, we compiled more than one hundred recently written works, from which we selected twenty for translation. In 2010, Lontar published the seventh volume in its *Menagerie* series, themed “People Like Us.” Upon its release, it became the world's first anthology of Indonesian “gay literature” in English. What the stories therein revealed—especially apparent when read together, in one volume—was that there exists in Indonesia a common and widespread knowledge of LGBT people, and that there is great empathy (at least among writers) toward the challenges many such people face daily in a society that not only often denies their right to exist but castigates them as sinners, deviants, and perverts—or worse.

Despite the strides Indonesia has made in many fields, there remains in this country a vast and pervasive amount of public ignorance about, and prejudice toward, sexual minorities. At the mosque and in the church, sexual minorities are said to be an abomination. At schools and universities, harassment of “different” students is common. In the police and military, homosexuality is grounds for dismissal. In the political sphere, no aspiring male politician would dare



Menagerie 7 cover

IN MEMORIAM



Larry Reed in 2022

It is with deep sadness that we announce the passing of Charles “Larry” Lawson Reed III on January 30, 2026, at his home in San Francisco. Larry was the director of ShadowLight Productions, which he founded in 1972. Through ShadowLight he pioneered a unique fusion of traditional Balinese shadow theater and contemporary stagecraft. A director, filmmaker, teacher, and shadow master, he devoted his life to storytelling across cultures, collaborating with artists worldwide and expanding the possibilities of shadow theater.

Larry’s artistic journey began in childhood and continued through Pomfret School, Yale, and the U.S. Peace Corps Theater Program in Costa Rica. He earned his MFA in film at the San Francisco Art Institute and performed with Anna Halprin’s Dancers’ Workshop.

A transformative encounter with *wayang* shadow theater in Bali in 1970 led to fifteen years of study with master *dalang* I Nyoman Rajeg, shaping his lifelong dedication to the art.

Through ShadowLight, Larry brought *wayang* to U.S. audiences and later developed cinematic shadow theater, combining puppetry, masks, lighting, and filmic techniques.

Generous, funny, and deeply curious, Larry loved languages, cooking, and music. He transformed the lives of countless artists and students, leaving a legacy that continues through ShadowLight’s community and education programs.



At the launch of *Menagerie 7* and its Indonesian-language companion edition with fellow panelists: Mitu M. Prie, Adi Wahono, Is Mujiarso, and Antok Srean

not to have a loving wife, and no female leader would be willing to say that she is a lesbian and that her true heart is not at home waiting on a husband.

In the decades since I’ve lived in Indonesia, there has been some positive change, at least in cosmopolitan Jakarta and the milieu in which I live. I see that for myself in the way most people treat me, but there have been many setbacks as well. In fact, in a recent summation of findings about the status of LGBT people in Indonesia, Equaldex—an online collaborative knowledge base for the LGBT movement—states that Indonesia has very restrictive laws and policies toward LGBT rights, with low public acceptance and limited protections, making it one of the least supportive countries globally for LGBT equality.

In our games of hide-and-seek at Glynnspring, the seeker most often succeeded in finding the hidiers. But sometimes, whether bored with the game or for another reason, she would call “Olly olly oxen free!” thereby ending the game and giving the hidiers a pass to freedom. Though we knew this nonsensical phrase meant “everybody out free,” we had no idea that it was one our maternal grandmother, Alvina Schraufnagel Schauf, who was of Bavarian descent, might have called out in German when she played with her siblings as a child: “*Alle, alle auch sind frei!*”

It takes a very brave individual to live openly as someone different from the majority. That kind of bravery—the refusal to bow to unfair and uncompromising societal demands—is to be found in many of the characters who graced the stories in *Menagerie 7*.

But in real life...? Wouldn’t it be liberating to shout, “Olly olly oxen free,” and grant all minorities, sexual and otherwise, the freedom they deserve?

John McGlynn (john_mcglynn@lontar.org)



Marjie Suanda is originally from the United States, but came to Indonesia in 1976 with a scholarship to study traditional Javanese dance. Just a month into her studies she met her future husband, ethnomusicologist Endo Suanda. The plan to study for one year turned into three and now a 50-year connection to Indonesian arts and culture.

During the time period 1987–1991, Marjie, with Endo and their two sons, lived in Seattle where she studied at the University of Washington, earning a Master's degree in TESOL (teaching English as a second language). There, too, she taught English and designed curricula for a number of refugee groups at a community college and a women's center.

Moving back to Indonesia in 1991, Marjie first began to teach and test English and then began to take on translation work as well, initially essays by Bandung artists and curators. Thereafter, she moved on to translating a wide variety of Indonesian texts from short stories, poetry, biographies and other non-fiction.

For a period of time she translated for *Tempo English*, and then for Lontar as well, including collections of stories by Avianti Armand, Cok Sawitri, and Zen Hae; essays by Hasif Amini; and, finally, excerpts from the novel, *Arrived Before Departing* (Tiba Sebelum Berangkat) by Faisal Oddang.

Her most recent projects include curatorial essays for a book on Ahmad Sadali and a book about *wayang*.

Surat dari Pejompongan

GERHANA

Kawan Moer,

Di luar filmnya *Turang* yang baru-baru ini ditemukan kembali di Rusia dan diputar di sejumlah tempat dan festival, bagiku, Bachtiar Siagian adalah seorang penulis cerita yang baik. Selain menulis skenario untuk film-filmnya, setidaknya, dia pernah menulis sejumlah cerita (dalam format ketikan) berjudul *Catatan Gerhana: untuk anak-anakku*.

Manuskrip ini memuat 12 cerita yang dialami atau didasarkan oleh pengalamannya sebagai tanah politik di berbagai penjara (Salemba, Tangerang, Permisan, Nusakambangan), sepanjang 1967-1975. Meskipun dalam halaman persembahan Bachtiar menuli seperti ini: “Kini kukisahkan segalanya kepada kalian, apa yang pernah kualami dan kusaksikan . . . ,” bagiku, kualitas fiksi cerita-ceritanya itu telah muncul. Kuat sekali.

Munculnya kualitas fiksi dalam sebuah cerita bukan sebuah kesimpulan yang akan membatalkan kebenaran cerita-cerita itu, tetapi karena dengan penceritaan yang memikat itu kita seakan-akan tengah membaca karya fiksi. Dalam hal ini Bachtiar berhasil mengajak pembaca untuk tetap betah dan menikmati “laporan pandangan mata” tersebut.

Dalam kehidupan sehari-hari, jika kita menceritakan sesuatu kepada orang lain, kita berusaha untuk menyakinkan pendengar kita itu agar percaya bahwa cerita yang kita sampaikan itu benar dan dapat diterima. Itu artinya, menuntut kita, si pencerita, untuk menampilkan kembali peristiwa atau fakta-fakta yang kita temukan di lapangan itu sebagai serangkaian cerita yang menarik.

Ia menuntut kemampuan kita mengisahkan cerita (*storytelling*). Dengan kata lain, sebenarnya, itu membuka peluang si pencerita untuk menyusun ulang semua itu menjadi semacam fiksi. Mungkin, peristiwa dasarnya tidak berkurang atau diselewengkan, tetapi upaya si pencerita mengisahkannya kembali itu yang menuntut ia masuk ke dalam dunia fiksi.

Apakah dengan begitu si pencerita telah berbohong agar ceritanya bisa dinikmati? Mungkin bukan berbohong namanya, tetapi menempuh semacam siasat berkisah agar si cerita tampil lebih menyakinkan. Tengoklah bagaimana Bachtiar mengolah pengalamannya di berbagai penjara itu mencari cerita-cerita yang menarik.

Pada “Paket Cinta” yang menjadi kisah pertama, misalnya, Bachtiar mengisahkan Karso, seorang tahanan politik yang sangat merindukan kunjungan istrinya, karena sudah berbulan-bulan si istri tidak pernah membesuknya. Akhirnya, pada suatu ketika si istri datang sambil membawakan segala macam makanan dan pakaian bekas. Teman-teman Karso ikut senang sebab bisa menikmati menikmati kiriman makanan itu,

CALL FOR PAPERS



In August, the Faculty of Islamic Studies at UIII (the Indonesian International Islamic University) will host an international conference on “Manuscripts and the Diversity of Islam(s) in Southeast Asia.” Scholars at all stages of their academic careers are encouraged to submit abstracts addressing themes related to Islamic manuscripts, written traditions, and intellectual diversity in Southeast Asia. For further information, contact: mughzi.abdillah@uiii.ac.id or Islamic.studies@uiii.ac.id.

This conference aims to explore Islamic manuscripts and written cultures of Southeast Asia by advancing new perspectives on the reading and interpretation of the rich diversity of textual, visual, and material expressions produced from the 17th to the 20th centuries.

While Southeast Asia—with Indonesia as a hub—is home to a vast corpus of Islamic manuscripts written in multiple scripts (Arabic, Jawi, Pegon, etc.), these pluralistic textual cultures have often been overlooked or marginalized under inherited notions of *Bhinneka* (diversity). This conference seeks to illuminate how these manuscripts reflect a plurality of “Islam(s)” that define the region’s unique intellectual and cultural heritage.

The conference will feature distinguished scholars, including Farish A. Noor, as well as invited speakers Oman Fathurahman, Annabel Teh Gallop, Andrew Peacock, and Ervan Nurtawab.

Participants in the conference will be eligible to receive a very large discount on two landmark Lontar publications: *Malay Seals of Southeast Asia* and *Illuminations: The Writing Traditions of Indonesia*. Sign up for the conference now!

di sela-sela makanan penjara yang buruk mutunya.

Namun, Karso harus menerima kenyataan pahit. Rupanya selain membesuk, si istri juga datang untuk meminta maaf bahwa ia sudah menikah lagi dan kini sudah hamil lima bulan. Pada cerita “Pilihan” Bachtiar juga mengisahkan hal serupa, Para tapol itu pada akhirnya harus menerima kenyataan pahit tentang manusia dan dunia yang berubah di luar sana, sementara mereka hanya bisa menunggu dan berbesar hati di balik jeruji besi.

Meskipun cerita-cerita yang ditampilkan Bachtiar umumnya menyangkut kisah hidup para tapol, tetapi jauh dari hasratnya untuk meromantisasi apa-apa yang mereka alami. Bachtiar bercerita apa adanya. Dan dari cara berceritanya yang cenderung datar dan dingin itulah sering kali muncul ironi yang tajam pada hampir semua ceritanya.

Pada akhirnya kita harus menerima kenyataan baru bahwa penjara adalah sebuah dunia tersendiri yang berjalan dengan hukum-hukumnya yang tersendiri pula. Penyiksaan yang dialami para tahanan, kelaparan yang berlangsung hampir sepanjang waktu, ancaman penyakit tanpa penanganan medis yang memadai itu adalah bagian dari langkah-langkah negara dalam mendisiplinkan mereka.

Namun, sampai di sini aku tidak akan melanjutkan kerewelanku, Bung. Kau pasti sudah tahu bagaimana negara ini memperlakukan mereka yang dituduh sebagai orang Komunis atau simpatisannya. Bahwa itu terjadi di masa lalu, sudah pasti. Kita mesti menerima semua itu sebagai bagian dari perjalanan bangsa kita—yang hari-hari ini sangat berambisi menjadi bagian dari juru damai konflik Palestina-Israel.

Bachtiar telah memberi kita kesaksian, tentang bagaimana di masa lalu kita memperlakukan orang yang berbeda dari kita. Dari pengalaman para tapol yang dia tampilkan itu, kita mesti belajar lebih keras lagi untuk menjadi bangsa yang lebih beradab—atau “mengasihi sesama manusia,” sebagaimana kata Bachtiar.

Itu pun jika kita tidak gampang lupa dan tidak bebal-bebal amat. Ciao, Bung. **Zen Hae** (zenhae@lontar.org)

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