



Lontar Newsletter

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Greetings

Amidst the Ramadan fasting month and the dominating news on the war in the Middle East, International Women's Day on March 8 all but escaped the attention of most media and the public's attention. Only a few commemorative events were held, unlike in previous years when women's rights and the struggle to achieve equality were festively lauded. Indonesia, for one, has cause to celebrate its modest gains. According to UNICEF, at the elementary school level 92.8% of Indonesian girls and 92.7% of Indonesian boys are enrolled, while at the secondary school level the figures are 62.4% for girls and 60.9% for boys. The 2024 World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap Index further shows that girls in Indonesia outperform their male peers in literacy, science and mathematics by a significantly wide margin. More women now occupy high-ranking positions in government and there are increasing numbers of female top executives in the corporate world. Nevertheless, discrimination does still exist, especially in rural and remote areas where women are deprived of the opportunity to be productive due to poverty or cultural constraints.

One particular event celebrating International Women's Day, this one hosted by UNESCO and the World Economic Forum as a global online panel, which brought together leading female voices in technology, focused on an intriguing theme: "Will AI Help or Harm Women's Quest for Equality?" In this regard AI (artificial intelligence) was defined as "a branch of computer science that creates systems capable of performing complex tasks typically requiring human intelligence, such

Ruminations

In a Jakarta Kampung

The greater Senayan area of Jakarta, whose center is the Gelora Bung Karno stadium complex, includes the subdistrict of Pejompongan in which I live. The area was once inhabited mostly by Betawi people, native Jakartans, but, in preparation for the 1962 Asian Games President Sukarno nationalized the land and had its approximately 60,000 inhabitants "relocated" to what were then outlying districts of the city: Tebet, Mampang, Condet, and others. Even so, a sliver of the original Betawi settlement remained—the *kampung* known as Karet Tengsin, located on the north side of the Krukut River, the northern border of the area that was nationalized. (As an aside, "*kampung*," which loosely means "neighborhood" in Indonesian, is a Malay-Indonesian word that entered the English language with the spelling "compound"—as in a complex of dwellings.)

As the crow flies, Karet Tengsin is less than 200 meters from my home. In this warren of homes, mechanic shops, food stalls, and home enterprises, a dweller's living room is likely to be the narrow *gang* outside her front door. (The word "*gang*," meaning "pathway," is another Malay word that entered the English language and was affixed to the word plank, as in "gangplank.")

It's 1983 and I, having recently moved to Pejompongan, explore the area. In the doorway of one tiny dwelling, two women are seated. One of the women is using her fingers to part her neighbor's long black hair at



Gelora Bung Karno stadium and the surrounding Senayan area in the early 1960s.
Photo from *Jakarta: Portraits of a Capital 1950-1980* by Scott Merrillees

as reasoning, learning, problem-solving, perception and decision-making.”

Those favoring AI claim it will greatly facilitate women’s efforts in the fields of education, job-placement, and other areas. But opponents warn of AI one day replacing all jobs, including those of women. Today, AI is still a work in progress, but that day may come sooner than later. The International Labor Organization (ILO) reports that 29% of female-dominated jobs are at risk of being taken over by AI, compared to just 16% of male-dominated ones.

Key proposals that were put forward included the following: 1) Bridge the Gender Digital Divide; 2) Increase Women’s Representation in AI; 3) Address Bias in AI Systems; 4) Involve Women at the Decision-Making Table; and 5) Heighten Global Collaboration, i.e. encourage partnerships between UN agencies, governments, academia, and industry to align AI innovation with gender equality goals.

As such, the event’s proposals were not just about fixing AI but about reshaping the ecosystem around it—from education and workforce participation to governance and accountability. The central message being: *AI must be designed with women, not just for women, if it is to advance equality rather than undermine it.*

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the scalp to check for cooties (another cognate from the Malay, deriving from “kutu” or body lice). They smile broadly and greet me as I pass. “Selamat pagi, Tuan!” Meanwhile, their children, who had been spinning tops on the hardened ground of the *gang* shriek with delight when seeing this pale-skinned foreigner and begin to tag along behind me. No matter how I try to shoo them away, they stick to my heels, laughing and giggling at whatever I do. Though somewhat irritated by their presence, I am also struck by their ebullience and good cheer. Living jowl to jowl as they do, in such simple conditions, with no private space of their own, I could not imagine myself being so pleasant.

Jump forward 27 years to 2010 and what has changed in Karet Tengsin? Very little, it seems to me. Certainly, there are more plastic items in evidence and a growing number of television antennae on rooftops, but the atmosphere is much the same and the inhabitant continue to exude that same good cheer. Of course, the two women from 1982 are no longer evident. Now it is their daughter who smile and say, “Halo, Mister!” and their grandchildren who pull on the hem of my shirt.

Twice now, since his election as U.S. president in 2008, Barack Obama has delayed a state visit to Indonesia, but SBY (Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono), Indonesia’s president, recently announced that he, his wife, and an entourage numbering in the hundreds, would arrive in Jakarta on June 14. As an old American hand, a member of the board of the American Indonesian Exchange Foundation, and having known Obama’s mother, I wondered if I would receive an invitation to the state dinner in his honor.

While most anyone who followed Obama’s meteoric rise in U.S. politics knew he had spent a number of his early years in Jakarta, few knew much about his mother, Stanley Ann Dunham, better known in Indonesia as Ann Soetoro. The foreign media was constantly asking who she was—that mysterious white woman from Kansas. Why she was living in Indonesia? What was she was doing here?

I had asked those same questions years before, when Ann was working as a program officer at the Ford Foundation office in Jakarta (1981–1984). In fact, before I came to know her better and learned of the innovative work she was doing with village women, I thought of her somewhat disparagingly as one of those white women who dressed in batik table cloths.

(To understand that comment, one must be aware that batik shirts for men and batik apparel for women were, at that time, de rigueur at many social events. With the exception of women of diminutive size, few foreign women had the panache to dress in traditional *kain*, much less slim-fitting *kebaya* blouses. For a full-figured woman like Ann, this presented a problem. The solution was a recent creation: a wrap-around batik skirt whose adjustable size made it possible for even the largest of

IN MEMORIAM



Tuti Zairati in 2007

It is with deep and heartfelt sadness we announce the passing of Tuti Zairati on March 18.

Born in Padang Panjang, West Sumatra, in 1956, Tuti joined Lontar in 1992 and was the foundation's chief finance officer ever since. In addition to that position, however, over the years, with changes in staff, she was often called on to fill many other positions as well, from marketing manager, to event organizer, to chief cook and bottle-washer. Never a person to put on airs, Tuti always dug in when digging was needed.

Not only did Tuti keep tabs on the job performance of Lontar personnel, she remembered staff birthdays and made sure that neighborhood watchmen received Idul Fitri bonuses.

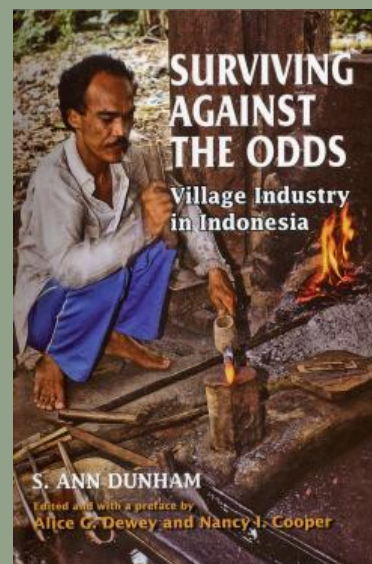
While others (most prominently, myself) have served as the “face” of Lontar, Tuti was the foundation's backbone, enabling it to stand and go forward, even in the worst of times.

She will be fondly remembered always.



women to wear. These skirts were usually made from thick cotton—not the finer kind used to produce traditional *kain*—and with their oversized batik motifs they truly did resemble a round batik table cloth.)

Following that digression, I return to the story at hand, the questions regarding that enigmatic white woman from Kansas. To help answer them, Lontar published that year, in cooperation with Duke University Press, *Surviving against the Odds: Village Industry in Indonesia*, a book based on Ann's dissertation.

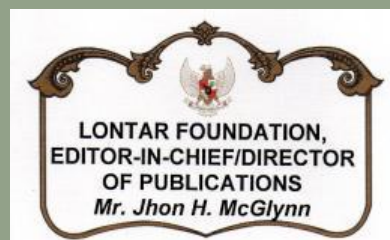


The cover of *Surviving Against the Odds*

In her foreword to the book, Ann's daughter Maya writes of the intimacy her mother enjoyed with village women and how, in their exchange, their relationship was not one of subject and object. “Mom had come to a real understanding with them, it seemed, and not just the women; she was welcomed and trusted by all. ... [She] moved with such ease through every world and people opened up at the sight of her smile.”

During Obama's campaign for presidency and, even more, thereafter, I was frequently contacted by journalists seeking answers to the questions previously cited. Always, I would admit at the outset that I did not know Ann well enough to answer personal questions about her but what I might be able to help them with was to provide a possible answer as to why Ann so loved Indonesia. To do that, however, they first had to exchange their hard-soled shoes with a pair of sandals. Then, I would take them on a walk through Karet Tengsin.

The smell of Karet Tengsin is ripe and its cacophony of sounds is almost overwhelming but what wins one over, what always saves the day despite the sweltering heat and shirt-clinging humidity, are the ubiquitous smiles on dwellers' faces. Despite their dire living conditions and regardless of their evident financial straits, they always show their bestface. That is what I saw on my first visit and that is what I am sure Ann saw in the villages she visited as well—an array of smiles that melted defenses and gladdened the heart. And for that alone, one could not help but fall in love.



I did receive an invitation to the dinner in honor of President Obama—though my name was misspelled.

John H. McGlynn (john.mcglynn@lontar.org)



Isla Winarto is of mixed heritage (Australian mother; Indonesian father), with a B.A. Honours degree in Indonesian language and literature, and a Graduate Diploma in Education, both from the University of Sydney, Australia. Before moving to Indonesia in 1984, Isla was a Senior Teaching Fellow in Indonesian at the University of Sydney, and later a Junior Lecturer at Griffith University, Australia.

For the past 42 years, Isla has been living and working in Jakarta. From 1985 to 1996, she worked at USAID Jakarta in the Indonesian language training division, and donor-funded projects.

From 1996-2014, Isla was the Country Director of a company owned by Australia's universities. Managing ten offices across Indonesia, she specialized in international education, scholarship and project management.

Over the years, Isla has also translated various literary works from Indonesian into English for Lontar. These include ten short stories and the novel *Raumanen* by Marianne Katoppo. During her professional career, Isla also acted as interpreter for a number of distinguished guests to Indonesia, including Hilary Clinton.

In her spare time, Isla devotes her energies to non-profit organizations such as Lontar, the Indonesian Heritage Society, the Australia Indonesia Association, the Australia and New Zealand Association, and Soroptimist International.

Surat dari Pejompongan

LEBARAN

Bung,

Kulihat di unggahan media sosial, kau ikut seru-seruan perayaan Lebaran di Kedutaan. Halaman Kedutaan diberi tenda dan alas bersih. Orang-orang duduk dengan khushyuk sambil melantunkan takbir. Lantas gambar orang salat berjamaah, khutbah, bersalam-salaman, berakhir dengan makan-minum bersama. Kulihat kau mengenakan kemeja batik, larut dalam kemeriahan, menyantap ketupat dan opor ayam.

Begitulah, perayaan Lebaran—minus sesi ibadahnya—telah menjadi acara yang kautunggu-tunggu selama ini, dari tahun ke tahun. Bahkan, perayaan hari raya umat beragama lain pun, kaudatangi juga.

Aku ingat, suatu kali, kau pernah mengajakku mendatangi sebuah ibadah Minggu di pusat kota—sementara, kau juga berjanji akan mengajakku ke sebuah pengajian kaum diaspora pada sore harinya. Kita menembus udara dingin Oktober, sempat celingukan karena salah alamat, sebelum akhirnya menemukan sebuah gereja rumahan yang terjepit di antara toko roti dan cinderamata.

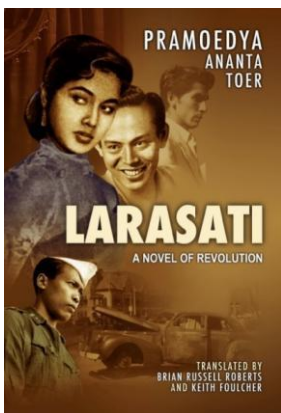
Di dalam gereja itu kita masuk dan duduk di antara orang-orang yang beribadah, mengikuti doa dan nyanyian yang dipandu oleh seorang pendeta, kawan kita dari Manado. Kita juga menyimak dengan saksama khutbah dari pendeta tamu tentang betapa kuatnya kasih Tuhan di antara kita.

Itu adalah tema ulangan, katamu. Sebagaimana wasiat takwa dalam khutbah Jumat, kataku. “Semua agama, pada dasarnya, sama saja,” katamu, “mengajak kepada kebaikan. Jalannya saja yang beda-beda.”

Dalam perayaan-perayaan seperti itu, aspek ibadah tentu saja penting—terutama, bagi yang menjalankannya. Tapi, bagimu, yang jauh lebih penting adalah aspek sosialnya, kumpul-kumpul itu. Bahwa ada makan-minum secara cuma-cuma, itu sudah pasti. Tapi kau selalu mencari peluang untuk bertemu dengan orang-orang dari negeri yang pernah melahirkanmu, merasakan suasananya secara hampir-lengkap: bahasa, busana, makanan, dekorasi, dan seterusnya.

Kau, sebenarnya, tengah berusaha menemukan kembali apa-apa yang telah hilang darimu selama ini. Meskipun berlangsung setiap tahun dan maaf-maafan di dalamnya segera menjadi klise, tetapi, buatmu, Lebaran selalu punya nilai baru, yang terbarukan. Itulah suasana nostalgia yang membuatmu mengenang kembali sebuah negeri, yang jauh di sana, tetapi dekat di hatimu selalu.

Di luar aspek nostalgis yang selalu merundungmu, sepenuhnya aku setuju Lebaran adalah momen kita berkumpul dengan keluarga. Agak berbeda dari kumpul-kumpul keluarga yang lain, momen ini didahului oleh proses ibadah sebulan penuh—sekali lagi, bagi yang menjalankannya.



On Saturday, April 11, at 2:00 p.m., the Lontar Foundation will host the launch of the English translation of *Larasati* at the Makarya–Gramedia bookstore on Jl. Matraman Raya No. 46–50.

Originally published as a serialized story in the newspaper *Bintang Timur* in 1960, *Larasati* is a novel by Pramoedya Ananta Toer that departs from many of his works of the same period. Rather than focusing on impoverished families or wartime suffering, it follows *Larasati*, an Indonesian film star navigating the tensions between the glamor of cinema and the turmoil of revolution.

Returning from Yogyakarta to the occupied city of Jakarta, the actress ultimately commits herself to the revolutionary cause, joining fellow fighters and, along the way, rediscovering her true love.

Translated by Brian Russell Roberts and Keith Foulcher, this new edition brings fresh insight into one of Pramoedya's lesser-known works. The event will feature a conversation between Brian Russell Roberts and Zen Hae on the challenges and nuances of translating *Larasati*, as well as broader questions surrounding the global reception of Indonesian literature. A live reading of selected excerpts will further evoke the novel's historical atmosphere.

This event is presented through a collaboration between the Lontar Foundation and Makarya, with the support of AMINEF–Fulbright.

Ita menjadi perayaan yang seakan-akan orang-orang yang berpuasa telah mencapai kemenangan.

Namun, apakah kemenangan itu? Aku tidak tahu pasti. Melawan hawa nafsu, tidak sepenuhnya. Sebab pada saat Lebaran kita justru mengumbar nafsu makan-minum kita. Kita memanjakan perut kita sebisa-bisanya—untungnya ada tradisi “Puasa Syawal” untuk mengerem nafsu makan-makan yang berlebihan itu.

Jika boleh kupertajam, Bung: Lebaran adalah ketika berakhirnya apa-apa yang diperjuangkan orang-orang yang berpuasa selama satu bulan. Lapar dan haus selama berpuasa harus dibayar dengan makan-minum sebanyak-banyaknya, selagi perut masih bisa menampungnya. Semua kembali rutinitas seperti sedia kala—malah lebih dari itu. Seakan-akan, tidak ada bekasnya Ramadan yang mulia itu. Itulah bulan yang membuat aku berpikir tentang penderitaan dan pengorbanan sebagai bagian dari pencucian jiwa manusia.

Ah, belakangan ini, aku agak sungguh hati memikirkan tentang penderitaan dan pengorbanan sebagai bagian dari pencucian jiwa manusia. Kupikir, jika puasa bisa menjadi latihan ke arah sana, mungkin akan lebih baik lagi dampaknya buat jiwa kita. Baiklah kutinggalkan garansi pahala keluar sana, aku ingin berfokus kepada latihan kejiwaan itu tadi. Jika kita rela berkorban, mungkin akan lebih banyak masalah yang kita bisa selesaikan bersama. Dan penderitaan, dan pengorbanan, adalah cara kita untuk menunda kerakusan tumbuh dalam jika kita.

Maafkan aku, jika sekarang ini aku sampai pada pemikiran seperti itu. Agak risau hati aku sebenarnya. Tapi, baik juga jika kuakhiri suratku sebelum aku merepet kelewat lama. Sebelum aku mencapai perenungan-perenungan lain yang mungkin tidak masuk akal, atau absurd.

Baiklah, aku kembali ke dunia nyata kita. Santaplah dulu opor ayam dengan ketupat yang dibungkus plastik bening. Abaikan ancaman kanker atau gangguan hormonal dari bungkus plastik itu, Bung. Aku akan menyesap kopi Sidikalang, sambil mengudap rempeyek yang dibentuk dengan cetakan kembang goyang. Gurih-renyah, tentu. **Zen Hae** (zenhae@lontar.org)

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