

# Jakartass Reads



Terry Collins

## Introduction

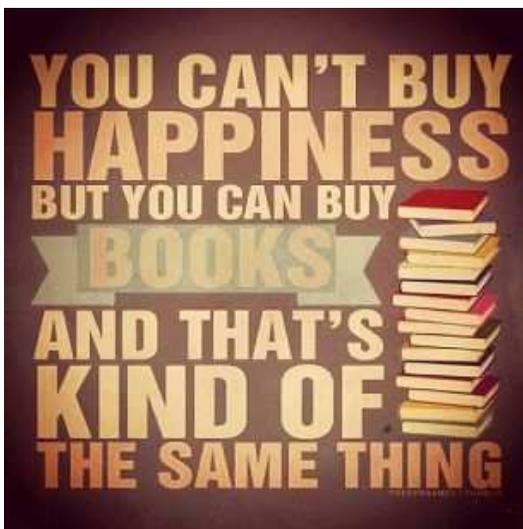
Before we had television in our house, my parents insisted that my sister and I should be able to read. Before we started school, we *Listened With Mother* on the radio at a quarter to two, and 'sat comfortably' for the day's story: I've loved to read ever since and am never without a book 'on the go', or a daily print newspaper.

When I started my blog Jakartass (<http://jakartass.net>) back in 2004 I had no idea where it would lead to. It was originally intended to be a repository for thoughts which would increase my understanding of where I was. As an observer travelling through a different life supporting an Indonesian family, certain issues and events such as the Aceh Tsunami came to directly concern me so I was rarely short of something to write about. Much of it is in my Jakarta Anthology.

It was as a direct consequence of the 1000+ posts I'd written that in 2006/7 I was commissioned by Marshall Cavendish to rewrite *Culture Shock! Jakarta*. Around then I also discovered that the local English language would pay me for articles.

These included reviews of books and reviews related to Indonesia, and so my blog took on another dimension. I was no longer writing primarily for myself, but for a different audience. And in so doing I learned a lot more about Indonesia through other's eyes.

But I couldn't have written unless I read.



## **Acknowledgements**

Dedicated to the still sadly missed David Jardine.

A special heads up goes to Derek Bacon, my co-author and now a really good illustrator.

Several folk deserve a special mention for their writing: you may discover their contributions within these pages. So, in alphabetical order, it's a big 'hi' to Daniel P. Quinn, Daniel Ziv, Diamond Geezer, Elizabeth Pisani, Enda Nasution, Irfan Kortschak, Jamie James, John Hargreaves, John McGlynn, Julia Suryakusuma, Leonard Lueras, Malcolm Johnson, Mark Heyward, Martin Jenkins, Nick Hughes, Rima Fauzi, Simon Pitchforth, Tim Hannigan.

Not to be forgotten, even though they're mostly offline, are all those in the Indonesian blogosphere who chronicled the post-reformasi era through their recording of events. We may largely be redundant in the age of selfies and wotnots, Mugshots and trite Twits, but we were pioneers in using our writing to demonstrate the power of free speech.

### **October 2015**

A special mention to Jeremy Allen who lives in Yogya where we shared long chats over a few Bintang. And may there be many more!



*Terry Collins*

October 2014 / 2015

## **I'm booked** (pub. 29.9.06)

Our Kid regularly asks me if I'm watching my book. What he's referring to is the **booked** TV programme I'm slumped in front of. I forgive him the odd lexical error because he does like reading, although only in English. A week ago I brought home *James and the Giant Peach* by Roald Dahl and *Hoot* by Carl Hiaasen, both in Indonesian, and I was surprised when he said that he doesn't like reading in Indonesian. Are the translations *that* bad?

He has got the Roald Dahl story in English and enjoyed it. He also read *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* before I let him (us) watch the Tim Burton movie. You see, I believe that reading is important for so many reasons, not least the broadening of horizons and the fostering of imagination and creativity.

Like many others, I lament the lack of good bookshops and libraries here in Jakarta. Reading is very much part of my culture and there will be few westerners of the pre-smart phone generations here who haven't got a book 'on-the-go' for reading in the loo, the back of their stationary car or taxi, or just before bedtime.

Too many years ago too enumerate, Derek Bacon, my co-author, and I were colleagues in a language school here in Jakarta which, at its zenith, had nigh on 60 native speaker English teachers. Talking about reading to one of my upper level classes, I said that I could guarantee that all of us had a book they were currently reading.

I was wrong. One colleague didn't have time to read a book: he was writing one, and if you come across a tome about the different types of *prahu* (indigenous fishing boats) throughout the archipelago by Nick Somebody-or-other then understand that this was a real labour of love.

Libraries are in the news, or rather the lack of them. The Jakarta Post regularly features individual efforts such as the young man in Yogya whose stock was largely destroyed in the earthquake. His readers were youngsters in fairly remote villages, the very 'clients' most in need at the moment as they wait for rehousing. Then there's the mobile library which, the Jakarta Post recently reported, will have to come off the road soon as its grant aid has ceased.

This week, well-known social commentator and former Presidential spokesman (for Gus Dur since you ask) Wimar Witoelar is surprisingly chuffed to be called a 'Blogger'.

*So, they (Metro TV) call me a blogger. I feel like John F. Kennedy who came to the Berlin Wall in 1963 and said: **Ich bin ein Berliner**.. Now I can say, **Ich bin ein Blogger**.*

Yeah, well, me too, Wimar, me too. But the reason I mention this is that Wimar has been reading Devi Girsang's blog (*now defunct*) and she's been searching for public libraries. Did she find one in this teeming metropolis?

Heck no, but in case you're interested, she did manage to post this review of the National Library.

*I've made up my conclusion; it's NOT a public library. It's just a NATIONAL library. Public library lends its collection (for free! Except for the late charges), free access for everyone, provides cozy place to read on, and free membership for all (based on my research of public libraries overseas). No wonder, reading-as-a-habit is not very familiar among Indonesians in general. You know why; it's hard (to) find ... a public library in the city.*

But good reading is not that hard to find in the blogosphere and .....\*

### Footnote

Our Kid has just asked me this question: "Dad, do you still have your sperm?" Can anyone recommend a book I can give him?

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\*It wasn't when I wrote that, but it is now that 'social media' has taken a grip on far too many of the *rakyat* who write very little about not very much.  
.....

### Glittering Literati (pub, 27.3.08)

'Er Indoors and yours truly went out and upmarket last night. Yep, we splashed out on a *tarif lama* (cheapo) taxi and headed off to the Bellagio Boutique Hotel and Mall dressed up so we could celebrate a book launch. Not mine, which is waiting to be knocked off its perch as Jakarta's number one book about Jakarta, but another one entitled, ahem, *Jakarta*.

The book is subtitled *Jayakarta, Batavia*, so old Jakarta hands, if they weren't at the do, will probably be able to work out that the book is a general interest book about the metropolis. And very handsome it is too in its hardback binding. This is a quality production, which is probably as much due to the corporate contributions as the care and attention of its curator, Leonard Leuras of the Bali Purnati Center for the Arts. (It says something, though I'm not quite sure what, that a book about the capital city should emanate from the tourist centre of the country.)

The book features high quality photographs depicting the everyday scenes of the city as well as the culture of the indigenous groups still resident here. Some are the work of photographers, such as P.J. Leo and R. Berto Wedhatama, whose work regularly pops up in the Jakarta Post. All capture facets which could well be missed by those of us more concerned with not falling down the holes in the sidewalks or bumping into the vehicle in front.

These pictorial delights are accompanied by essays from a number of denizens of the oft-called dens of iniquity in Jalan Jaksa, including good friends such as Simon Pitchforth of Metro Mad, Dave Jardine and Irfan Kortschak whose writings can be read in such publications as the Post, Tempo magazine, Jakarta Java Kini and the Garuda Inflight Magazine.

This book would make a very good souvenir of one's visit to Jakarta. Those of us who live here are encouraged to recognise that as much as we may suffer the constant aggravations, the human spirit is indomitable. Unfortunately, one aspect of last night's party had many of us scurrying for cover.



It wasn't the dances of these Betawi puppets so much as the accompanying 'music'. Even the lass operating the sound-desk was observed covering her ears.

A group of 5th grade students have written: **Ondel-ondel is huge human effigies that are usually parades during festive occasions. Presumably, the effigies were in former times used to scare evil spirits and chase them out the village.**

After half an hour of this, we appreciated a few short speeches from a couple of faces

last seen on TV and then the more soothing tones of *keroncong*, one of the original sounds of Jakarta.

Strictly speaking, *keroncong* is strings-only music, a reminder of the earliest Portuguese merchants who presumably brought violins, guitars, and mandolins with them all those years ago. (fr. *Culture Shock-Jakarta*)

As we were leaving, a fine little jazz group was playing, a reflection perhaps that life moves on. Or perhaps they were the Bellagio's house band. Whatever, meeting old friends, some now very old, and gossiping about times gone by and the hopes that we would meet again soon seemed to be an apt reflection of the evening and its purpose.

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**A Ballad For Ballard** (pub. 23.4.09)

I do like 'poetic' titles, ones that are easy on the eye and carry a sense of what is to follow, yet I have searched for a better title since the weekend.



JG Ballard, who died last Saturday aged 78, maybe deserves a 'love song', if only because, as the many tributes that have since poured out demonstrate, his bleak dystopian writing has affected so many creative people.

The author of over 25 books, it wasn't until Steven Spielberg filmed the autobiographical *Empire Of The Sun* in 1982 that he moved beyond being a 'cult' writer. Until then, words such as *sardonic*, *absurdist*, *comically satiric*, *bizarre mixture of fact and fiction*, coupled with his *relentless intelligence* - words from the back cover of the only Ballard novel I have to hand, *Rushing To Paradise*, restricted his readership.

His visionary and consistent contemplation of humanity's rush to be at one with technological advances lead him to be compared to HG Wells. Indeed, where writers have often been described as Wellsian, they may now be considered to be Ballardian, a word now to be found in certain dictionaries.

Until I fairly recently found my secondhand copy of his 2001 novel, I had more or less forgotten that many years ago I had been disturbed by his account of a London community marooned on a concrete island by the building of inner city ring roads.

I think the book, in my long lost archives, was in fact *Concrete Island*, but may have been *Crash*, filmed by David Cronenberg.

I didn't like that particular movie, but then other movies I have enjoyed, Cronenberg's *Dead Ringers*, David Lynch's *Blue Velvet*, and his TV series, *Twin Peaks*, and the early Quentin Tarantino movies, do owe a lot to their perceptions of Ballard's take on contemporary urban life.

To quote the great man, he was interested in "the evolving world, the world of hidden persuaders, of the communications landscape developing, of mass tourism, of the vast conformist suburbs dominated by television – that was a form of science fiction, and it was already here".

In many senses, I too have these interests, worrying about how humanity seeks dominion over everything, yet manifestly fails. Much of my writing, an externalisation of these concerns, owes much to Ballard.

And just today I discovered that maybe, just maybe, there are others out there and maybe they've given me an alternative and probably better title.

On a bridge above the toll road that encircles Jakarta there is a hoarding for yet another dormitory suburb. The sales pitch is that it offers A Touch Of Reality, as if to acknowledge that what has been on offer until now has been mere fantasy.

As Ballard has said, "In a sense, fakes are the only authenticity remaining to us."



Jakarta is ringed with dormitory towns which tart up their commercial estates with turrets, cupolas, statuary and other ornamentation, in multifarious pastel shades as if to disguise the paucity of architectural imagination.

These aren't the grand mansions with doric pillars which line busy roads so that passers by can ogle the occupants' ostentatious display of their accumulated wealth.

These are nothing but functional boxes designed to house functionaries.

The shopping malls offering 'recreational facilities' in place of the parks and green spaces they've been built upon, the immense growth in private transport forced to navigate along roads in an appalling state of repair, the élitist apartment blocks safeguarded against the under-employed *hoi polloi* housed in the clusters of shacks just below, the zoo-like behaviour of electoral candidates - surely these are all present day manifestations of Ballard's perception.

(Incidentally, are there any Brits who are surprised that a local bank, Bank Ibi, has failed? Who among us would contemplate entrusting their savings to a bank which actually admitted to dodgy dealings? )

Just as in Disneyland, much of humanity can only handle reality in small doses. JG, I salute you and thank you for allowing us to see.

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**Taking Time for Time Out** (pub.3.8.08 and 1.4.09)

Six months ago, I wrote: *Jazz fans living near the Welsh/English border might like to know that John Etheridge, a deceptively vague guitarist (as described by the Guardian), is playing with Arild Andersen and John Marshall at The Guildhall, Brecon, this coming Friday, August 8th.*

*How come I know more about gigs like that one than forthcoming events here in Jakarta?*

*As a Londoner, it's inevitable that I make comparisons between the two largest cities I've lived in. Not that I get out much – parental responsibilities and poverty take their toll – but something I really miss from my London days are gigs and exhibitions.*

*Time Out was the first, and remains the best (only?), listings magazine in London and is coming to Jakarta. I presume it will be an English language edition because all applicants for the positions of graphic designers, editors and reporters, sales and marketing staff etc "must speak fluent English".*

*Hopefully there will be fewer gigs I hear about after the event. It gets tedious reading reviews and muttering if only.....*

I wondered then if the comprehensive listings magazine *Time Out* would provide added value for those of us wanting to know about events here before they

happen rather than reading reviews of gigs and exhibitions we'd love to have been to.

I was one of the first readers of the original London magazine put out by Tony Elliott. I then gravitated for a while to *City Limits* which was set up as a rival by disenchanted *Time Out* employees after Elliott abandoned the worker's co-operative structure. The latter magazine finally ceased publication in 1993 due to falling sales and advertising.

*Time Out* remains, and is now the major listings magazine throughout the world with editions for Amsterdam, Beijing, Chicago, Dublin, Florence, Hong Kong, Istanbul ...erm, where's Jakarta? .... Kuala Lumpur and on to V for Venice.



But, hey, the Jakarta edition is here and I've got a copy of the March issue, a complimentary copy as it happens, which saves me Rp.33,000 (c.\$3). Not that I'm a tightwad, which I am, but I doubt that I'll be subscribing as this isn't the magazine for me. Not according to their website anyway.

Let me nitpick.

The newest issue of *Time Out Jakarta* has hit the newsstands and it's full of March! Music! Madness! Jakarta's known for having one of the best music scenes in all of Asia.

We have an in-depth look at the city's hippest scenesters. I'm not, and never have been, a "scenester".

Wanna know where to catch the best electronica performances? Wanna know how to blend into the headbanging crowd at a punk rock show, or dress up like a *dangdut* demigoddess?

Nope.

But maybe you don't want to blend in; you'd rather stand out and be a rock star in your own right! Our feature on 'How to be a rock star' will give you all the tips you need to break in and stay on top of the cutthroat world of music.

I probably do want to blend in, so if I were to be a musician I'd want to be a bass player in a jazz group.

We also bring you all the latest info on the hottest happenings around Jakarta. See who our critics chose as the must see acts at this year's Java Jazz Festival. What? No mention of Tohpati and Dewa Budjana together, or Mike Stern, possibly the only acts who didn't play 'lounge' music.

Learn who serves the best coffee in Jakarta. Not bad, but geared to the cocktail lounge set.

Check out our interview with sexy siren Anggun with pics. The Jakarta Post had a very similar interview a couple of months back.

You'll find all of that, plus our comprehensive up-to-date listings of the best events, activities, and venues in Jakarta.

'Best' is, of course, subjective. However, I'd rate the bookshops section mainly for its mention of Gudang Buku in Pasar Festival with "100,000 rare and antique books to choose from." (*It's now closed: 2015*)

There are a couple of interesting but slim feature articles about Jakarta, including the underground secrets of Kota, already extensively covered in the Post.

Otherwise, the magazine is a consumer's delight - the section Consume has the new Blackberry, but no info on where to buy a jar of blackberry jam. There's also a full page ad for Panasonic fridges - *eh?*

So, to sum up, if you're single and fancy free with disposable income, then this is the glossy listings magazine for you.

What might tempt me to subscribe would be fewer reviews of books, music and films lifted/licensed from other publications and more of local interest. And why is there nothing about the election?

And for those of us who like the occasional outing as a treat rather than a lifestyle, I'd suggest something along the lines of these ideas lifted from the London edition:



- +
- # 101 things to do before you leave London
- # London's best unsung museums
- # London on a budget
- # Free London

Freebie food, gratis gigs, cost-free culture and nights out for nowt - Time Out delivers.

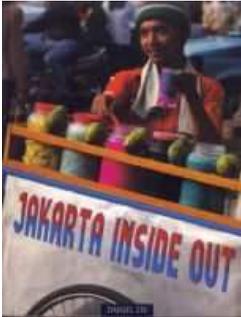
Well not for me here, but I do hope the local edition is able to survive the economic crunch. Perhaps they could widen their circulation if they heed some of my suggestions, and yours too if you write to the editor.

**Note:** *Time Out Jakarta* folded in 2011

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**Good Reads About Jakarta** (pub. 11.5.12)  
(First published in Jakarta Expat Edition 69, 9th-22nd May 2012)



I recently read a headline online which simply said 'Yes, Live In Jakarta', and I wondered which of the pairs in the gubernatorial election to be held this coming July was putting a positive spin on life here. All I've heard from them up to now is which of the many problems facing the megapolis they intend to prioritise.

Of course, and once again, I was wrong. The article actually referred to a gig on the world tour of the near-geriatric prog-rock group Yes; tickets cost more than a circuit judge's monthly salary.

There are so many stimuli assaulting one's senses in Jakarta that trying to understand it all is nigh on impossible without the insights of others. Whether stuck in a traffic jam or a meeting to discuss when the next meeting should take place, or you just want to switch off for a while, a good solution is to always have a good book in your backpack or briefcase..

The following is a partial list of what is on my bookshelves about Jakarta, past and present. They are arranged in chronological order according to the periods they are set in.

## **JAKARTA THEN**

### **Historical Sights of Jakarta**

- Adolf Heuken. pub. Times Books International, 1989.

Numerous maps and illustrations, and details of little-known, and often neglected, historical places of interest.

### **A Certain Age**

- Rudolph Mrázek. pub. Duke University Press 2010

Colonial Jakarta through the memories of its intellectuals. An academic work which is very readable.

### **In The Time Of Madness**

- Richard Lloyd Parry. pub. Jonathon Cape 2005

A journalist witnesses the revolution in 1998 which saw the abdication of President Suharto.

### **Eyes of God**

- Philip Babcock. pub. Edgeworth Press 2011

A multi-levelled Conradian thriller is set in the turbulent times of 97/98.

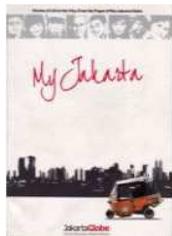
Babcock was blacklisted and deported presumably because he was a pawn in the struggles for slices of Pertamina following the injection of IMF funds. The introductory passages are set in Jakarta gangs, five star-hotels and the American Embassy.

## **JAKARTA NOW**

### **Jakarta Inside out**

- Daniel Ziv. pub. Desa Kota 4th edition 2009

A street level look and "a love letter to a city [he's] been proud to call home for over a decade." Through short incisive commentaries which accompany candid photos, Ziv provides insights into the chaotic reality of everyday life in the city.



### **My Jakarta**

- pub. Jakarta Globe 2010

A compilation of Jakarta Globe interviews with Jakarta residents (*inc. me*) talking about - erm - "My Jakarta".

### **Nineteen**

- Irfan Kortschak. pub. Mercy Corps 2008

Selected portraits of Jakarta's itinerant street vendors – tales of strength in adversity.

### **Jakarta, Jayakarta, Batavia**

- ed. Leonard Lueras. pub. Yayasan Bali Purnati 2008.

A coffee table tome with essays and fine photos - an excellent souvenir of your stay.

### **Culture Shock! Jakarta** (no apologies for this blatant plug.)

- Terry Collins and Derek Bacon. (pub. Marshall Cavendish 2nd edition 2011)

fr. Amazon review: *As an Indonesian born and living around Jakarta, reading this book still managed to give me insights about the little and not-so-little things that escaped my attention.*

## **NOVELS**

### **Batavia's Graveyard**

- Mike Dash. pub. Three Rivers Press N.Y. 2002

*"The true story of the mad heretic who led history's bloodiest mutiny - in 1629"*

### **The Year Of Living Dangerously**

- C.J.Koch. pub. Grafton 1978

About journalists waiting for the revolution in 1965 which saw the downfall of President Sukarno. Banned during the Suharto era as was the movie, starring Mel Gibson. However, it has recently been shown on local TV.

### **Monkeys In The Dark**

- Blanche d'Alpuget. pub. Aurora 1980

Life in Jakarta among expats in the inter-regnum between the '65 coup and Sukarno's exile.

+ not Jakarta specific, but **Batavia** features strongly.

### **Ups and Downs of Life In The Indies**

- P.A.Daum. pub. Periplus 1999

Dutch colonial life in the nineteenth century.

### **Indonesian writers** (translated into English)

#### **Twilight In Jakarta** - Mochtar Lubis (1963)

This was the first Indonesian novel to be translated into English.. His tale of life

in the *kampungs*, with its politics, poverty, corruption and crime, when he was a thorn in the side of Sukarno, still seems relevant.

**Saman** - Ayu Utami (1998) Trans. pub. Equinox. 2005

Utami covers many of Indonesia's social ills, such as exploitation of plantation workers, political oppression, religious and sexual identity in the last years of Suharto's regime. This is an outstanding and courageous novel, which echoes today.

Also worth reading is anything by Pramoedya Ananta Toer.

## **PUBLISHERS**

Delve into Academia for a myriad theses and articles published by universities and smaller publishing houses on history, geography, ecology, culture ...

### **Afterhours.**

Beautifully bound, perfectly printed (i.e. expensive) tomes about specific cultural aspects of Indonesian life, past and present..

### **Equinox**

Publishes a wide range of non-fiction, mainly in the business and political arenas, They also republish long-out-of-print works, both fiction and non-fiction, as well as new works by, e.g. Michael Vatikiotis and translations e.g. Ayu Utami's *Sanam*

### **Periplus Editions**

Browse their catalogue for high-quality illustrated books, dictionaries and maps on Indonesia and other Southeast Asian countries.

### **Lontar Foundation**

Since its founding in 1987 Lontar has focussed on creating a 'market' for Indonesian literature abroad through the publication of Indonesian literary titles in English translation.

### **Yayasan Bali Purnati**

Coffee table tomes with fine photographs illustrating essays.

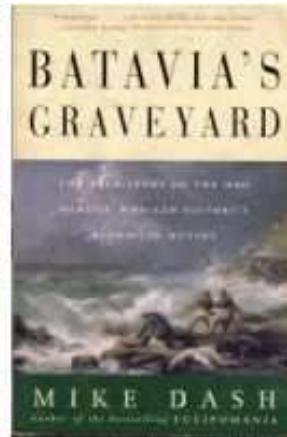
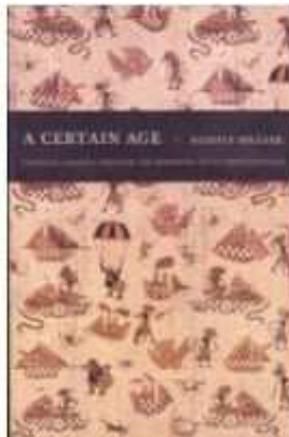
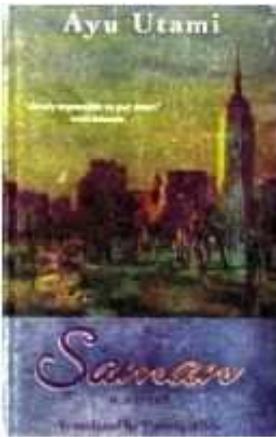
### **Blogs and other Websites.**

Even a blind man can see that more folk carry 'smart' phones than carry books. If you are one of those, then there are several non-commercial websites, especially blogs, which offer different insights into Jakarta.

+

Inside Indonesia - monthly, with email subscriptions, readable, wide ranging in-depth articles.

The late David Jardine wrote many book reviews for Tempo magazine and other publications. His archives: <http://davidjardine.net/?cat=10>



**John H. McGlynn - Lontar Foundation** (pub.10.4.14)

First published in the **Indonesia Expat** magazine (Issue 115 – 8.4.14)

*“If the word of God had come down to the Indonesian archipelago, this is where it would have remained.”*

- John H. McGlynn, Co-founder and Chairman of Lontar Foundation

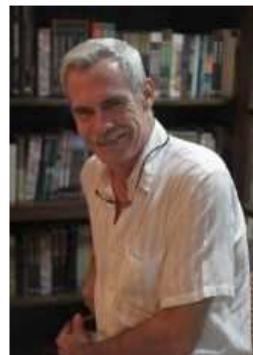
For much of the world, Indonesia is an exotic country next to Bali, and Java is where coffee comes from. It's viewed as a land of smiles, of gamelan, spices, volcanoes, komodo dragons, and photogenic rice terraces.

It's also seen in the international media as a country of natural and manmade disasters: tsunamis, earthquakes, volcanic eruptions, floods, plane crashes, deforestation and occasional terrorism.

There are few foreigners who make the effort to dig deeper, to discover what makes Indonesia tick. One Jakarta expat who has, and has also done more than most of us to make Indonesia tick, is John McGlynn.

Although we have friends in common, we hadn't previously met nor had I visited the Lontar Foundation's centre in a backstreet of Pejompongan, Central Jakarta. From the outside, it is a modern looking house, but once inside I was impressed by the comfortable decor: dark wooden floors creaked, several alcoves were lined with full but tidy wooden book shelves, and there were enough comfy rattan chairs to provide the familiarity of a well-run library.

I was impressed by the large oil paintings which couldn't readily be categorised as 'Indonesian art', but added to the ambiance.



The purpose of our meeting was to discuss Lontar which is noted for its

translations into English of Indonesian 'literature', an often capitalised word which, as a non-academic, I viewed with some trepidation. I was taught to analyse 'classic novels' rather than to consider the stories and the background circumstances of the writing. However, John defines 'literature', in the broadest sense of the word, "as ranging from research reports, academic treatises, and patent schemes all the way up to film-scripts, comic novels, and poetry."

John first came here in 1976 to study Indonesian, which he did first in Malang and later in Jakarta, at the University of Indonesia. In 1978 he returned to the the USA to complete his university studies, gaining a Masters Degree in Indonesian Literature at the University of Michigan in 1981. Thereafter he returned to Indonesia and it was while working as a freelance translator that he, along with Indonesian writers Sapardi Djoko Damono, Goenawan Mohamad, Subagio Sastrowardoyo and Umar Kayam decided to found Lontar in 1987.

Lontar is primarily John's 'baby'. As Pak Goenawan has said, "*John works single-mindedly for our purpose: to bring Indonesian literary expressions to the world.*"

Even for a polyglot, that's no easy matter. The lingua franca during the Dutch colonial era was Malay, the language developed throughout the region by traders over a thousand years. It was originally written in an Indic script and then, after the coming of Islam to the archipelago, in an Arabic-based script called Jawi.

Then in 1901 the Dutch linguist Charles van Ophuijsen introduced a more systematic spelling system, one that conformed with Dutch spelling practices. In 1947, after the revolution of Indonesian independence, this spelling system was replaced with the *Ejaan Yang Disempurnakan* (Improved Spelling). The EYD system thus represents the third orthographic change.

Indonesian grew with Javanese, spoken by the majority, and other regional languages added to the complexity. It was not until 1972 that the EYD system was agreed with Malaysia, which had English and its own regional languages contributing to the mix, and hence Soeharto became Suharto, and Djakarta became ...

All this was largely irrelevant to most Indonesians, the large percentage of whom could not read or write. In rural Indonesia and urban kampungs the fantasy worlds of such Hindu classics as the Ramayana and Mahabharata stories were related by a visiting *dalang* (puppet master) who relayed their moral values, and during Soeharto's Orde Baru often inserted his political messages.

In 1870, some of the Dutch-founded schools opened the doors for bumiputera (native Indonesians), albeit a privileged few. Moreover, it was not until 1950 that a six year programme of compulsory elementary schooling was introduced to newly independent Indonesia.

Hence, when Soeharto assumed power in 1966 the literacy rate was c.50%. The adoption of "The Functional Literacy Program", which ran from 1966 to 1979 and was followed by other programmes, raised the literacy rate for adults

to c.83% and for children to c.90% in 1998, the year Suharto (was) stood down. However, their aim was for economic, productive reasons rather than for freedom of thought.

Jawi script	Rumi script
<p>كيا لون اينتن بر كليف-كليف دلا غيت تيغي،            دان جياي مئاري-ناري دلا غيت بيرو،            تيدقه دافت مننغن قراسا نكو،            بع ريندوكن كحامبيرن كاسيه.</p>	<p><i>Kilauan intan berkelip-kelip di langit tinggi,            Dan cahaya menari-nari di langit biru,            Tidaklah dapat menenangkan perasaanku,            Yang rindukan kehadiran kasih.</i></p>
<p>گم رسيق ايرام مرديو بولوه قريندو،            دان يايون قاري ٢ دري كايغن،            تيدقه دافت تننرمكن ساتوباري،            بع مندمباكن كشمين كاسيهمو.</p>	<p><i>Gemersik irama merdu buluh perindu,            Dan nyanyian pari-pari dari kayangan,            Tidaklah dapat tenteramkan sanubari,            Yang mendambakan kepastian kasihmu.</i></p>

#### English translation

The glimmer of gems waltzing beyond the celestial sphere,  
 And aurora ablaze a ballet upon the azure sky,  
 None are able to soothe my heart,  
 That desirous for an affection.

The melodious rhythm of the yearning bamboos,  
 And the ballads of nymphs from the eden,  
 None are able to calm the soul,  
 That craving for your word of honour.

By contrast, writing, especially fiction, offers the context of 'place' and, in John's words, "the better books have real people in them" and can therefore be subversive: much of Indonesian literature has the nationalist struggle as the historical background.

Post-independence, with the bureaucracy and military at their disposal, Presidents Soekarno and Soeharto imprisoned and exiled writers. The dawn of *reformasi* in 1998 and the growth of the internet and other communications technology has seen many more Indonesians speaking out via text messages, blogs, social media and novels.

However, what John wrote in an essay *Silenced Voices, Muted Expressions* for an anthology of *'New Writing From Indonesia': Indonesian Literature Today* published by the University of Hawai'i in 2000, still holds true today.

He wrote: "*Having grown up under constraints of freedom of expression and inquiry, an entire generation has been traumatized into becoming a society of silence and avoidance. Not until today's young people have unlearned the ways*

*of repression and a new generation has been educated to respect and defend its right to freedom of expression will true openness and democracy come to Indonesia."*

There is also the need to foster a love of reading in early childhood which John believes should start at home. However, although I think that schools have a greater role to play, many parents and teachers still have the mindset inculcated during Suharto's régime, and only those who are enlightened, rather than blinkered with prejudices or self-interest, will encourage the freedom of thought engendered by easy access to fiction.

Good writing comes from wide reading, and access to it. So one of Lontar's goals is *"to stimulate the further development of Indonesian literature."*

In addition to its library of printed materials containing more than 3,000 books and other texts related to Indonesian literature, the foundation maintains a digital library [which] provides preservation and access to materials produced and gathered by the foundation over its 20+ year history including:

- videos from the Indonesian Writers Series, Indonesian Performance Traditions, and Wayang Kulit/Shadow Puppet Theater Series
- audio interviews with Indonesian authors and witnesses from significant events in Indonesian history.
- archival photographs of traditional manuscripts, colonial-era postcards, and historical images from the New Order to the present.

### **Frankfurt Book Fair 2015**

John says that the aim of Lontar is to *"promote knowledge of Indonesia through its literature"*, and it is natural that he is a member of the 'Indonesian National Committee for Preparing Indonesia as Guest of Honour in Frankfurt – 2016'.

The first Frankfurt Book Fair was held soon after Johannes Gutenberg invented the movable type printing press in around 1439. Revived in 1949, it is now the world's largest and most prestigious book fair. Since 1986 a country, or region, has been chosen as 'Guest of Honour'.

However, with several government ministries and a large number of departments involved, as well as the Goethe Institut, Lontar and others, he thinks preparations should have been started earlier than the end of last year, if only to have a larger range of books at Frankfurt.

Over the years, John has worked with more than 100 translators and is well aware of the time required to produce a literary translation that *"is both felicitous to the original text and appealing to the target audience"*. However, a worrisome fact is that of those 100 translators *"no more than a dozen are both truly fluent both in Indonesian and English."*

John further notes that *"for the rest, a heavy dose of editing is usually required."*

However, some good news has recently been received: the Ministry of Education and Culture has established a translation funding program, the "I-Lit

(Indonesian Literature in Translation) Program”.

For those who like to carry many books on their travels, the Kindle is ideal, John says, but we both agreed that with such devices something is lost. Printed books are shared, and one can learn a lot about folk by browsing their shelves of well-thumbed books.

Lontar books are available in Indonesia at Periplus bookstores and abroad through Amazon as print-on-demand paperbacks. They are also available as e-books through Book Cyclone.

Website: <http://lontar.org/>

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### **Books On The Go (85-6)** (pub.11.6.14)

(Also published in Jakartass Travels: <http://travelsofjakartass.wordpress.com/>)

I travelled around the world for some thirteen months and always had a book to hand for those moments when the emotional switchback ride of constant auditory, visual and physical contacts became too much. Also, when the discomfort of travel by plane, train, bus or truck wracked my frame, a book took me out of myself.

One of the joys of arriving in a town visited by fellow travellers is that there's an opportunity to exchange reading material. I stayed for over two months in Ladakh, so there I was instrumental in setting up a book exchange. This also served as a meeting place, and I sought out similar places wherever and whenever I could. Singapore was different: at the time a row of secondhand book stores could be found at the bottom end of Orchard Road. These have gone the way of much of the city-state - replaced with a featureless tower.

These, in chronological order, are some of what I read. The few words I've added are taken from the entries in the diary I kept, which I'm gradually posting online.

The places give some notion of my awareness of who I was at the particular time and place the books were to hand. Just one, *Blue Highways*, has a whole post because it's the only book I didn't return to a book exchange and can be found on my book shelves here in Jakarta.

(Note t&p = 'easy' train and plane read, not for one's bookshelves.)

### **Flight London to Delhi**

*The Passion of Molly T* - Laurence Sanders

#### **Ladakh**

*Daughter of Tibet* - Rimchen Dolma Taring (1970)

*A Journey In Ladakh* - Andrew Harvey (1981)

*Christine* - Stephen King t&p

*Blue Highways* - William Least Heat-Moon (1983) (Review on page 47)

*Mussolini: His Part In My Downfall* - Spike Milligan

*Coils* - Roger Zelazny t&p  
*Freedom At Midnight* - Larry Collins & Dominique Lapierre t&p  
*The Honourable Schoolboy* - John Le Carré  
*The Mint* - T.E. Lawrence  
*Midnight's Children* - Salman Rushdie

### **India** - 'on the road'

*World According To Garp* - John Irving  
*Empire Of The Sun* - J.G. Ballard  
*The Seduction Of Peter S* - Laurence Sanders t&p  
*The Name Of The Rose* - Umberto Eco

### **Kovalum Beach**

fr. diary 30.9.85

*For mental stimulation I have read almost constantly - all train and plane volumes I've missed out on whilst training and planing: Robert Ludlum and his ilk. Pure entertainment and escapism, not that I want to be entertained or escape from here - just yet.*

*Aquitaine Progression* - Robert Ludlum t&p  
*White Mandarin* - Dan Sherman t&p  
*Saladin* by Andrew Osmond t&p  
*Second Saladin* - Stephen Hunter t&p  
*Night Work* - Irwin Shaw t&p  
*Twilight Strike* - Michael Stewart t&p  
*Strange Evil* - Jane Gaskell t&p

### **Kerala**

*Return Of The Native* - Thomas Hardy

### **Singapore**

*Long Voyage Back* - Luke Reinhart t&p  
*'A long book for people who like short words.'*  
*Dead Secret* - Alan Williams t&p

### **Penang**

*Understrike* - John Gardner t&p  
*The Nostradamus Traitor* - John Gardner t&p  
*Far From The Madding Crowd* - Thomas Hardy

### **Penang to Bangkok train**

*Claudius, The God* - Robert Graves  
*(Noted that Robert Graves had just died aged 90)*

### **Thailand**

*Mixed Company* - Irwin Shaw  
*'Well crafted, dour short stories about World War II'*  
*Family Trade* - James Carroll t&p  
*The Dancing Dodo* - John Gardner t&p  
*The Restaurant At The End Of The Universe* - Douglas Adams  
*'An alternative Lonely Planet book'*  
*The Retreat of Radiance* - Ian Moffit  
*'Very fine thriller, decriptive narrative of the 'new' China'*

*A Small Town In Germany* - John Le Carré (*a reread*)  
*Black Heart* - Eric Von Lustgarten t&p  
*'750 pages of pap, sex and violence'*  
*Green Ice* - Gerald Brown t&p  
*'Witty account of emerald heist interwoven with love affair'*  
*Heritage* - Peter Driscoll t&p  
*'570 pages, family saga set in OAS Algeria:*  
*Baraka* - John Ralston Saul t&p  
*'Deftly written tale of arms smuggling - oil companies'*  
*Sideshow: Kissinger, Nixon and the Destruction of Cambodia* - William Shawcross  
*'Horrific account of arrogance, blind militarism'*  
*Angel Of Death* - Thomas Perat  
*'Absolute crap. Appalling plot, poorly told'*  
*Slapstick* - Kurt Vonnegut  
*'As usual, humane and humorous'*  
*Year of The Golden Ape* - Colin Forbes  
*Action filled thriller, excellent t&p and lazy afternoon read.*  
*The Queen's Gambit* - Walter Tevis.  
*A compelling read of a girl chess prodigy.*  
*Other Women* - Lisa Alther.  
*Sharp sympathetic characterization of two modern women in need of reinforcement.*  
*The sort of book that makes you nod in acknowledgement.*  
*Empires Of The Sky* - Anthony Sampson  
*Account of growth of international air travel, cartels and politics*

### **Thailand>Malaysia**

*The Water-Method Man* - John Irving  
*Clever writing, sharp, bizarre, astute, familiar*

### **Malaysia**

*The Case of Lucy Bending* - Laurence Sanders t&p  
*Another familiar and engrossing read of human frailty*

### **Singapore & Fiji**

*The Fourth Deadly Sin* - Laurence Sanders t&p  
*Another comfortable detective story.*  
*Love Songs* - Laurence Sanders t&p  
*Psychological thriller of sexual emotions, better than the blurb indicates.*  
*Sanders' forte is good characterisation.*  
*Ride A Pale Horse* - Helen MacInnes t&p  
*USA v KGB*  
*Death Beam* - Robert Moss t&p  
*Ditto.*  
*The Sweetheart Deal* - Robert Rosenblum t&p  
*Law & order v. the mob & morality, with a good sting ending.*  
*Original Sins* - Lisa Alther  
*Good sense of character and generations*

*Schindler's Ark* - Thomas Keneally

*Booker prize winner and deservedly so. Real life history of flawed anti-Nazi hero*

*The King's Commisar* - Duncan Kyle t&p

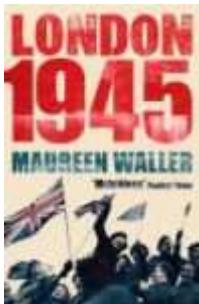
*Cross referencing Fall of Tsar in 1917 and merchant bank in 1983*

*The Dream Traders* - E.V. Thompson

*Good narrative of early Hong Kong and background to Chinese Opium War*

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## REVIEWS



### **London 1945: Life in the Debris of War**

Maureen Waller

John Murray 2004

512pp

ISBN 0 7195 6602 9

The cover photograph used shows Londoners celebrating VE Day in May 1945, a time of celebration because five years of deprivation and massive destruction had come to an end.

It was a time of release, and maybe the photograph was taken on the day I was conceived. I was born nine months later. It's nice to think that my existence is probably the result of a happy passion.

The book is about the transition between war and peace; quite clearly it is the peace which has been hardest to bear. Women, who'd remained behind as their husbands and brothers went off to fight in foreign lands, worked in the munitions factories, produced the food and materials and other essentials, and for the first time in British history, as well as assuming full responsibility for managing the home, gained an unheard of degree of independence.

This was to end when peace came.

It took at least twenty years to pay off the war debt (to the USA), rationing existed for a good number of years into my memory bank, and the communal spirit gradually died.

It is clear though that I benefitted from the war. The coalition government of the war years, through necessity, brought an immense degree of social control into the population's lives. It was the war effort which enabled the 1944 Education Act and the National Health Service, inaugurated in 1948.

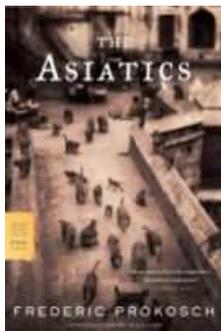
Subsidised health services, including free vitamins, milk and, yeuk, cod liver oil, gave me a head start in life, and my education through to university was largely free, although my parents contributed according to their means.

All parents are expected to make sacrifices for their children. This book is the story of my parents' generation.

With age comes reflection, and this immensely detailed book is, therefore, timely and any of my readers wishing to know more about where Jakartass comes from would do well to read it.

Originally published in GoodReads June 22nd 2008

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### **The Asiatics: A Novel**

Frederic Prokosch  
Chatto & Windus 1935  
Paperback 1983  
ISBN 0-571-13199-9

*Prokosch is a master of moods and undertones, a virtuoso in the feeling of place, and he writes in a style of supple elegance.*

- Albert Camus

I learnt only recently that **Frederic Prokosch** didn't actually travel through all the countries he describes. Neither have I, but his description of Ladakh, in the Himalayas of north-western India matches my recall of 22 years ago.

"I believe all of *The Asiatics* is accurate, geographically and socially speaking," he said after the novel's original publication in 1935, when he was 27. "I've skirmished about a bit in northern Africa and western Asia, and now I'm off to the Balkans, Bukhara and Samarkand."

*The Asiatics* is seemingly an autobiography of an American in his twenties exploring the world and thus exploring himself. It is the journey itself rather than the arrival which is of value, so we gradually see the protagonist 'growing up' as he learns about different philosophies.

It is sad to note that he was prescient; sad because surely what he forecast is now upon us.

*Take away our clothes, our food, our liquor, our quaint sexual pleasures, or fatiguing little conversations and our loathsome excitements about this and that: what's left? A hollow thing, like one of those silver Christmas-tree ornaments, with no more blood or warmth. Let the snow fall and we're cold as ice, let the wind rustle the branches and we drop and shatter once and for all.*

*Nothing's left, because we never really lived anything, we never rose above the world of objects, we never deep down within us were alive. It's the age of inversion, the negative age. We're changing into tremendous plants, and soon we'll be breathing carbon dioxide, at the rate we're going.*

When travelling, I find it comforting to read and extract bon mots, words that encapsulate and clarify my ill-formed thoughts.

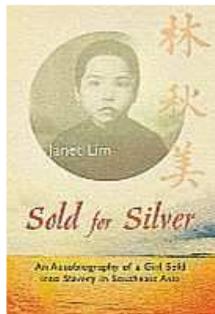
When I came to Indonesia at the tail end of 1987, I brought two books with me,

knowing that both would be reread more than once.

This classic is one of those.

Originally published in **GoodReads** 22nd June 2008.

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### **Sold for Silver by**

Author: Janet Lim

Monsoon Books (Singapore) 2004

978-981-05-1728-1

(Originally pub. William Collins & Sons, UK, 1958)

Janet Lim's account of her early life is subtitled *The Autobiography of a Girl Sold into Slavery in Southeast Asia*. When it was first published, in 1958, she wrote, "Today I am not, as I used to be, ashamed of my past."

She was by then 35 and times were different. Fifty years later and her statement is even less unusual as her fate has been mirrored in many ways across continents and cultures by countless others. There can be no shame when your life is determined by the circumstances of your birth.

Born in Hong Kong in 1923, her early childhood was spent in rural China. Her father was a doctor who practiced *sin seh*, traditional medicine, and doted on her. Her mother was strict and rarely showed affection towards her, but at that time, Chinese wives lived almost entirely separated from their husbands and, presumably, in turn little affection was shown to her.

Girls were generally considered a nuisance, only good for marriage at 15. Janet had two sisters who died in infancy and a beloved brother who died aged four, and when she was six her father died. Thus ended her relatively benign childhood.

As it was not the custom for bereaved wives to inherit property, her mother remarried in order to have a measure of security. Janet did feel that her mother loved her, but she had become an extra burden and what followed was seemingly inevitable - she became a *mui tsai*. This term referred to girls transferred from their families, for payment or as settlement of a loan, to other families to be used as domestic servants. Given no pay, they were on the lowest rung of a household.

Janet was transferred indirectly through a trafficker in girls from destitute families and, at just 8, she ended up in Singapore where she "was looked at, criticized, and after much bargaining sold for \$250".

*"My master was a very rich man, a landowner .... who craved female company. After about three months, he started trying to visit me at night. I cannot express my terror when I heard his footsteps. I crawled anywhere, inside cupboards, under the beds, outside the windows, anywhere, as long as I could get out of his*

*reach. I never slept for two nights in the same place."*

In 1933, the government passed a law requiring all *mui tsai* girls to be registered and Janet then began a journey, which took her via a Christian orphanage to the nursing profession.

In December 1941, war arrived in Singapore and on February 13th Janet along with her fellow nurses was evacuated aboard a ship which was doomed to be sunk by a Japanese bomb.

After drifting for two days, she and a few other survivors were rescued and taken to the island of Sumatra.

In the second half of the book Janet Lim gives an account of her struggles, mainly in Padang, West Sumatra, with malaria and the seemingly endless concern that she would become one of the 'comfort women' for the Japanese.

She escaped into the surrounding jungle only to be recaptured and tortured. There were times when she was ready to give up. Following one lengthy bout of questioning, she was taken to the beach at Padang at two in the morning.

She thought that she was going to be shot as this was a preferred method of execution by the Japanese who were thus spared the problem of body disposal.

*As I stepped out (of the car) they caught hold of me thinking that I was trying to escape. I laughed aloud and said, "Don't touch me, I won't run. I am more eager to die than you know."*

Eventually, the Japanese allowed Janet to resume nursing at the local cement works. With the end of the war, she returned to Singapore, where she became a hospital matron, eventually relocating to Australia and raising a family.

Janet Lim's prose may leave readers underwhelmed. Apart from the recurring underlying motif of protecting her 'honour', from her Chinese slave-master in Singapore to the Japanese overlords in West Sumatra, there is very much a sense of unexplored emotions.

This account may have served as an exorcism of past hurts, but, although she denies this at the outset, there are still echoes of a lingering sense of shame. None of us can ever completely overcome the traumas of our childhoods.

After repeated and continuing news through the years of genocide, massacres, serial killings, of 9/11, the Bali bombings and other more recent terrorist outrages, I often wonder whether we build a blanket of insouciant immunity to the shocking news of Man's inhumanity to Man and other desecrations of the human spirit.

Janet's is a lone voice from the past reminding us of present societal ills. There may be fewer countries at war, but torture is no longer, nor indeed has it ever been, the prerogative of a few rogue states. According to the UN, up to 27 million people are now held in slavery, far more than at the peak of the African slave trade, and the majority of the victims this time are Asian women.

The message of this book lies in Janet's struggle to be true to herself, even at those times when all seemed lost. Her experience as a bought child gave her the strength as she began her adult life in appalling circumstances to be true to herself and no-one else. That is a valuable lesson for today's world.

*Published on Jakartass 10 June 2009*

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**Rimbaud in Java: *The Lost Voyage***

Author: Jamie James

Editions Didier Millet (Singapore) 2011

ISBN 978-981-4260-82-4

Those of us growing nostalgic for the follies of our youth, who set off on our worldly travels not knowing where our pig was headed cannot state that our sole reason for travelling was an innate curiosity.

It may have been to explore one's roots, as London witnessed with its influx of Australians, and Ireland with its pilgrimages of Americans. For others, our travels may have been motivated by a desire to start over in midlife, as for Jamie James, the author of *Rimbaud in Java*, or, as perhaps for Rimbaud, an escape from the restrictions of family life.

Several factors determine where we go and where we end up: it may have been a postcard from abroad, a meeting with someone from afar, or a travelogue on TV. For some, vicarious imaginings through reading, say, Jack Kerouac's *On The Road* or even Tolkien's *The Hobbit* may spark wanderlust.

For Jean-Nicolas-Arthur Rimbaud, who was born in 1854 in the provincial town of Charleville in the Ardennes, northeastern France, it was surely a combination of factors.

He was the second son of a career soldier who left the family six years later, shortly after the birth of a daughter. Arthur's mother was strictly religious and controlling, even to the extent of collecting the two boys from school until they were 15 and 16. Her exertions may have been her way of distancing her boys from her two alcoholic "bohemian" brothers.

Rimbaud was a gifted student in most subjects at school. Two teachers, one a private tutor, encouraged his love of literature and he began to write poems in French and Latin, one of which was published at the age of fourteen.

When his teacher left the school upon the outbreak of the Franco-Prussian War in 1870, as is the wont of insulated adolescent boys, Rimbaud rebelled and ran away to Paris, was arrested for travelling without a ticket, which cost him a week in jail, returned to Charleville and promptly ran away again fearing the wrath of his mother.

For the next four years, Rimbaud had a dissolute lifestyle. He sent several poems to Paul Verlaine who in 1894 was elected France's "Prince of Poets" by his peers. Verlaine invited Rimbaud to join him and they embarked on a year long torrid affair, living in poverty, drinking absinthe, smoking hashish and thereby shocking society in Paris, London and Paris.

All the while, Rimbaud was producing what came to be known as Symbolist writing, the representation of absolute truths which could only be described indirectly.

Yet, this reviewer wonders whether Rimbaud had a very specific notion to journey to the Dutch East Indies, now Indonesia.

fr. A Season In Hell (1873)

*My day is done. I'm leaving Europe.*

*The sea air will burn my lungs; hot climes will burn my skin,.*

fr. The Illuminations (1874)

*I have seen sidereal archipelagos and islands whose delirious heavens are open to the voyager.*

By 1875, Rimbaud had given up poetry, whether because he had 'grown up' or because he wanted to become financially self-sufficient in order to resume his poetic life at some later date is unknown.

In May 1876 he enlisted in the Dutch Colonial Army, a mercenary force, set sail for Java on June 10th, and arrived in Batavia on July 22nd. The force of 172 men were barracked in what is now Jatinegara, and on July 30th set sail again for Semarang, caught a train to Tuntang, from where it was an eight kilometre march to the encampment at Salatiga.

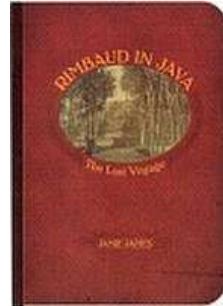
By August 15th, Rimbaud had deserted and no documents have been found about his life until, it is thought, he arrived at his sister's house in Charleville on December 31st. To reach there on that date, examination of shipping records suggests that he was aboard the *Wandering Chief*, a Scottish bark which set sail from Semarang on August 30th.

It is Rimbaud's undocumented missing fortnight in Central Java which forms the central core of Jamie James' recently published book. Of necessity, what he writes is pure conjecture laced with descriptions of present day relics, the sights and sites which Rimbaud may have seen and encountered, as well as descriptions from writers of that period such as Balzac, Baudelaire, Flaubert, and Alfred Wallace, of opium dens, Sumatran jungles, the many ruined temples etc.

As a critic, James brings a profound knowledge and "a consuming enthusiasm" for the life and works of Rimbaud. I am in some awe of what James has achieved with this slim volume, a book I shall continue to dip into, so as to explore and journey down some of the many paths.

If you are already an “enthusiast” for Rimbaud, then you will delight in this addition to your library.

Moreover, it is a rare book, impeccably printed on quality ‘art’ paper with period illustrations and one that is a real pleasure to hold and possess.



Originally published in *TEMPO* September 27th 2011



Rimbaud's Java

### **Batam and the Riau Islands**

Edited: Leonard Lueras

Pub. The Yayasan Bali Purnati 2011

pp.320

*Batam & Riau Islands* is the sixth in a series of 'coffee-table' books produced by Leonard Lueras, noted author of *Surfing Indonesia*, and the Yayasan Bali Purnati which focus on aspects of Indonesia often overlooked by tourists and residents alike.

The first three in the series were portraits of Sanur, Kuta and Ubud, but more recently Leonard has moved beyond Bali. This is no bad thing. I've learned a lot about Yogyakarta and even Jakarta which I have written about extensively for nine years.

A bulky hardback, *Batam and the Riau Islands* could well have benefited from having been published as a pair. One is of interest to business folk and Singaporeans wishing to enjoy whatever modern benefits are offered on Batam and Bintan, whilst the other sheds light on a few of the other 3,200 islands which make up the Province, sleepy backwaters which have a rare significance in world history.

In recent years, few non-Indonesians have visited any of the islands which

make up the Riau Archipelago which faces Malaysia and Singapore, whereas Batam, and to a lesser extent Bintan, which are described as "*some of the most developed and affluent parts of Indonesia*", are familiar to many.

Indeed, such is the vastness of this country that in my 24 plus years here, I have only had a cursory glance at Batam whilst en route to Singapore by ferry, and I didn't like what I saw.

Many of the photographs depict "Batam's penchant for colorful structures".



In her essay 'Batam Today', Jan Russell writes: "*Batam is building, building, building. Throughout, the earth has been torn up, left raw and exposed in every shade from pastel peach to russet red, to make way for colorful rukos (shophouses), flimsy as film sets, or close-knit worker housing such as one that is elegantly titled, with no apparent irony, the Family Dream Home.*"

To this reviewer, these rows of *rukos* were seemingly inspired by Legoland or Disneyland. The satellite towns of Jakarta are littered with similar eyesores.

The final chapter is a hagiographic account of the achievement of Pak Kris Taenar Wiluan in developing the Citramas Group from a pipe-processing firm employing 40 people in 1983 to an international group now employing 4,000 people in 20 countries with revenues "exceeding US\$1 billion".

He could not have managed this without political backing, and the chapter entitled *Batam's "Father"* is most illuminating, as it is an interview conducted by Leonard with former Indonesian President Bacharrudin Habibie. He tells how the then General Suharto used Batam as his headquarters during the *Konfrontasi* between Indonesia and Malaya (1963-1966), because he could see across to Singapore, then part of Malaya. He observed the movement of shipping and said, "My goodness, this is a very strategic place."

Chris Holm's essay, '*Batam Means Business*' chronicles the foundation of the Batam Industrial Development Authority (BIDA) in 1971 by the astonishingly corrupt Ibnu Sutowo. In March 1979, B.J. Habibie took the helm of BIDA and from the outset he envisaged Batam developing a synergy with Singapore and Malaysia, whilst using Singapore's development as an example "*to motivate [my] people*".

Talking about the situation on Batam now, former President Habibie said, "*Now they are not consistent with their planning. They do what they want.*"

As always?

The first essay, *Origins*, is by the recently deceased David Jardine\* who has

written from a historian's perspective with his expected objective and detailed insight.

Since the early stages of human migration the Riau islands and Lingga (the group of islands further from the coast of Sumatra) "*at the swing point of the Straits of Malacca, the Java Sea and the South China Sea*" have been "*of the greatest significance.*"



The first migration of note was of the Malayoid people, originally from the north-western part of Yunnan in China. Later proto-Malays were seafaring people, probably from coastal Borneo, who expanded into Sumatra and Peninsular Malaysia as a result of trading and seafaring activities. Their gene pool mixed with other races, mainly Thai, Arab and Chinese, who "*perhaps needless to say*", brought their religions and cultures, remnants of which remain to this day.

Arabs, who traded with the Romans, and Chinese of the Chou dynasty established a sea route some two hundred years before the Christian era (BCE).

As Jill Gocher writes in her essay 'Royal Riau', one reason for the importance of the strategic importance of the Riau islands is that "*the two annual monsoons that hit this area allowed traders from India, Arabia and China to converge here - to stay for each respective monsoon before heading homeward laden with the precious commodities of the other side. They left Riau with Chinese silks and porcelains, spices from the Spice Islands, textiles from India, and timbers, gold, gems and other exotic treasures from Borneo.*"

David Jardine writes of the Buddhist state of Sriwijaya which, from the 7th century CE, "*was pre-eminent in the region and exacted tribute from far and wide [and] attracted the devout from as far away as China to study in its schools and temples.*"

But not all was peace and love. The seafarer Fa-Hsien had made the journey from China to India in 413-414 and reported that "*the waters of Southeast Asia are full of pirates*", the many islands of Riau and Lingga "*providing a multitude of bolt-holes to which one could escape with plunder*", as they have done continuously to this day.

Once the Europeans arrived to fight over the spice trade, the Bugis of South Sulawesi became such major players in piracy that English children are still taught to “beware of the Bogey Man.”

But what of now?

Gilles Massot writes of the “*motley crowd*” that makes up the ‘Riau Mosaic’, which now includes the remnants of the Vietnamese boatpeople who were originally housed on Galang island by the Indonesian government.

Steve Kell's focus is on Tanjung Pinang, capital of Riau Islands province, and Bintan, the largest of the Riau islands.

He wandered among the villages, explored beaches and neighbouring islands occupied by single families and interacted with “*lots of friendly people*”. He did not explore the northern part of Bintan as “*approximately 20 years ago the Indonesian government leased much of it to Singaporean business interests, and it has since been turned into a luxury resort ... where prices for goods and services are quoted in Singapore dollars.*”

Evan Jones is a pioneer explorer of the islands, paddling by canoe “*in a silent and deserted wilderness of mangroves and coastlines intersected by an occasional black sand beach.*” However, as he points out, tourism has declined partly due to “*government policies which make travel to Indonesia difficult.*”

Through the many fine photographs and much of the writing, one rediscovers that thanks to its location Indonesia is, and always has been, one of the most culturally diverse countries in the world. If for that reason alone, we should be grateful to Leonard Leuras for the reminder.

But one thought does not go away: where is the foreword from the Ministry of Tourism?

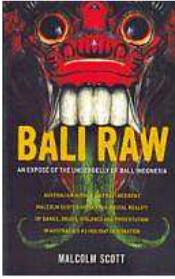
Published in Tempo Magazine (English) March 11th 2011

#### Notes

The illustration of lego houses is from the book, but this Map of the Arab-China trade route is taken from here: <http://nabataea.net/msroute.html>

\*Leonard Lueras has kindly donated ‘*Origins – Geography is Destiny*’ to the David Jardine online archives. Read it here: <http://davidjardine.net/?p=235>

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## **Bali Raw: An Exposé of the Underbelly of Bali**

Malcolm Scott

Monsoon Books, Singapore. 2012

ISBN (e-book): 978-981-4358-72-9

ISBN (paperback) 978-981-4358-71-2

This is a strange book, and I have to wonder why it was written, let alone published.

Malcolm Scott went to Bali some ten years ago to escape the fallout of a broken marriage. His three brothers owned and ran a construction-real estate company in Bali and offered him a refuge from the emotional turmoil, but in so doing gave him an entrée into another. By his account, and through the many anecdotes he relates with much gusto but little sophistication, his brothers are hard men as are most of the Indonesian milieu - police, gangsters, 'working girls' - they mix with.

*Bali is a rough place. You don't see it in the brochures, and the Indonesian press is very careful about what it prints, but the truth is there is always something going down. Tourists get robbed, raped and murdered and Westerners get in fights amongst themselves and with Indonesians on a regular basis.*

That is the opening to the second chapter of Malcolm Scott's anecdotal account of his ten years living in Bali. The first chapter is devoted to a serious fight which took place before he'd accepted the job offer.

The setting is Kuta and Legian, the southern strip of beaches close to the international airport, an area lined with bars, discos, cheap 'boutiques' selling mass-produced 'handicrafts and clothes. In other words, it caters for low budget tourists, such as brawny Australians seeking sun, sea and sex as an escape from whatever constitutes daily life.

That's this reviewer's impression based on just a few visits. I first visited Bali in 1988 with my English son then aged 11. We stayed in Kuta for our first couple of nights before setting off to explore much of the rest of the island. On our first day, we went for an early morning dip; the beach was empty so we hid, or so we thought, the few belongings we'd taken with us under a bush.

When we got back after our body surfing, we discovered that my spare glasses, his Swatch watch, our towels and flip-flops had all been taken. As Tony Wheeler had written in one of his Lonely Planet guides, "*Most people who lose things at Kuta are idiots who leave things on the beach.*"

We idiots made our escape and have never lost anything since.

My other visits to Kuta have been rare and have only been in order to accompany 'Er Indoors who likes to shop. Well, I don't so I always arranged to meet her in a restaurant where I'd have a cold Bintang and read whatever novel

I'd found in one of the many second-hand book shops in Ubud where we generally stayed.

I'd also make sure that wherever I chose for my quiet solitary hours was not on the well-advertised 'pub crawl' route frequented by single males who, to again quote Tony Wheeler, are "loud-mouthed drunkards who get plastered every afternoon."

What Scott's book adds to the Lonely Planet guide to Bali and where this exposé rings true is the accounts of the higher 'bule' prices and land scams. A number of expat characters are familiar too, such as those with bi-polar disorder, drunkards and poverty-stricken pensioners avoiding the immigration authorities.

Then there are the 'hookers' and 'working girls'. Yes, there's a lot of sex in Scott's land. He does have a respect for most of the bar girls, many of whom he counts as friends and, without being judgmental, he carefully explains why they do what they do. Some are sold into prostitution by their families, some are saving up to pay for a university education while others, a fairly high percentage, are single parents supporting their themselves and children.

A web search produces a number of Bali-based Malcolm Scotts, none of whom fit my perceived image of the seedy habitués of the island's underbelly.

One can be fairly certain that these publicly upright expats are similarly aware of, even if not part, the goings on in seedy Kuta. They could probably also provide anecdotes embellished with "fothermuckers" about violent incidents leading to "broken noses" and hospital visits, all of which are described at too great a length. And that is where for this reviewer Bali Raw gets tiresome.

In its favour, but somewhat minimised, is Scott's advice that casual sexual encounters require condoms because of the high risk of being infected with HIV/AIDS.

I'd also like to have read a few more survival pointers for the presumably Australian short-term visitors the book is intended for. The prevalence of buying one's way out of trouble is covered, but there is also the notion that it's best to know some who knows someone who ....

I am left with the impression that Kuta is a lot like Jakarta, except it has a cleaner beach and a lot more alcohol.

As for rough and tough hard drinking brothers, if you'd like to about the Irish lads I once knew here in Jakarta, you'll have to wait for *Jakarta Raw* - my exposé of the underbelly of the Big Durian.

*This review was first published in the free **Bali Expat** magazine 16.7.12.*

*I have since been informed that Bali Raw fits into a genre known as 'thug-lit'. Knowing this earlier would not have made me like the book any more, but it would have lead me to write a different opening sentence.*

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## Eyes of God

Philip Babcock

pub. Edgeworth Press 2011

ISBN: 1463728190

Last year, I received an email with a brief message: "*I was deported from Indonesia some years ago (under Soeharto). Inspired me to write a novel.*"

A few reviews on Amazon had a couple of key words - *Conradian, thriller*. These piqued my interest. I generally enjoy what I term 'train and plane' books, thrillers which transport me to a world far from the unpleasantness of long drawn out journeys, such as across Jakarta.

I wrote back to Philip Babcock asking if he'd be willing for me to review it. He agreed, the book duly arrived, and this is my review, one of the most difficult I've ever written. Since being deported and blacklisted in 1997/8 (?) he has never returned to this country and his alienation permeates his first novel.

Babcock is now an economics professor at the University of California and has achieved some objectivity. For example, he writes, "*If a nation is endowed with a valuable resource, it may never develop value-added industries. Things come too easily.*"

At the heart of his novel is the fallout from the IMF deal in 1997 as those anxious to grab a slice of Indonesia's economic pie, including American diplomats, jockeyed for position. Pertamina, the state oil company, was seen as the ultimate prize.

A brief synopsis would tell you that in the late '90s Harry Griffin, also known as Harry, Griffin, Griff or as the young man, the buleman, the foreigner, the odd expatriate, the new guy, etc., newly graduated from Berkeley, is lured to the oil fields of Indonesia by his mentor and surrogate father, Cliff Ramsey.

Griffin expects to go to Pulau Hitam, one of the Riau islands, to work alongside Ramsey where Ramsey is working on an automation project for Amtech, an oil company.

Nothing seems simple in Indonesia, especially for a young idealistic young American lacking Indonesian, and this novel captures much of the chaos of the time. First, Griffin has to spend a short while in Jakarta where he faces the culture shock.

The city described by Babcock is well observed, and familiar 15 years later: one of the characters "arrived ten minutes early, in spite of the traffic."

He doesn't meet anyone from the Indonesian company because it's a Friday.

*"Better Monday. The zoo, Mr. Harry. You see it. Yes?"*

He gravitates to the hotel restaurant where a "dried-up shell" of a long-term expat dispenses his wisdom.

*"The underlying Truth, Mr. Griffin, is that nobody knows anything. If anybody*

*tells you that he knows, then he's a fraud because the fact is nobody knows. But if he doesn't know, and lets you know he knows he doesn't know, well, then, he just might know something."*

At a party held by an official from the American Embassy, one of the Americans informs him that Ramsey has disappeared in an apparent suicide, so he, Griffin, has to take his place. He also meets a newly arrived journalist whose role is unclear, although he does end up with her that night at a *wayang kulit* show.

Shadows and light: the backdrop is of hidden matters.

It is this confusion which is at the heart of the novel, and has led to this reviewer's difficulty. Yes, Indonesia is hard for those of us with a western mindset to grasp, but that there appear to be four - or is it five? - narrators does not make this novel a page-turner.

At the site, riven by ethnic divisions - the Batak security are derogatory about the Javanese - an explosion occurs and someone is killed, Griffin is blamed, although he has come to realise from Ramsey's notes found on a PDA that the technology being transferred would not work.

He runs, he knows not to where, and through various hallucinatory escapades involving riots, beatings, interrogations, disguises and much else, ends up on the west coast in Padang, having somehow crossed the vast island of Sumatra. By this time, having by now realised that he has been a pawn in the games of others, he eventually comes to terms with himself.

Ever the pedant, I found that possible factual errors interrupted the flow of my reading. For example, did we use cards in public phones back in '98? We may have in Jakarta, but in small Sumatran towns?

Then, on page 272 we learn that the "*girl was a Catholic, as most Chinese Indonesians in the archipelago are.*" In Sumatra maybe, but Protestants outnumber Catholics approximately seven to three in the archipelago.

Then on page 273 a soldier is described as having "a hard face with sharp Batak features." My Indonesian family is Batak, and all of them have rounded features. Was the soldier perhaps an Acehnese?

That there appear to be four - or is it five? - narrators does not make this novel a page-turner.

Various characters are assigned labels before their names are given, often pages later. Thus 'Contact' is revealed to be 'Townsend', who had held a house-warming party in Jakarta 300 pages earlier.

Elsewhere, at various points in the narrative there is an analysis which seems out of place, as if Babcock is still working out the reasons for his abrupt departure from Indonesia.

For example, in a scene towards the end of Griffin's ordeal, set in a Padang police station cell, a "technocrat", later identified as Harseno, with presidential

ambitions describes the "auspicious continuity" of the "guiding principle of Javanese politics."

Indonesia is hard for those of us with a western mindset to grasp. I suspect that *Eyes Of God* is Babcock's attempt to rid himself of the demons from his obviously traumatic time here.

*Eyes of God* hopefully repays a second and third reading. For that I'll wait for my next plane or train trip.

*Published 8 November 2012*

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### **Raffles and The British Invasion of Java**

Tim Hannigan  
Monsoon Books 2012  
368pp  
ISBN 978-981-4358-85-9

As a lad growing up in post-World War II London, I was force-fed a history diet which told me that Britain was great because it once had an Empire. I was taught that as an island nation, we had fought off the likes of the Spanish Armada, Napoleon and Hitler, and that our sea power had enabled us to civilise far off nations: we exported Bibles and imported resources such as cotton. Through our strict Protestant work ethic, our coal and our sheer inventiveness we had harnessed steam and thus created the Industrial Revolution which was to prove a boon to Mankind.

All very simplistic and to our adolescent minds rather romantic. Our heroes were the adventurers and explorers such as Walter Raleigh who brought us tobacco, potatoes and the gold he'd pirated off Spanish buccaneers. In 2002 he was listed in a BBC poll of the 100 Greatest Britons.

But Sir Thomas Stamford Raffles wasn't. Until reading Tim Hannigan's new published biography, I'd continued to share the notion that Raffles was a great man; discovering Borobodur, founding Singapore, and having a hotel named after him seemed to be credit enough. Mind you, I wasn't sure that the *rafflesia* which also bears his name was intended as a compliment: the world's largest flower emanates a stink akin to that of a rotting corpse.

Hannigan gives solidly researched grounds for suggesting that the flower might be the most appropriate recognition..

Hannigan's is possibly just the second<sup>1</sup> of some 20 biographies which isn't hagiographic, extolling the East India Company's representative's "*saintly virtues*".

Unlike the majority of other biographers of Raffles, Hannigan has lived and worked in Java, speaks Indonesian and has written on the history and culture of

this fascinating island for the mainstream English-language media here and the Asian Geographic Magazine. His researches, both here and in the Reading Room of the British Library in London, were meticulous, and included a "*source ... which the Raffles-worshippers had always ignored: the other side of the story. An account existed of the years when Raffles ran Java, laid out in the allusive stanzas of high Javanese, written by a local aristocrat.*"

This refers to the sacking of the royal city of Yogyakarta on 20th June 1811 in order to replace the Sultan with one more compliant to British rule. When it was over, "*just 23 members of the British party had been killed, and a modest 76 had been wounded. All along the battlements meanwhile, tumbled in the ditches, abandoned in the alleyways and heaped in great steaming piles in the broken gateways, were thousands of dead Javanese.*"

How Raffles came to be Lieutenant-Governor of Java is a tale of patronage and egotistical connivance and ambition.

The suggestion that Raffles came from a poor family is patently false. His father was the captain of the slave ship on which he was born. That he left school at 14 was not unusual (as did this reviewer's grandfather a century later); however schooling was a privilege for a minority in the early 19th century.

Through the 'patronage' of his mother's brother, he became a clerk with the East India Company, the *de facto* ruler of India, on a generous salary of £70 per annum. (Charles Dickens, who was born a year after Raffles set sail for Batavia, from the age of twelve worked a ten-hour day in a factory earning just over £15 per year.<sup>2</sup>)

During his ten years as a Company clerk, and thereon, Raffles was a prodigious auto-didact, with a curiosity and drive which attracted both admiration and resentment.

In April 1805, Raffles and his recently wed wife Olivia set sail on a five month voyage to Penang where he was to be the assistant secretary to the newly appointed Governor of Penang. Why he was granted the position at a salary of £1,500 - an incredible rise from his then probable annual salary of £100 - has never been satisfactorily explained. Gossipmongers of the time said that it was related to Olivia's 'dark past', a relationship with the Company Secretary, William Ramsey, but she never faltered in her support of her husband.

Once in Penang, Raffles impressed Lord Minto, the Governor-General of India, sufficiently to be given the task of gathering information about Java, a project which the Company had been discussing for a dozen years. Raffles later claimed that it was he who had initiated the Company's (mis)adventures here because it "*was worthy of His Lordship's consideration, beyond the Moluccas*".

Hannigan brings to the fore other *dramatis personae* of the British inter-regnum, few of whom have been treated kindly by history. Some, such as Major-General Rollo Gillespie, the military commander, was eulogised in his lifetime, but there is little trace of Col. Colin Mackenzie who surveyed Prambanan or John Leyden, an orientalist who beguiled Raffles with his scholarship and poetry. Others,

Hannigan treats less sympathetically.

However, one thing is clear. All were subservient to Raffles' self-aggrandisement, subsequently enhanced and polished by Sophia, his second wife. For more than a century, Singaporeans and we Brits have been under their spell. Hannigan has done us a great service with his – erm - spellbinding biography.

It is packed with a wealth of background about the earlier history of Java, life in the sultanates with their intrigues, of the Mataram and Majapahit kingdoms, about how religions arrived with ill-educated traders, and the still relevant Javanese mysticism, with footnotes where appropriate.

I cannot praise Hannigan's work highly enough, but have one caveat: a book with such riches for anyone with a smidgeon of interest in Raffles and Indonesia would greatly benefit from an index.\*

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<sup>1</sup> Source: *Sir Stamford Raffles - A Manufactured Hero?* by Nadia Wright.

She suggests that the first was H. F. Pearson's *This Other India: A Biography of Sir Thomas Stamford Raffles* (pub. Singapore: Eastern Universities Press 1957)

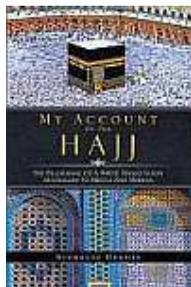
<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

*First published in Jakarta Expat magazine 20.12.12*

\* Note: a new expanded edition (2014) now includes an index.

\* Note 2: the book has been translated into Indonesian and is available in Gramedia

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### **My Account of the Hajj**

Nicholas Hughes

Trafford Publishing (Singapore) 2013

Available in hardback, paperback or e-book

I first met Nick Hughes at the turn of this year at a book launch and got chatting to him afterwards over a few Bintang. I'd already learned that he was a retiree from a life with international NGOs in South and South-East Asia, mainly the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations.

I knew too that he loves climbing Indonesia's peaks with both Gunung Bagging and Java Lava.

After the folk involved in the book launch had left for a more formal occasion, Nick and I began talking about spiritual journeys. I knew from experience that sitting silent atop of an inactive volcano watching the sun rise can give one a deep insight into our insignificance in the true scale of the universe, and that in an urban environment such moments are rare and ephemeral.

It is being in the moment that is important to me: the gaze with naked eyes into a vast cloudless starlit sky, a musician dragging us into the depths of his or her soul, or the gasps of "Oh, I say" as Murray or Djokovic rake sublime shots past

each other. Perhaps this awe inspires fear, the knowing that we are truly insignificant in the scale of the universe.

When Nick sent me a review copy of his recently published 'diary' of "*the pilgrimage of a white Anglo-Saxon Australian to Mecca and Medina*", which he undertook with his wife and daughter in 1992, I wrote to him that, as outlined above, my approach would be one of curiosity and with 'a personal spirituality' rather than being a follower of a particular creed.

His journey, he told me, "*was initially one of curiosity, then participation, and finally, a search for understanding leading to spirituality and deeper faith in an Almighty.*

*"More importantly, I have focused on the spiritual dimensions of the Hajj without seeking, in any way, to proselytize/espouse the merits of Islam as a religion. My hope is that Westerners might better understand the rites of the Hajj through the eyes of a "White Anglo-Saxon Australian", leading to greater inter-cultural and religious understanding.*

*"It's an on-going process. Creeds are the least of my concern; I think you will sense this from the text."*

And indeed I do.

My school years were spent in the then predominantly Christian white surroundings of South London, the other side of the world from Nick. My 'heroes' of the time included Richard the Lionheart and Robin Hood, who defended what we English were taught were our rights.

My knowledge of Islam was therefore limited to the Crusades which, for about two hundred years from 1095, had the stated goal of restoring Christian access to the holy places in and near Jerusalem, as well as stamping out all traces of paganism and polytheism, which survives here as animism.

This struggle between Christianity and Islam continues to this day, although the battlefields in the 'War on Terror' are now worldwide, as the recently leaked Prism documents and occasional terror attacks here in Indonesia make clear.

Nick says in his Introductory Comments to the extensive bibliography, "early Western scholars focussed more on the historical aspects of Islam. ... Personal accounts of travellers to Mecca, such as Sir Richard Burton (1821-1890), have added some understanding of the Hajj in the West but little to its religious and spiritual aspects."

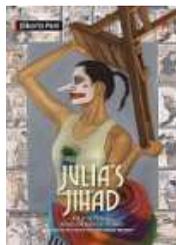
And this is where Nick's account of his journey proves of immense value. Each step of the way, each ritual, arouses "a deep sense of empathy among the vast community seeking affinity with the Almighty." That vast community he speaks of numbered about two million, an immense logistical exercise.\*

Fortunately, his diary, the core of this book, has "provided a basis for ... further enquiry and learning [which] continues to inspire a sense of spirituality and a deeper faith in the Almighty."

Other pilgrims seeking their spiritual core in Islam, which “literally means submission to God”, or, indeed, in other religions, would do well to seek out this modest book.

*First published in the Jakarta Expat magazine 2.July 2013*

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### **Julia's Jihad**

Julia Suryakusuma  
Komunitas Bambu, 2013  
pp.524  
ISBN 978-602-9402-27-8

*To learn who rules over you, simply find out who you are not allowed to criticize.*

– attributed to Voltaire

*Julia's Jihad* is a fat anthology of Julia Suryakusuma's weekly columns written for The Jakarta Post since 2006 and for Tempo News Magazine from March 2007 until April 2010.

Its sub-title – *Tales of the Politically, Sexually and Religiously Incorrect: Living in The Chaos of the Biggest Muslim Democracy* – gives a sense of what *reformasi* has been about, particularly following the election of President SBY, the Thinking General.

Ah, *reformasi*, a word uttered in May 1998 to usher in the dawn of a new era following the 'abdication' of Suharto; it was a positive month or two with high hopes, now “*lost in conventions, seminars ... and broken promises.*”

Julia uses her columns to vent her righteous anger and to tackle shibboleths head on, yet displays a generosity of spirit, an incisive wit, and an insight backed up with details and examples. This could be an indication of a *laissez-faire* attitude among the *pembesar* (big people).

Either that or, being more concerned with the immediacy of tweets, they don't peruse the main English language media and leave that to their entourages of yes-men and women.

Julia is not shy of criticising certain folk when others might not dare. For example, she wonders how Lt. Gen. (ret) Prabowo Subianto could have risen phoenix-like from the ashes of 1998, which, because of his alleged human rights abuses, means that unless he is elected President next year – please, God, not him! – he is barred from entering the USA.

*“In his case, the bird that comes to mind is more a vulture than a phoenix.”*

National heroes, she says, are “*a reflection of our insecurities, our need to tie our identity to someone else's status. .... Let our heroes live in our hearts and not demean them by turning heroism into an ego-filled political commodity.*”

In a prescient column published in May 2009, she castigates the then perceived 'clean' political party PKS for nominating the corrupt Soeharto for national hero status. Elsewhere she examines the duality of the late President Gus Dur who was considered a 'prophet' by his followers but wanted to be a 'king'. Both are currently being reconsidered for posthumous status.

Yet she has her heroes too. Julia extols the virtues of Sri Mulyani, a "nonconformist who is unwilling to play political games or participate in Indonesia's traditional cronyism" whose "war is against corruption, and she is fighting it ruthlessly, unrelentingly, and with total integrity and commitment."

That description tells us much about Julia, who fights the same battles, and many more. Describing herself as a "liberal Muslim", she opposes religious fundamentalism and as a woman, gender inequality. As both, she tackles sex.

In a column published in the Post seven years ago entitled *Bombs, Boobs or Bust*, regarding men's sexual gratification she writes: "Men create the demand and women have to provide the supply. The hypocrisy is astounding but is typical of the patriarchal religions that have molded most religions of the world."

Identity is a key word throughout. Her own, as the daughter of an Indonesian diplomat and the wife of an Australian academic, means that she is "*bi-cultural and can be both 'western' and Indonesian, depending on the context.*" When she says 'Indonesian', I assume that in being so outspoken she is referring more to Bataks, say, than Javanese.

Those of us, including westerners who really do "*understand the realities of authoritarian regimes*", who look for an understanding of the chaos she describes, can only be grateful for her authoritative voice.

Full praise is due to Tempo and the Post for giving her space because Julia speaks for all who care for the future of succeeding generations of this fascinating, contradictory and often frustrating nation.

*Submitted to Tempo English magazine: maybe, or maybe not, published.*

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### **Indonesia Face To Face**

Ivan Southall

Malaya Publishing House (Singapore) 1964

Landsdowne Press (Melbourne) 1964

pp. 257 (plus 28 pages of b&w photos)

I bought this book in a second-hand book store in Singapore in the early 90s when I was a newbie here; only now have I come to reread it. What I find fascinating is that many of his observations still apply.

Ivan Southall (1921-2008) was an Australian best known for young-adult fiction, but he also wrote seven books for adults, including *Indonesia Face To Face*. In 1963, he came to observe the work of the (Australian) Volunteer Graduate Scheme for Indonesia.

The pegawai were "young people who worked in Indonesia for a couple of years or so, not as 'experts' on fat salaries, but as ordinary servants of the Indonesian government paid in accordance with the local scale."

A lengthy chapter, *The Fledgling Is A Dubious Bird*, is devoted to their pre-departure briefing.

*"Indonesia is a very strange mixture. It is not a land of 'natives' or 'coolies'. Nor is it just a rich green country, with sweet, gracious little people and quaint foods, song and dance. It is a country full of social and economic contradictions, but it is also a new, self-respecting country with its own culture and its own way of life."*

One may argue that when one now reads of communal and religious strife, and corruption at the highest levels, that 'self-respect' is not universal.

Before his visit, Southall was also a 'fledging' and he was warned about the pitfalls of Jakarta.

*"It's the first month or two that counts. That's when you pick up everything that's going: amoebic dysentery, malaria and so on. I've heard that the cities stink with open sewers and the place is rotten with TB. It's true, you know. I've seen it on TV."*

When I came here a quarter of century later, at the end of '88, I knew nothing of this. But I do now. As I wrote about street food in *Culture Shock! Jakarta*: "you may find the entire experience less than appetizing as you settle down to eat next to an open sewer with rats."

Regarding TB, according to USAID the population is 328 million (give or take a hundred million?) and in 2010 there were 302,861 notified cases. Furthermore, from July 1st this year the UK Border Agency has required Indonesians who wish to stay in the UK for more than six months to be tested at an approved clinic and be free from tuberculosis before applying for a visa.

*"It's a pickpocket's heaven."*

This is the only country, out of the c.50 I've visited and/or lived in, that I've ever felt someone else's hand in my pocket, other than my wives' that is.

In '63, as in every year following the departure of the Dutch in 1950, the country was impoverished. One now prominent member of the government told me that his family's good fortune is based on the post-independence smuggling of goods into Indonesia. (*He was once a student of mine, and, no, I'm not saying who.*)

So Southall found himself burdened with Australian *oleh-oleh* to pass on to the volunteers: a projector lamp, lengths of material, batteries, cans of milk, a box of cheese, shirts, nappies, feeding bottles and medical supplies.

Of that list, I'd love a box of cheese, meaning real cheese and not that processed block of plastic to be found in most supermarkets. Oh, and if anyone's going back to the UK for a while, please bring me a jar of Marmite.

*"Djakarta is an assault upon the senses of sound, sight and smell. Indonesia is much more than Djakarta, but it is here that the country begins and ends. Djakarta is the shop front, the doorway in and the doorway out. What happens in Djakarta may make the cable page or the front page of newspapers from Melbourne to Mineapolis. What happens in Talangpading (where the hell is Talangpading?) may not even make the back page of newspapers published in Djakarta."*

I've no idea where Talangpading is either and search engines only offer Talang Padang in Lampung, south Sumatra. Indonesia is, of course, a vast country. However, since President Habibie freed the press in 1998, now monopolised by a few oligarchs, local news is available to the c.9 million annual 'immigrants' to Jakarta via the internet – post office telegrams (cables) were discontinued earlier this year.

The 25 chapters cover a wide range of topics and places, from birth control and education to the future of the country after Sukarno: *"We hope by then to have created beneath him a sound body of administration, so that the top may change without ill effect, that the top in fact will not matter so much."*

A forlorn hope given the coup and pogrom just two years later, and few would describe the many current corrupt administrations, from the "top" down, as being "sound bodies".

Besides Southall's initial culture shock, much of the book is personalised with the anecdotal experiences of several *pegawai*. One may hope that Dan Quinn's Gunung Bagging website will prevent further potential disasters as almost befell a doctor on the island of Siau, off the north coast of Sulawesi, who lead two English teachers up Gunung Awu. (Previously mere acquaintances, the teachers later married.)

Of more interest to me are the descriptions of the social divide experienced by the *rakyat* of Java, Sumatra, Kalimantan et al who were encountered by and hopefully benefitted from the work of the *pegawai*.

Southall's fifty year old book is a valuable document about where Indonesia once was and, perhaps in too many ways, still is. It is most certainly worthy of a reprint.

*First published in the Jakarta Expat magazine 26 August 2013*



**Confiscate all UK and USA capital for financial independence - Jakarta 1964**

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**Crazy Little Heaven: An Indonesian Journey**

Mark Heyward

Pub. Transit Lounge Publishing 2013

ISBN: 978-1-921924-507

272pp plus 8pp photo insert

*One's destination is never a place but rather a new way of looking at things.*

- Henry Miller

My book shelf has a number of tales written by travellers through Indonesia: from Geoffrey Gorer in the mid '30's (*Bali and Angkor*), to Norman Lewis (*An Empire of the East* - 1995), Redmond O'Hanlon (*Into the Heart of Borneo* 1983), and George Monbiot's (*Poisoned Arrows* - 1989).

However, these were written by folk who came, observed, and then departed for pastures new, and not by someone who is the patriarch of an Indonesian family and has clocked up on two decades here.

With his fellow Tasmanian wife and their two young children, Mark Heyward arrived in East Kalimantan in 1992 to teach at an international school for the children of expatriate miners. He had a certain wanderlust inherited from his family's folklore and so he was not the first to leave Tasmania, that far-flung corner of the Commonwealth, for the tropical forests of Borneo.

In 1994, with three companions, and seeking "*a little adventure in [his] own life*", he set out to cross Kalimantan from his home base in Sangatta to Pontianak in the southwest. His journal of the seventeen day adventure, recounting travelling by *taksi air* (water taxis, "*the local public transport*"), climbing mountain ridges, trekking through forests, wading across streams and exploring cave systems in

isolated areas, forms the core of the book.

A year after his “adventure”, he returned to Tasmania, a divorce, and further study. As the subject of his Ph.D was ‘intercultural literacy’, returning to Kalimantan seemed natural, and it was at his old school that he met his future wife. Although currently based in Jakarta, where Mark works as an educational consultant for an international NGO, their home is in Lombok, where they have the Studio, “a comfortable ecolodge”, and have helped set up a school for local children which invokes *gotong royong*, community action.

I’d only had time for a quick dip into the book before Mark and I first met up for a chat over a few Bintangs but, with delighted recognition, I had already realised that we were on the same page of different books.

Mark described his journal to me as “*a little bit I*” and in writing a Tasmanian magazine article, which ended up as “*half a book*”, he realised that his “*journey of a lifetime*” was just part of a life’s journey.

And that becomes clear when reading *Crazy Little Heaven*. Although the journey across Kalimantan forms the main structure, it is divided into seven parts which act as pegs. These have allowed Mark to reflect not only on the ‘then’ but also on where it has lead him, to the ‘now’.

For example, in Part 5 the trekkers come across an isolated Dayak family whose sole occupation it seems is to harvest birds’ nest from caves in limestone outcrops by clambering up precarious bamboo scaffolding. However, “*while in the past birds’ nest were obtained exclusively from remote locations like this, more recently enterprising locals have begun farming the birds*” for a “*burgeoning Chinese market*”.

Mark writes movingly about his visits to the orang-utan rehabilitation centres founded by Willie Smits, the Borneo Orangutan Survival Foundation (BOS), and Biruté Galdikas who founded Camp Leakey.

*“With our greed and appetite for progress, our cruelty and inability to share the planet with other creatures, we have become have become a destructive plague. Looking into the eyes of a young orang-utan threw this into stark relief. Is his the last generation?”*

Perhaps Mark’s journey is not so much myth-making as in placing his own in the context of the many myths westerners cannot grasp here. In order to conform to Indonesia’s marriage laws, Mark converted to Islam. In Part 6 – *Rapids and Religion* - he offers an extensive ‘critique’ of religious ethical codes as practiced here.

He witnessed the fatalism – *Inshallah* (God willing) – of Muslims in Aceh six months after the tsunami, yet I knew two parents who, having lost three of their four children to the waves, subsequently died of heart break.

His own sense of spirituality has lead him to climb many volcanoes throughout the archipelago. On Gunung Inerie on Flores, which is a predominantly Catholic island, he had a sense of awe and wonder.

*Standing on that peak, nothing around us but sharp, slender air, a strange stillness, the roaring silence prompted me. Turning to our local guide I asked, "Can you hear it? Can you hear the voice of God?"*

*"Nope," he replied, with a puzzled look.*

He later *"wonders whether we should be looking beyond the Abrahamic religions for a spiritual basis for the environmental ethic we so desperately need."*

At the recent book launch in Kemang a local journalist asked Mark, *"What's in it for Indonesian readers?"* His answer was that he hoped it would help Indonesia-Australia relations. A worthy aim, but as he told me, *"Writing is an act of making meaning, sorting out the chaos, myth-making – and the primary audience is oneself."*

I suggested to Mark that because his journey as a young man had set the context of his life, perhaps the book served as a closure.

After twenty or so years spent travelling around the islands of Indonesia he said that *"Indonesia has become me. The more Indonesia becomes comprehensible and 'normal', the more I appreciate the beguiling mix of contradictions and ambiguities: a sweet disappearing world."*

*"Living and travelling in Indonesia teaches you nothing if not flexibility in thinking."*

How very true.

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### **Welcome to Smisland**

Mathieu Sechet  
(with Keira O'Connor)  
pub. Bali Buku 2013

After working in advertising for ten years, Mathieu Sechet enrolled in a French pastry school. Having made frequent visits to Bali from 2005, he says that after graduation three years ago he could then settle here.

As many do, he took up surfing - *"but I'm not so good at all actually"* - and, as few do, launched a marmalade brand.

*"This was a great chance to do everything from the visual identity to the final product, including the recipes. And so I finally came back to my first love, graphic design, and a year and a half ago I decided to write Welcome to Smisland."*

"Write" is perhaps not the appropriate word because *Smisland* is a book unlike any other you'll have come across. Mathieu says that he *"tried to create an*



Mathieu says that "*underneath all the humour, and because I love Bali, the book is a bit more serious than at first meets the eye. I can say that's a 'buku campuran' with 50% photographs, 50% graphic design, and a lot of smiling with a pinch of thinking.*"

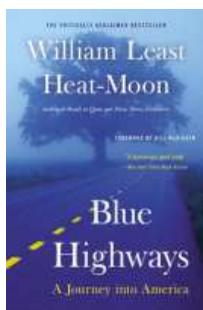
He hopes to produce "Welcome to Smisland 2" perhaps in two years, with a focus on other subjects such as *legong, babi guling* etc.

I look forward to that, with the hope that his eye remains unjaundiced and his mind irreverent.

Sadly, from my breakfast point of view, he has stopped making marmalade.

*First published in the Bali Expat magazine 15.1.14*

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### **Blue Highways: A Journey Into America**

William Least Heat-Moon

Picador Books 1984

ISBN0 330 2851 4

I have kept a diary of my travels\* since I first decided to leave the immediacy of the UK, a life of school, teacher training and teaching, with adult school holidays spent exploring the neighbouring island of Ireland.

I needed to get away to discover myself beyond those limited confines, and so began a traveller's life. That I've lived in the same Jakarta street for nigh on 27 years, does not mean that I've stopped my travels. As a friend, a fellow vegetarian recently said in a restaurant without vegetables, "*WTF moments are delivered on a daily basis here.*"

I've always been in the habit of 'having a book on the go' and I read many during my 13 month circumnavigation of the world in 85/6. That was one motivation for setting up a book exchange in the office of Kashmir Himalayan Expeditions during my two and a half month stay in Leh, Ladakh. Someone deposited a copy of William Least Heat-Moon's *Blue Highways* and I'm only slightly ashamed to say that once I'd dipped into it, I felt unable to return it.

The book is now sitting on one of my bookshelves here in Jakarta ready to be dipped into again. It's not so much the conversations he had as he followed the roads less-travelled across America, as the seemingly random philosophical thoughts which grabbed me.

I've always thought that travel is about the journey more than the destination, and I was very happy to find someone who appeared to echo my own musings, yet made them coherent.

Dotted through my diary are quotes from *Blue Highways* which resonated with

me then ... and still do now. This post brings them together.

My page references are from the Picador edition pub. 1983.

#### **p.17**

It is a contention of Heat Moon's – believing as he does that any traveller who misses the journey misses all he's going to get – that a man becomes his attentions. His observations and curiosity, they make and remake him.

Etymology: 'curious', once related to cure, once meant 'carefully observant'.

'Absurd', by the way, derives from a Latin word meaning 'deaf, dulled'.

Maybe the road could provide a therapy through observation and obvious, a means whereby the outer eye opens an inner one. STOP, LOOK, LISTEN, the old railroad signs warned. Walt Whitman calls it "*the profound lesson of reception*".

#### **p.84**

I learned to travel, then travelled to learn.

#### **p.163**

What you've done becomes the judge of what you're going to do – especially in other people's minds. When you're travelling, you are right there and then. People don't have your past to hold against you. No yesterdays on the road.

#### **p.215**

The word 'error' comes from a Middle English word 'erren', which means to wander about, as in 'knight errant'. The word evolved to mean 'going astray', and that evolved to mean 'mistake'. As for 'mistake', it derives from Old Norse and once meant 'to take wrongly'.

*Posted 1st May 2014*

**Note:** My diary has been typed up and is now online: <http://travelssofjakartass.net/>

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#### **Indonesia Etc: Exploring the Improbable Nation**

Elizabeth Pisani

Published June 2014

- in the UK by Granta / in the US by WW Norton

- in Indonesia by Godown, an imprint of Lontar.

*I dumped my bags in a dispiriting hotel room, asked the staff to clear out the dead cockroaches and headed out to explore.*

And explore Indonesia with a very keen eye and widening mind is what Elizabeth Pisani did for just over a year in 2011/12. She was first posted here by Reuters in 1988, having backpacked the banana pancake circuit of north Sumatra, Java and Bali in 1983.

She left Indonesia in 1991 "*following several differences of opinion with the military about the accuracy of [her] reporting, particularly around the unfolding civil war in the north-western province of Aceh.*"

Ten years later she returned with a PhD and spent four years as an epidemiologist, specializing in HIV and helping the Ministry of Health "*track the speed of an epidemic it would prefer to ignore.*" Her experiences here and in other countries lead to her book *The Wisdom of Whores*.

For her return, in choosing what to explore in such a vast country she opted for "*the principle of random selection*" figuring that by simply trusting that if she "*got out there and looked through the eyes of enough people in enough places, [she'd] be able to piece the fragments together into a portrait of the nation as a whole, to understand better the threads that tie the glorious disparity together.*"

That meant that she explored places and cultures outside the dominant Java and the usual haunts of tourists and most travellers. Starting out as "*a hard drinking occasional smoker*", she "*settled into the rhythm of life in extraordinary places*" and discovered an Indonesia "*quite different from the one [she] thought [she] knew.*"

Villages and small towns in Sumba, Flores, the islands of the Moluccas from Kei up to Ternate, Aceh, West Kalimantan, Lombok, and the cities of Semarang, Surabaya and Solo were places which she visited, some revisited, generally staying in homes as an invited guest, often following a chance encounter. That way "*you get to hear and see more than in, say, a coffee shop where you get the braggart's view, and it is that view, expressed in public, that most often makes it into history.*"

Some of these places I recognise from my own visits: Banda (*where she met a friend and former colleague of mine*), Ambon and Ternate in the Moluccas, and Semarang's Kota Tua in particular. In so doing, not only do I find myself smiling and nodding with recognition, as in my opening quote, but actually learning about and understanding aspects of Indonesia which faintly glimmered in my consciousness, but now that she's brought them into my focus seem so obvious.

EP offers the historical context in broad strokes. For example, the fundamental foundation of Indonesia is *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika* (Unity in Diversity), and that is based on the historical role of the aptly named trade winds.

"*They blew south from China between December and March, and provided a fast passage up to India from June to September. In the interim months, the islands sat in the fickle-winded Doldrums. During these months, traders sat in the bustling ports that grew up to meet their needs. They married local girls in each port and left them to source cargo for their next visit.*"

Then, with detailed descriptions, she points out that visitors to today's markets "*will probably find much the same sights and smells as Marco Polo did seven centuries ago.*"

Many of the cultures she meets are still very much rooted in *adat*, the traditions carried down through the generations, yet "*villagers film a ritual sacrifice on their mobile phones [which] presents the nation's leaders with a headache. If ancient and modern Indonesia co-exist, which should they make laws for?*"



## Jakarta Jive, Bali Blues

Jeremy Allen  
pub. YellowDot 2009  
ISBN 978-979-18946-3-0

Living through interesting times and recording them as an observer, albeit with a strong attachment, offers a value not only for future historians, but also for those of us on the periphery.

She observes the clan system and suggests that what many call 'corruption' may be best described as 'patronage'. Certain 'positions' are 'reserved' for members of the clan, and the exchange of items of 'homage' - from pigs to buffaloes at weddings and funerals in rural areas, to cash in cities and govt. centres - are traditionally a symbol of respect for the positions in a hierarchy.

In bureaucracies, that translates as the excuse that "*belum dapat petunjuk*" - 'I haven't received instructions yet' and *Asal Bapak Senang* (ABS) - 'as long as father is happy'.

However, she offers no excuses for the often blatant grabbing of local funds for self-promotion. *The central dilemma of modernisation* (read 'decentralisation') *in collective societies [is that] the all-encompassing security of a shared culture gets sold off in exchange for individual fulfilment.*"

Within the political sphere, following *reformasi* and the dismantling of Suharto's centralised Orde Baru, there is now "*so much democracy around that almost everyone has someone somewhere in the system delivering for them.*" So "*the disconnect between what comes out of the central government ministries in Jakarta and what goes on in the districts is growing more pronounced.*"

Amid the serious, almost philosophical, ruminations, lie small gems observed with a sardonic eye for the seemingly mundane. For instance, she is absolutely spot on with her description of the ubiquitous Padang restaurants and points out that "*while not all of the food is appetizing, there will always be something you like.*"

I romped through the book, revelling in the details sourced from her observations (because she was "*always scribbling in notebooks*"). In nigh on 400 pages, with a glossary, occasional footnotes, suggestions for further reading, and a valuable index, EP has written an always fascinating travelogue.

Very few of us have done more than scratch the surface of the etceteras beyond our immediate surroundings, and *Indonesian Etc.*, is surely the richest account of contemporary Indonesia yet to be published. It is a nation quite different from the one we think we know.

Canadian Jeremy Allen straddles the worlds of expats and Indonesians alike. He first came to Indonesia as an "innocent" backpacker in 1980 and "*became enthralled by Indonesia's natural wonders, its vibrant culture, and by the way [he] was received with warm hospitality.*"

He is an innocent no longer, and nor are any of us in Indonesia who've witnessed first hand the natural and manmade disasters, the social unrest, the blatant corruption, and the disregard for legal processes – often by the judiciary and law enforcement agencies. All this, and more, is covered by the local and international mass media, NGOs and personal social media.

*Jakarta Jive, Bali Blues* is a reprint of two books. The first, originally published in 2001, has as its core the events which lead to the forced abdication of the “dictator in all but name” Suharto in May '98.

Other accounts have been published about the Asian Economic Crisis (*krismon*) which lead to his resignation, but, as Jeremy points out, “*all economic circumstances are relative*”. For him, “*the quadrupling of the price of imported cheese was a minor inconvenience.*” However, “*for a middle-class mother, the four-fold in baby formula was a serious concern.*”

As businesses and banks collapsed, one solution was for *selebritis* to establish upscale *warung makanan* which came to be known as *kafe tenda* (tented café). At one such, Jeremy learnt from a former banker at a Soeharto-owned bank that “*he believes that there is nothing wrong with nepotism as long as you keep it in the family*”.

Although his income at the time was derived mainly from copy writing, his keen ear and empathy marks Jeremy out as a “*proper journalist*”. He was curious and concerned as he ventured out on the streets in that tumultuous week, often in the company of Monica, a traumatised Chinese-Indonesian student from Trisakti University, the scene of still unresolved shootings, who hid her tension behind the lens of her camera.

She was to develop into a filmmaker, documenting the aftermath of the mass rapes of Chinese women, and the students' continued push for *reformasi*, the “*desire to see an end to Soeharto's rule with no clear concept of how to replace the existing authoritarian government with a more democratic political system*”. (Many would say that nearly 20 years later that in spite of direct elections there are still few with a clear concept.)

The students divided into two groupings, militant activists and those demanding a more peaceful route, both facing the “*incompetently commanded troops*”. And then came Ramadhan, the Islamic fasting month and all sides called a cessation, probably because “*the prospect of hours in the tropical afternoon sun without a drop of water would be a rigorous test of both political zeal and military discipline.*”

Among the ‘characters’ Jeremy met was Pak Trisno, who became a journalist “*fired with humanitarian fervor ... documenting the plight of the common people as a half-made, fractious republic lurched from one crisis to another.*”

In 1965 he was arrested, accused of subversion, but never tried, and spent the years until 1974 being “*shuffled from one prison to another in Jakarta.*” Upon release he was helped by friends to establish a used furniture-antiques business in South Jakarta, close to expat enclaves. And they lead Jeremy to an ‘expose’

of the duality in the then expat scene in Jakarta. There were many insensitive DIAs ("*dollar income a\*\*holes*") who thought life was "*dirt cheap*", and they are contrasted with the majority of Indonesians for whom "*life was no party*".

*Bali Blues*, the second book, has as its focus the Bali bombings on October 11th 2002. Jeremy had hoped to be in Bali that day to meet some friends, but fortuitously had a business meeting in Jakarta, while an allergic reaction kept his friends out of both the Sari Club and Paddy's Bar.

He "*hastened there and discovered that [his] friends' fortuitous escape had not been an isolated occurrence. A few remembered feeling a force at their back, like someone physically pushing them out of harm's way.*"

And so begins a personal account about the balance between the metaphysical and physical planes of existence at the centre of Bali life, and the changes wrought to the land- and mind-scapes with the advent of mass tourism, as well as the seekers of a residential paradise with little understanding of the exotic norms.

Underlying and beyond the urbanisation, the traffic jams, the real estate vendors, new age dreamers, surfers, and the Javanese economic migrants (including "*professional prostitutes*"), lies a "*shadowy parallel world, called Niskala, and the physical world, Sekala. These are kept in balance through the endless cycles of prayer, ritual and public ceremony. The catastrophic Bali Bomb disrupted this harmony, threatening the well-being of Bali, but of the world.*"

Much of the book are character studies of Jeremy's social circle, so it comes as something as a shock to find chronological accounts of the fateful evening with laughing terrorist Amrozi and his cohorts intertwined with those of Jeremy's Indonesian friends.

The book closes with an epilogue. A week after the executions of the three bombers, Jeremy undertook a cycle ride from Bali back to Jakarta. En route he took a detour past by the burial site of the two brothers, Amrozi bin Nurhasyim and Ali Ghufron. They had been buried in a "*plot of carefully cleared land shaded by mango trees, with a chain-link fence enclosing the side-by-side graves.*"

The fence had been erected because so many faithful pilgrims made midnight visits and took away the "*mystically charged earth.*"\*

So much of contemporary history is reduced to message bytes and sound bites that having a personal, occasionally anecdotal, yet essentially objective account of seminal events such as this omnibus edition is of immense value.

There is a strong humanity shining through Jeremy Allen's prose; I recommend it for that and to all those seeking a good armchair read.

Look for it in your local Periplus book store.

First published in the Indonesia Expat magazine 19.9.15



## A Brief History of Indonesia

Tim Hannigan

pub. Tuttle 2015

pp.288

ISBN 978-0-8048-4476-5 (pbk)

ISBN 978-0-4629-1716-7(ebook)

[The sub-title is far from brief: *Sultans, Spices and Tsunamis - The Incredible Story of Southeast Asia's Largest Nation.*]

When Tim Hannigan first arrived in Indonesia "as an earnest young backpacker with a passion for history", he was unable to find anything with a general overview; just academic tomes and guides to tourist 'obyeks' of interest. These guides, phrase books and beautiful coffee table books portraying landscapes, flora and fauna, and meals, are still the main stock of non-fiction reading to be found on the shelves of book stores situated in malls and airport departure lounges.

But now Periplus stocks two paperback volumes of narrative history, both by Tim: *Raffles and the British Invasion of Java*, previously reviewed in Indonesian (né Jakarta) Expat, and now this one, the result of far less intensive scholarship, albeit with an extensive bibliography and index.

This book is less concerned with dates than with context. In our inter-connected and interdependent world, the importance of what is now known as the Indonesian archipelago in the shaping of the world geopolitical map we know today is barely recognised by Indonesians themselves, let alone visitors.

The archipelago was formed as Asian and Australian land masses separated, so its early history, was determined by geology and is unwritten except by archaeologists. Climate changes lead to migrations of early hominids; a great Ice Age had lowered sea levels, and what is now a nation was land-linked to Asia and sea journeys were shorter.

The Java Man dates back some million years, and the recently discovered in Flores metre high *Homo floresiensis* proved that sea journeys were made at least 100,000 years ago.

The 'Hobbits' were followed much later by the Melanesians, who still predominate in the easternmost regions of the archipelago. Then some seven thousand years ago the Austronesians, "the greatest tribe of maritime travellers the world has ever known", set forth from "the damp interior of southern China." It took a further two and a half millennia for them to reach Sulawesi, and that's when Indonesia's history began: c.2500BC.

There are no barriers to trade along the coastlines between the Red Sea and Africa in the westerly direction and to Japan and China in the other. The seasonal monsoon winds provided easy sailing through the Malacca Strait. During the equatorial dry season (summer), the winds carried ships with their cargoes to the north-west and to the north-east during the wet season (winter).

Lying midway along the trade route there was the incentive for traders to settle. Here it must be noted that until 1867 when the Straits Settlements on the Malay Peninsula were declared a British crown colony, their affairs were intertwined with those of south Sumatra and west Java in terms of trading and piracy.

The volcanic activity and tropical climate provided the fertility suitable for agricultural settlements, particularly in Java. As well as goods to sell or barter, traders brought their religions - Hinduism and Buddhism, and later Islam - and languages. These traders also sought the riches found here: tin from Palembang in south Sumatra which also provided pepper, and the spices, nutmeg and cloves, from the far Moluccas,

Before then, there were "Empires of Imagination": *Here and there some pretender prince, with ideas too big for the traditional role of village chief, might have seized control of a federation of hamlets or a growing port. Once he had done so he would have found himself in need of a political concept to bolster his new position as head of a proto-state. The Indian idea of kingship was perfect for the task.*

Situated at the junction of the sea lanes in south Sumatra, from the 7th to 12th centuries the Buddhist trading 'empire' of Srivijaya (aka Sriwijaya) was able to dominate the surrounding states, including those across the Straits of Malaka. By the time its influence had waned some six centuries later, kingdoms in Java had had already sought permanence through the construction of stone temples, such as the earliest on the Dieng plateau which were built by Shiva worshippers.

The Sailendra Dynasty in central Java, a trading rather than a maritime kingdom, possibly had ties with Srivijaya because of the religious connection, Mahayana Buddhism, as portrayed in their monument Borobodur built during the 8th and 9th centuries. They were supplanted by the Sanyaya dynasty who took Shiva, the Hindu god as their key deity and erected Prambanan Temple and lots of smaller temples in the surrounding countryside.

In East Java, at the end of the 13th century, the Mongols, who were then ruling China, sent a number of fleets to extract tribute from the traders. In 1293, the final one was repelled by Raden Wijaya, who had invited them in the first place

He then *"went back to his little village ... and turned it into an empire called Majapahit. ... Later Javanese kings, nineteenth century European orientalisks and strident Indonesian nationalists have all retooled its reputation to fit their own prejudices and purposes."*

The introduction of Islam is less well documented. By the early thirteenth century there would almost certainly have been Muslim communities living in ports around the Straits of Malaka. Hannigan suggests that the creeping conversion could well have been a matter of "kingly pragmatism", the need to work with the increasing number Muslim traders passing though or settled with local wives, the first converts.

It is in relatively recent times, the past 400 hundred plus years, that European powers, the Dutch, English, Portuguese, Spanish and French - named the

“Spice Invaders” by Hannigan - came in search of the source and tried with varying success to monopolise the trade. However, events ‘back home’ were to lead to what is now an independent Indonesia

The storming of the Bastille in 1789 and the start of the French Revolution lead in political and economic terms to what has been termed ‘Age of Enlightenment’.

*Out of this came the idea of European intellectual and moral superiority and the spurious moral imperative - the idea that "we know what's best for them" and the contemptuous notions of the 'ignorant native' and the 'Asiatic despot'.*

One may surmise that the ‘inferiority complex’ engendered remains in the national psyche, and is the fundamental reason for the current rise in nationalism.

Sukarno once said: "Never forget your history." To which I would add "especially that not written by the 'winners'." At the book launch in Jakarta I suggested that this 'Brief History' should be translated into Indonesian as an all-purpose supplement to the bleak and shallow versions of national history 'approved' by successive governments.

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Note: Tim Hannigan's Raffles book has recently been translated into Indonesian and is available in Gramedia.

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First published in the Indonesia Expat Magazine October 2015.  
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### **Image of the Week – 127 (Bookshops) 19.10.14**



The Book Barge, Lichfield in England is featured in *The Bookshop Book*, "a love letter to bookshops all around the world."

The 60-foot narrow boat has toured the canals of Britain since 2011, along with bookshop rabbit Napoleon Bunnyparte.



When I lived in the UK, I made a point of becoming a member of my local public library, the first one of which was housed (and still is) in this magnificent building, Charlton House

On my many travels I've always made a point of seeking out the most interesting bookshops, hopeful that I can find a good read among the second-hand selections. In a few places, including work staffrooms, I've set up a book exchange or two on my travels. This has guaranteed that I've always had a 'book on the go' read when I circumnavigated the globe in 85-6 (see page 17) : note that I don't make any claims to be a literature buff.

Kinokuniya (located at Sogo Plaza Senayan, Sogo Plaza Indonesia, Pondok Indah Mall, and Grand Indonesia) is one of the largest English bookstores in Indonesia. They are also the only ones which apparently have copies of 'my' book (*Culture Shock! Jakarta*), which I should add is the number one seller in its Kindle edition..

Periplus, the supposed distributors of 'my' book, don't stock it in their bookstores, which are widespread throughout the archipelago.

There isn't a public library system so for the large sector of society which lives near or below the poverty line and/or in the remoter areas of the country (some 100 million).

One project which deserves an honourable mention is *Taman Bacaan Pelangi* (Rainbow Reading Gardens), founded by Nila Tanzil, which has transported hundreds of books to Flores and Komodo so that children can get a glimpse into worlds beyond their own.

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### **Images of the Week – 165 (Children's Books) 5.7.15**

There's a mere 50 years between the first publication of Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* on July 3rd 1865 and the publication of the first Ladybird Book.

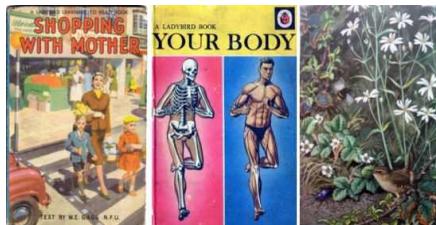


Yesterday was Alice Day, a day to celebrate Alice's hallucinatory *Adventures in Wonderland* which were the product of Lewis Carroll's imagination, presumably addled with laudanum, a tincture of 10% opium and 90% alcohol flavoured with cinnamon or saffron.

Drink what?

*"How puzzling all these changes are! I'm never sure what I'm going to be, from one minute to another."*

For people of a certain age, there's nothing like an old Ladybird book to take you back in time.



I'm of a certain age and recall these cheap hardback pocket sized books, with illustrations which reproduced life as we knew it, and above all, took us into places which were beyond our experience.

Naturally both momentous anniversaries are being celebrated. There is Alice In Wonderland.com, a site full of information and animations about how wonderful the Macmillan publishing house has been for 150 years.

**Footnote:** July 6th 2015

Shirley Hughes, winner of the inaugural Book Trust Lifetime Achievement award, says: "*Reading isn't a competition. It isn't how many words you can read. What even tiny children can do with a book is make their own personal exploration of a story. I think books are a wonderful piece of technology, I hope they survive.*"

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**Image of the Week - 176 (Not Ladybird Books) 27.9.15**

14

John sees the painting.

"I could paint that," says John.

"But you didn't," says Mummy.

new words   paint   could   didn't



Artist Miriam Elia says she is both sceptical and optimistic. "I really enjoy making something that undermines the philosophy of contemporary art – but what I'm making is contemporary art."

I've often written about the Ladybird books, those cheap but well-produced little hardback books which taught a generation to read, a time when video phones and apps were the stuff of a dystopian almost nightmare vision of the future.

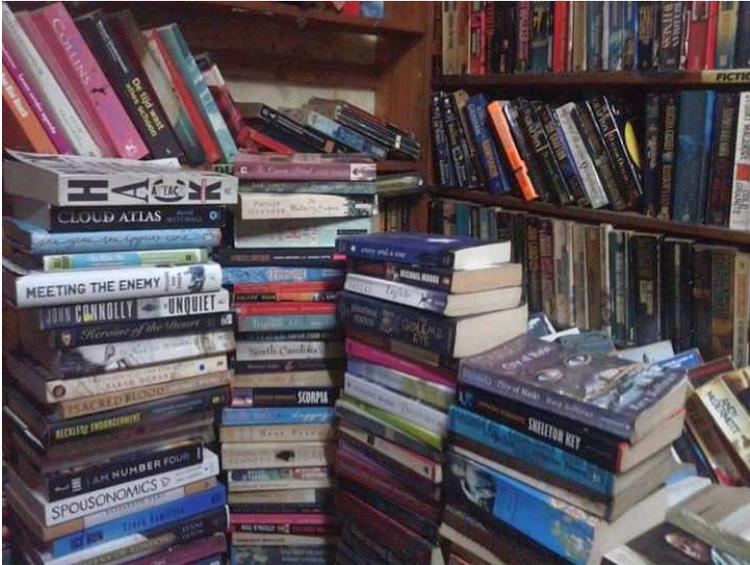
Of now.

In her art, the postwar optimism embodied in the perky Peter and Jane learning system clashes delightfully with the willful nihilism of the modern art scene.

*“Everything I do is about a violent clash between two things that makes something funny. That clash is the backdrop of my life.”*

There are several more images at Cobgallery.com but some are NSFW.

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**Second hand books in 'Memories', Jl. Jaksa, Jakarta**