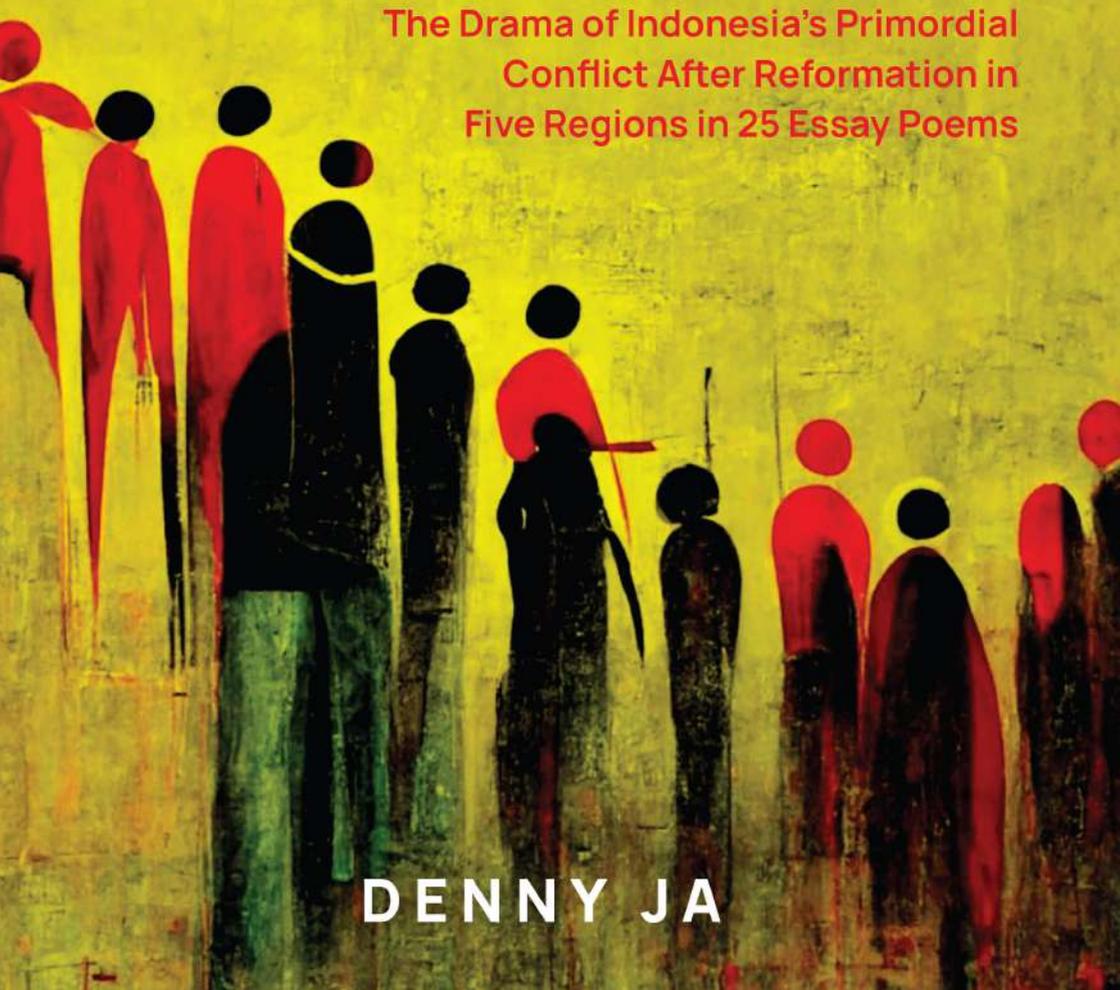


The logo for CBI (Center for Book International) is located in the top right corner. It consists of the letters 'CBI' in a bold, white, sans-serif font, with a small white leaf-like symbol to the left of the 'C'.

CBI

Screams Following Liberation

The Drama of Indonesia's Primordial
Conflict After Reformation in
Five Regions in 25 Essay Poems

The background of the cover features a series of stylized human figures. On the left, there are several figures in red, some appearing to be in conversation. In the center and right, there are more figures, some in black and some in red, standing in a line. The figures are simple, with circular heads and elongated bodies. The background is a textured, yellowish-green color.

DENNY JA

Screams Following Liberation

The Drama of Indonesia's Primordial Conflict After
Reformation in Five Regions in 25 Essay Poems

DENNY JA



CERAH BUDAYA INDONESIA
2022

Screams Following Liberation

**The Drama of Indonesia's Primordial Conflict After
Reformation in Five Regions in 25 Essay Poems**

Author: Denny JA

Translator: Nate Lukinsky

Editor: Monica JR

Layout: Emmy Umasita

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PT CERAH Budaya Indonesia) Menara Kuningan ILT. 9G
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Preface

SCREAMS FOLLOWING LIBERATION

The Drama of Indonesia's Primordial Conflict After Reformation in Five Regions in 25 Essay Poems

"Bodies were piled up on both sides. There were no survivors. The entire journey smelled stinky. Something was set aflame. All the way, bodies were swelling up."

This is not a scene from a movie. This is Ronald's statement. When the Maluku conflict between Muslims and Christians erupted in 2000. Ronald was only ten years old at the time.

He told the BBC about his experience ⁽¹⁾. His community invited him to join the war to defend the religion while he was still a child. Kill or be killed was the guiding principle.

The Maluku conflict, which lasted from 1999 to 2002, claimed the lives of 8,000-9,000 people.

This is Maluku, a land that gives birth to tender and witty songs like Ayo Mama:

"Come on, mama, don't be mad at me. He simply kissed me. Come on, mama, don't be mad at me. The usual applies to young people."

The Moluccas went berserk in the same Maluku from 1999 to 2002. They killed each other over religious differences. Christ militias clashed with Jihad militias, and both were destroyed.

This depicts a region in the early years of political freedom in Indonesia, after 1998. There were many cases of "Screams Following Liberation" not only in Maluku, but also in four other regions of Indonesia, both after and before the reformation.

1 People in Maluku are killing each other <https://www.bbc.com/indonesia/indonesia-43207033>

During the 2001 conflict in Sampit, Central Kalimantan, more than 100 human heads were beheaded. The conflict pitted the Dayak tribes against the Madurese. Dozens of human heads were paraded through the streets as victory rites and symbols.

During the racial riots in Jakarta in 1998, over 400 people were burned or set on fire inside malls. Many of the bodies were no longer identifiable. They were trapped in a mall that had been doused in kerosene and the exit had been set ablaze.

Since 2006, Ahmadiyah followers have been living in refugee camps, driven away from their own land, their birthplace, which they have inherited for generations in Mataram, West Nusa Tenggara. Nothing was known to the children. They were born to Ahmadiyah-practicing parents. They were also expelled solely on the basis of that belief.

Over 1,700 ethnic Balinese were evacuated from their Lampung village. During the Bali vs. Lampung ethnic conflict in 2012, dozens of their homes were destroyed. An elderly man was perplexed by what was going on. He could no longer run like other teenagers. He attempted to walk quickly. But he was an easy target for assassination. It was simply due to the fact that he was Balinese.

The stories above are too dark to recall, but they are too important to overlook. How can we turn these occurrences into useful lessons?

Essay poetry is a novel approach to telling a true story. Unlike historical writing or journalism, however, essay poetry incorporates drama and fiction.

Why do we need fiction to tell a true story? A piece of history will be easier to recall and more affecting if it is presented in the form of a moving drama.

The reader will fully comprehend that the social setting depicted in the essay poetry is a historical fact. However, drama in a realistic setting is merely a supplement to the imagination.

Essay poetry can be thought of as a variation on historical fiction, which has a long literary history. The distinction is that historical fiction terminology refers to events that occurred more than 50 years ago.

Essay poetry does not have a time limit. Whatever occurred, even if the case is still ongoing, can serve as the biological mother for essay poetry.

This book aims to record 25 fictional dramas based on true stories from the most violent primordial conflicts following the Reformation.

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In 2012, research was conducted by the Denny JA Foundation for Indonesia Without Discrimination. The findings are as follows:⁽²⁾

There were 2,398 cases of violence and discrimination in Indonesia between 1998 and 2011, a period of 14 years. There are five types of fundamental conflicts that can be used to categorize instances of violence. As many as 65 percent of the conflicts were caused by religious/faith interpretation.

Up to twenty percent of violence is motivated by ethnicity. Ten percent of violence is motivated by gender. Five percent of violent acts are motivated by sexual orientation.

The nature of the post-reform conflict is distinctive. Conflicts between communities were more primal or communal. The nature of this conflict differed from that of the New Order era, which was marked by discrimination and ideological feuding. The Denny JA Foundation identified the five worst discrimination cases from five regions.

The indicators used in this study are quite measurable, namely the number of victims who died, the extent of the conflict, the duration of the conflict, material losses, and the frequency of news.

Each variable is given a value between 1 and 5. A weighted index is created during the ranking process.

The variable number of victims is given a score of 50. Score 40 for the length of the conflict. Score 30 for the scope of the conflict. Material loss receives a 20. The final score is 10 for news frequency.

2 The five regions in which primordial conflict is the most violent following the reformation.
<https://amp.kompas.com/tekno/read/2012/12/23/15154962/nasional>

The following is a list of five primordial and communal conflicts in post-reform Indonesia. The Ambon conflict ranks first, with a score of 750. The Sampit conflict came in second place with a score of 520.

Jakarta riots in May 1998, ranked third with a total score of 490. The case of Ahmadiyya refugees in Mataram follows (470). Finally, there is the South Lampung conflict between Lampung and Balinese tribes (330). These five worst conflicts have claimed the lives of 10,000 Indonesians.

The Denny JA Foundation also collected more detailed information. The Maluku conflict claimed the most lives: 8,000-9,000 people were killed.

The conflict also resulted in material losses, including the destruction of 29,000 houses, 45 mosques, 47 churches, 719 shops, 38 government buildings, and 4 banks.

The duration of conflicts is also the longest, lasting up to four years. Meanwhile, the ethnic Sampit conflict between the Dayaks and the Madurese killed 469 people and displaced 108,000. The conflict could last up to ten days.

Meanwhile, the Jakarta riots of May 13-15, 1998, were no less terrifying. This conflict claimed the lives of 1,217 people, raped 85 people, and forced 70,000 people to flee. Despite only lasting three days, the material losses caused by the May 1998 riots totaled Rp 2.5 trillion.

The Ahmadiyya conflict in Transito Mataram killed nine people, injured eight, and left nine people with mental illnesses. A total of 9 people were forced to divorce, 379 were expelled, 3 miscarried, and 61 dropped out of school. In addition, 45 people had difficulty obtaining their ID cards, and 322 people were forced to leave the Ahmadiyya.

Despite the fact that there were no major casualties, this conflict served as a mirror in which to view Indonesia's face. Even after decades of independence, there are still citizens who are refugees in their own country.

This event drew a lot of attention from the public. It also received a lot of media attention and a long post-conflict event.

Even in 2022, when this preface was written, some Ahmadiyya residents were still unable to return to the country where they were born due to their religious beliefs.

Another incident of violence had also occurred in South Lampung. This conflict claimed the lives of 14 people. Over 1,700 people were also displaced.

Overall, the state appears to be ignoring the conflict, which has resulted in serious human rights violations. In some cases, not even the perpetrators or masterminds of these atrocities are investigated.

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The International Essay Poetry Festival was held in Sabah, Malaysia, in September 2022. The local government helped fund this festival.

Since I wrote my first book of essay poetry, *In the Name of Love* (2012), a decade ago, I cannot believe how far this poetry has traveled beyond the borders of Indonesia.

In addition to publishing 150 books and videos on essay poetry, some of which are in English, the essay poetry community has also formed the ASEAN Association.

I presented the Washington Post research, *Poetry is Going Extinct*, in a video oration welcoming the international poetry essay festival. Poetry is now a rare form of expression. ⁽³⁾

Poetry in its current form is becoming increasingly unread. Poetry ranks second to last among the various forms of art and literature, after opera, which is becoming increasingly rare.

Essay poetry becomes an important cultural mission. It attempts to reintroduce poetry into the spotlight.

Screams Following Liberation was written to introduce essay poetry to a wider audience. Every December, an essay poetry writing festival will be held.

3 Existing poetry will be increasingly abandoned if it does not innovate. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/wonk/wp/2015/04/24/poetry-is-going-extinct-government-data-show/>

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**JAKARTA RACIAL
RIOTS, MAY 1998**



When Four College Students Were Shot Dead

"Hendra, Hendra ...
You were the first to follow in their path.
You also died young."

Eshal, a woman in her forties, was crying.
Although she tried to hold back her tears.
From behind, I could see
Eshal's body shaking.

I just let Eshal channel her inner anxiety.
That afternoon, following the funeral at San Diego Hills Cemetery
in Karawang, it was so still and quiet.

Long stretches of green grass.
A breeze was blowing. Gentle. Quiet.
Time seemed to stand still.

My heart ached.
The experience of mourning the people
I cared about was always touching.
Very deep.
I myself was already content to weep
when I first heard that Hendra had died.
But by now, it was already the seventh day.

Hendra was my best friend at high school and college.

“This is something that Hendra Chen left for you.

He wanted you to keep it.”

I handed over what I had intended to give Eshal from the start.

With a weak glance, Eshal looked at me.

She accepted a small package wrapped in paper.

She tried to guess its contents.

“What’s inside, Rani?,” Eshal asked.

I answered briefly: “I don’t know.

I didn’t dare open it.

I had received it directly from his wife.

“She said Hendra requested that it be given to you.”

Eshal opened the package.

She saw the contents: Djawa Hokokai batik cloth.

It was made by Oey Soe Tjoen, a legendary artisan from Pekalongan, Central Java.

It was vintage batik.

The cloth seemed ancient.

This time Eshal’s tears exploded.

She shed tears as she held the precious cloth against her eyes.

“Hen, why did you just bequeath this beautiful cloth to me now, after you died?

I waited such a long time. For 24 years.”

I wept along with her.

Eshal’s words took me flying back to the distant past.

24 years earlier.

Hendra had promised Eshal in front of me.

“Eshal, this is very old-fashioned batik cloth.

I intentionally bought it for you. It was difficult to procure.

I obtained it from a collector.”

“Later this will be our dowry when I propose to you.”
Hendra described the meaning of the batik motif.
It featured chrysanthemum flowers, peacocks, and butterflies.

Eshal’s heart blossomed. She hugged Hendra.

How happy this student couple was.

But the cloth was never given.
Eshal only received it 24 years later,
right in front of Hendra’s grave.

Oh, my heart ached even more now.
The wind at the San Diego Hills funeral blew me back to the 1990s,
the era when we were still Trisakti student activists.

It was the peak of the economic and political crisis of 1998.
Mainly, it was the era when four of our friends,
fellow Trisakti student activists, were shot dead without provocation.

May, 1998 witnessed the end of Suharto regime.
And the birth of the Indonesian reformation era.

-000-

A week ago, Hendra Chen died of illness.
He was still young, just 42 years old.

When Hendra died, his wife asked me:
“Do you know Eshal, Rani? Shortly before his death,
Hen left something in my care.”

“He asked that you give it to Eshal.”

I just answered succinctly: “Okay. Sure. I know Eshal.
She was a friend from our student years at Trisakti.”

“Are you still in contact with Eshal?” asked his wife again.
In a somewhat inquisitive voice.

I answered nonchalantly.
"Eshal disappeared a long time ago."

I recalled the last time I heard from Eshal.
It was in 2008. I hadn't seen her during the past 14 years.

I told Hendra's wife: "I heard that she moved to Yogyakarta.
But I can track her down. I know where her older brother
lives in Jakarta."

"Please help me, Rani," asked his wife.

"Hendra was one of your best friends.
I was never privy to all of his secrets.
But now he has died.
And it is important to fulfill the last requests
that people make shortly before they die."

-000-

Hendra met his future wife in 2004.
In 2007 they were married. A year later, they had children.

His wife did not know Hendra's past.
Hendra seems not to have told her.

Since 2008, Eshal had disappeared.
She didn't want me to contact her anymore.
She said: "I want to forget Hendra.
I also want to leave Jakarta."

Eshal said: "This city is full of bitter memories.
I need someone sweet, something pleasant..."

Following the message from Hendra's wife,
I quickly went to Yogyakarta and spent two days there,
looking for Eshal with directions from her brother.

The call from my cellphone was not picked up by Eshal.
Nor did she didn't reply to my chat request.

After struggling to locate her, I finally found Eshal's house.
She lived alone. She had never married.

On the wall of the living room wall, there was a framed verse of Kahlil Gibran's poetry: "If love calls you, come. Even though the sword behind his wings may hurt you."

I remembered. I truly still remembered.
That was a gift from Hendra.
"Oh Eshal. You never really left Hendra," I said to myself.

I began to recall the past.
May 12, 1998 was a bloody day.

Not only did four Trisakti students die.
Not only were Hendryawan Sie, Hafidin Royan, Elang,
and Hery Hartanto shot and killed.

Hundreds of other students were hit by rubber bullets. ⁽⁴⁾

And another 41 students were hit by more lethal bullets.

Hendra Chan was hit by a rubber bullet. His legs were bleeding.
I was also hit in my arm. Eshal fell after being shoved from
behind. Her face was bruised.

The three of us could easily have been exposed to
sharp metal bullets. We could have died.
Bullets flew and ricocheted everywhere.

In 1998, we were student activists. We often walked together,
the three of us. Our friends called us: The Three Musketeers.

There was just one man: Hendra. And two women beside him:
me and Eshal.

Eshal really liked Hendra. She fell in love with him.
Eshal said he was the type of man that she desired.

4 Four Trisakti University students were shot dead during peaceful student demonstrations on May 12, 1998. <https://www.idntimes.com/news/indonesia/vanny-rahman/kronologi-kerusuhan-12-mei-1998-insiden-yang-menewaskan-4-mahasiswa-trisakti-1?page=all>

“Indeed, Hendra was Catholic. And also of Chinese descent.”
On the other hand, Eshal’s father was a hardline Muslim.
He was somewhat racist toward ethnic Chinese.

But for Eshal, religion and ethnicity were not the issue.
The essential problem was: Hendra already had another lover.
They had been together since high school.

His girlfriend was not from activists. In
fact, Hendra’s girlfriend was averse to student political activities.

Since the death of the four Trisakti students,
Hendra’s heart had made a U-turn.
He left his high school sweetheart.

Hendra said: “My girlfriend did not pass the trial by fire.”
When bullets went flying at the Trisakti Campus, she panicked.
Shouted here and there. She was terribly frightened.

Hendra’s lover went berserk. Hendra’s legs were bleeding.
He called his girlfriend. But she did not help him in his hour of need.
She had simply disappeared.

But Eshal came. When Hendra was taken to the nearest
hospital, Sumber Waras, it was Eshal who accompanied Hendra.
Eshal waited for him. For days. Hendra felt her loving kindness.
Eshal took care of him.

Hendra’s parents and other family members lived in Surabaya.

Dozens of Trisakti students lay in the hospital.
At that time he heard sad news.
Elang Lesmana was shot.
In the heart and back. With sharp conventional bullets.
Yet on television, the government alleged it did not use sharp bullets.
Only rubber bullets.

-000-

The cool air at San Diego Hills Cemetery in Karawang
only amplified the pain.

Eshal wanted to linger there alone. At his grave.
She didn't want to be disturbed.
Oh, I still remember what happened that day,
hour by hour. May 12, 1998.

On campus, the Chancellor had argued with us:
"Why do you want a hold such a large demonstration?
Do you really want Reformation?"

Then they held a meeting of high-ranking faculty.
The results were unexpected.
The university leadership supported the students.

It was thus decreed on May 12, 1998:
The entire Trisakti academic community would march and
descend on the public pulpit.
Students, lecturers, and college deans spoke out in one voice.
They called out in unison:
"Long Live Reformation! Long Live Reformation!"

Trees, classrooms, everything on campus,
even the sky overhead, became turbulent.
That day, Trisakti became a campus of political struggle.

One line formed:
15 thousand demonstrators.

The long march began from Trisakti University to the DPR/MPR Building.

They were guarded by the Student Task Force.
One command: There would be no violence.
They were also instructed not to clash with the authorities.

In truth, Trisakti University was late in joining the fight.
The whole city had been witnessing mass protests
long before May 12, 1998.
Other college campuses in Jakarta and adjacent towns
had already been set ablaze.

The main demand had already crystallized:
Suharto must step down from the presidency.

Student movements were already active in Jabodetabek.
In Solo. In Bogor. In Yogyakarta.

But none could compare in size to the massive group
of demonstrators mobilized by Trisakti University.
9 college deans supported them.
Professors representing 18 faculties were present.

The Chancellor, lecturers, and other employees were in agreement.

All of this had been accomplished through a difficult process.
Three months were needed to give birth to a movement
that spoke in one voice.

The action began at 8:00 in the morning.
Unexpectedly, many foreign journalists showed up to cover.
Who invited them? Were our plans leaked?
CNN, CNBC, NHK, and AFP were all covering the Trisakti march.

From 10 am until 5 pm, students would take to the streets.
From the campus to the DPR parliament building.
The DPR leadership agreed to meet us there.

However,
The masses were only allowed to march 300 meters
from the campus gate.

They were intercepted by Police barricades.
Negotiations were carried out.

“Sir, this long march is supported by the chancellor.
Please allow us to go to the DPR.”

The policemen simply replied:
“We’re just carrying out orders.
You can’t cross this line.”

Soon after that, the police asked the students to return to campus.

From 5 pm until 9 pm, hostilities broke out.
First came military troops on motorcycles.

They deliberately collided with students.
It appeared that they were trying to provoke and incite a chaotic atmosphere.
Many female students shouted: "Sir, we are human beings. How come you just hit us?"

The sound of gunshots rang out. Officers were stationed on standby on the flyover. There were also troops on standby on the rooftop of the Ciputra Mall right across from the campus.

Shots continued to ring out.

News appeared on television.
Four Trisakti students had been shot dead.

Hendra, Eshal and I spent a few days at Sumber Waras Hospital in Grogol. We witnessed the dead bodies of Hendryawan Sie, Hafidin Royan, Elang, and Hery Hartanto.

Hendra Chen was badly shaken by the violent police reaction. He hadn't expected the student movement's peaceful actions to result in death. Elang was his close friend.
Limping with his wounded legs, Hendra wept while holding Elang's limp body.

Eshal remained constantly by Hendra's side.

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May 12, 1998: Four Trisakti students were shot.
May 13-14: Mass riots and unrest in Jakarta
May 14-20: The movement expanded nationally.

However, resentment at the government spilled over into racial unrest. Chinese-owned houses and shops were raided, vandalized, and looted. Many Chinese women were raped.

May 21: Suharto stepped down as president of Indonesia.

The Reformation Era began.
Campus life returned to normal.

Hendra broke up with his old girlfriend.
Eshal became closer to Hendra.

Eshal was often allowed by her parents to stay at my house.
One reason: Cooperating on class assignments.
Another reason: Mid-term test preparation.
Yet another reason: Preparation for semester exams.

What really happened was Eshal stopped by at my house for a while.
But she spent the rest of the night at Hendra's apartment.
Just the two of them.

To study together for class,
And especially to talk about life,
Hendra was the right person.

He was a well-known scholar at the university.
His grade point average was among the highest.
And Eshal liked intelligent people.

I was a witness.
Hendra visited Eshal's parents at their house.
He stated his intention to marry Eshal.

Hendra said: "If you give us your permission to marry overseas, we will.
Singapore can officiate interfaith marriages."

But Eshal's father replied: "It is impossible for me to allow Eshal to go
against religious commands.
Muslim women must marry Muslim men."

Three months later, Hendra came back.
He was now willing to change religion for Eshal's sake.

He asked permission from Eshal's father to get married at his mosque.

But Eshal's father asked:
"What about the rest of Hendra's family?
Would they also convert?"

This meeting also failed.
Eshal's father told her that
he prioritized religion over love.

When Hendra left and went home,
Eshal protested loudly to her father:
“Hendra was ready to change religion.
It was outrageous when you asked his family to convert as well.”

Her father replied: “Even if his whole family converted,
they would still be ethnic Chinese.”

To which Eshal shouted:
“I regret being the daughter of such a racist father! If I could only choose
my parents, how much happier my life would be.”

A year after his two marriage proposals were rejected,
Hendra bade farewell to Eshal. He would continue
his education in the United States.

Eshal cried. “Don’t give up on us, my dear. What if we elope? We
wouldn’t have to worry about my parents,” said Eshal.
“Just take me abroad with you. You go to school. I will find work there.”

Hendra hugged Eshal while shedding bitter tears.
“I love you, Eshal.
You took care of me.
But it would be wrong for me to separate you from your parents.”

Eshal hugged Hendra. They both cried even harder.

That was the last time they met.

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Having finished our pilgrimage to Hendra’s grave at San Diego Hills,
Eshal and I visited the Tanah Kusir cemetery on the southwestern
outskirts of Jakarta.

We visited our friends’ graves,
the four Trisakti students who were shot dead.

Eshal had been very close to Elang Mulia Lesmana.
Although less close to the other three.

Eshal began crying:

“Elang, Hendra has recently followed you to the grave.”

Eshal wept for a long time.

The inner turmoil from two decades ago began to flow out.

The suffering that had been pent up inside her for so long started seeping out of her soul.

The pain she had concealed for so many years dribbled and oozed out of her body and into the open air.

The batik cloth from Hendra

Eshal gingerly unfolded and wrapped around her neck.

She caressed it slowly. As though she were looking for traces of Hendra’s fingers on the cloth.

Again, she shed tears. More than I could possibly count...

Although Eshal had wanted to forget the past,

Hendra had always been present in her heart.

Always...

September, 2022

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Screams Following Liberation is an anthology of stories that express the nature of primordial conflicts that raged during the Post-Suharto Reformation Era: The Sectarian Conflict in Maluku (1999-2002), Interethnic Violence in Sampit, Central Kalimantan (2001), Interethnic Conflict in Jakarta (May, 1998), Anti-Ahmadiyya sectarian violence in West Lombok (2002-2017), and the conflict between Balinese transmigrants and indigenous communities in Lampung, South Sumatra (2012).



My Daughter's Tears At The Mall

Lions and dragons danced in the sky.
A lively lion dance loomed on the horizon.
The sound of ethereal singing wafted here and there.
The music played, floating aimlessly away.

Lian, his favorite daughter, had become a dancer.
Smiling at him from the supernatural world.

This image often came to Koh Enlai.
Especially when he missed his only child: Lian.

I don't know how many times Koh Enlai read the news.

The Joint Fact-Finding Team concluded that in the May 1998 riots, as many as 488 people died in a mall that was set on fire. ⁽⁵⁾

It was the Klender Mall in East Jakarta.
Previously called the Yogya Plaza.
The bodies of the dead were scorched.
They were burned beyond recognition,
rendered black like charcoal.

5 The Joint Fact-Finding Team listed 488 dead victims in the arson attack on the Yogya Plaza Shopping Center, which is now called Klender Mall. <https://www.kompas.com/stori/read/2021/12/02/080000379/tragedi-kebakaran-mal-klender-1998?page=3>

For Koh Enlai, the number of deaths was not just a number.
Because Lian was among those who died at the mall.
At the time of her untimely death, Lian was only 10 years old.

Lian's screams and cries for help often resounded in his ears:
"Papiil ..., Papiii..."

Koh Enlai saw Lian from a distance.
On that terrible day, Lian was visiting his shop,
accompanying his employees who guarded its merchandise.

Koh Enlai was at home.
Neighbors informed him.
"Koh, the mall has been set on fire.
"Go quickly, Koh. Your daughter is there."

"Ha?" Koh Enlai was aghast.
Startled. Worried. Frightened.

Koh Enlai rushed there.
He rode his motorcycle as fast as possible.
Speeding.

His shop was on the second floor.
Koh Enlai arrived there.
A distance of 30 meters from the shop.
But the fire had already burned much of the mall.

Smoke was everywhere.
His eyes were sore.
Hot.
His vision became blurry.
Shortness of breath.
Coughing.

"Liaaaaannn, wait!
PAPI is coming!!!"

Koh Enlai yelled as vigorously as possible.
But his voice was blocked by the rowdy shouts.
And the hustle and bustle of hoodlums looting the shops.
The sounds of those who stealthfully arranged to

steal TVs, refrigerators, jewelry, shoes, or whatever else could be stolen from the mall.

Suddenly, Bedebuk!

A sturdy man had just hit him hard from behind.

Koh Enlai was still conscious.

Bedebuk. Bedebuk!

The man hit Koh Enlai repeatedly.

But Koh Enlai only thought about his daughter.

He kept shouting:

“Liaaaann, Liaaaann,

Papi is coming.”

Koh Enlai was then thrown by the man from the second floor.

He fell into the mall parking lot.

Instantly, Koh Enlai felt dizzy.

He could not move his legs.

But Koh Enlai kept screaming, as much as possible:

“Liaaaan, Liaaannnn”

Then Koh Enlai fainted.

When he regained consciousness, Koh Enlai was at home.

His sister told me.

Fortunately, Koh Enlai fell in the parking area.

If he hadn't, he would have been burned to death.

Or died from shortness of breath and smoke inhalation.

As soon as he regained consciousness,

Koh Enlai remembered his daughter:

“Liaaaaaan! Liaaaann!”

Koh Enlai shouted as hard as he could.

He also forced himself to move.

He wanted to pick his daughter up at the mall.

But both his legs were stiff.

This year, in 2022, Koh Enlai, although able to walk again for a long time, his legs are still a bit lame.

The scars of a wound on one leg are still noticeable.

But more enduring are the wounds in his heart.

More gaping the trauma of his daughter's tears.

Oh, these are the wounds of the racial riots in Jakarta of May 1998.

How deep they run.

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When the mall was looted on May 14, 1998,

Koh Enlai was 36 years old. He did not know politics.

Nor did he care about politics either.

For Koh Enlai, life was about trade.

Beyond that, life involved raising children.

Raising Lian.

But since the looting of the Klender Mall, Koh Enlai began to read a lot.

He wanted to know why the mall was set on fire.

Koh Enlai currently knows.

Two days before the mall was looted,

four Trisaksi University students were shot dead.

Koh Enlai now knows.

Before all that,

there was an economic crisis in Asia.

Koh Enlai had been inquiring for a long time. Both the arson and looting at the mall were perpetrated by commandos.

The more sophisticated Koh Enlai became in political matters, the more he asked: "Was everything connected?"

Was the looting at the mall devised in order to create a chaotic environment?

With the intent of toppling the Suharto regime?

Koh Enlai couldn't figure it out.
Every time he thought about this matter,
Lian's screams and cries always came.

During the first months after the incident,
he often woke up in the middle of the night.
He felt he heard Lian screaming and begging for help.

When strong gusts of wind blew against his window,
he felt like Lian was there.

Koh Enlai would never forget that mall.
The Klender mall was quite complete.
It was a shopping center.
It had a supermarket.
There was a movie theater.
It had a children's play area.

Koh Enlai had a store at the mall.
He sold electronic goods.
His employees always took care of them.

Koh Enlai's wife had died when Lian was just three years old.
After that, Koh Enlai lived alone with his daughter, Lian.
They had many employees and some servants.

Koh Enlai now knows.
On that tragic day, May 14, 1998.
A group of men appeared.
They directed local people to enter the mall.

They shouted loudly:
"Take all the merchandise.
This mall is owned by Chinese."

Koh Enlai now knows.
Many looters had disguised themselves as high school students.
They were wearing school uniforms.
They pelted the shop windows with rocks.
Low boisterous screams.
They pointed their fingers and gave commands:

“Loot this mall.
Attack it ...!
It belongs to Chinese.”

Local residents scattered out of their dwellings. Men, women,
young, and old... They all joined in looting.
They reveled in robbing.
After all, times were difficult.

Some residents tried to prevent the looting spree.
“Hey, don’t steal.
You will be punished.”
But they were ignored.

Now Koh Enlai knows.
There were no security forces there.
As though this looting was deliberately allowed to occur.

In the parking area of the Klender Mall,
various looted items were seen.

In cars.
In trucks.
Inside the cart/wheelbarrows.
There were refrigerators, televisions, shoes.
There were clothes.

Now Koh Enlai knows.
A red pickup truck came.
It stopped in front of the Klender Mall.

Dozens of sturdy men got out.
Some of them had crew cuts.
Some were long-haired.

Oh! They carried jerry cans containing gasoline.
Some of them held walkie-talkies.

Oh!
They collected mattresses, clothes, and other flammable goods.
They stacked these in the middle of the mall.
Then they poured gasoline on them.

“Byaaaaarr” They started a fire.
The fire spread and raged.

The first floor of the mall caught fire.
Everyone in the mall was trapped.
It was hard to find a way out.

Electric lights in the mall were extinguished.
Smoke was everywhere.
Many people suffered shortness of breath.
They fainted from lack of oxygen.

Now Koh Enlai knows.
Those men were trained.
They stood at various exits.
They piled cardboard boxes.
They poured gasoline on them.

And byaaaar!
The fire burned.
The exits were blocked.
Everyone in the mall was burned to death.
Roasted.

Each time he recalled this event, which was often,
Koh Enlai screamed:

“Oh, my God.
There were so many people in the mall.
They were all roasted.
They were scorched beyond recognition.”
Who had the nerve to kill hundreds of people in a mall?

“Their bodies could not be identified.”

The Joint Fact Finding Team recorded:
The number of victims was 488 people.
He could hear the shrill cry of Koh enlai.
“My daughter was there. My one and only child.”

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Since the arson attack on the mall,
Koh Enlai never went there anymore.
He sold the shop.
He once tried to visit the mall.
But his legs trembled.
The screams and tears of Lian, his daughter,
were heard again: "Papiiiiiiii, Papiiiiiiii..."

Just once did Koh Enlai go there.
He scattered flowers,
hoping to meet his daughter again.

What made Koh Enlai sad: he never saw his daughter's body.

The owner of the adjacent store told him a story.
He said Lian tried to fend off the looters.
Lian said: "This belongs to my Papi. Get out of here."

Koh Enlai's employees survived because they ran away.
But Lian chose to stay and fight the looters.

Koh Enlai heard the news. Victims from the mall had been
gathered at Cipto Mangunkusumo Hospital. ⁽⁶⁾

He forced himself to go there.
His younger brother brought him there.
Because his legs still hurt, Koh Enlai just sat in a wheelchair.

Many corpses were charred.
But Koh Enlai did not find Lian's body.

All he saw pertaining to her was a plastic bag.
Inside there were shoes,
And a shirt.
Those were Lian's shoes.
And that was Lian's shirt.

But where was Lian's body?
Some alleged that Lian did not die in the fire.
She just died due to shortness of breath from smoke inhalation.

6 The dead bodies at the mall were sent to a hospital and then buried in a mass grave at TPU Pondok Ranggon, East Jakarta. <https://nasional.kompas.com/read/2017/05/14/11065481/19.tahun.kehilangan.anak.korban.tragedi.mei.98.ini.sulit.tidur?page=all>

But where was Lian's body?
Shoes and clothes were collected by officers.
But her body had apparently been piled up with the bodies
Of other dead victims.
Nobody knew quite where.

Koh Enlai heard the news.
His daughter was buried in a mass grave.
The grave was located at TPU Pondok Ranggon.

Koh Enlai had already gone there.
He saw that there were indeed many graves.
But which one was Lian's grave?

For years, Koh Enlai hoped.
That somehow Lian was safe.
That somehow Lian did not die.

But 24 years had already gone by.
If Lian hadn't died, where was she?
Why didn't Lian come home?

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On that day.
February 2022.
Koh Enlai celebrated Gong Xi Fa Chai with his brother's family.

He remembered the last time he celebrated Chinese New Year with Lian.

"Papi, I won't cut this noodle.
The noodle is very longggg!
So that Papi has a long life.
And my life is also long.
So I can take care of Papi when you get old."

He hugged Lian.
"Oh Lian, Papi loves you so much. Papi is also proud of you."

Each time she was hugged,
Lian returned Papi's hug with great love.

Lian then told him.
“Papi, I want to be a barongsai dancer.
There are lions.
There are dragons.
Both of them guard luck and fortune.”

Koh Enlai asked: “Lian, do you want to be a lion dancer
or a dragon dancer?”

Lian answered:
“I have often seen lions on TV.
Real live lions.
But I have never seen a living dragon.
I want to be a dragon dancer, Papi. It’s more exciting.”

The next day, Koh Enlai invited Lian to buy a dragon candle.
“It’s sort of a dragon, Lian. Actually, it’s just a candle.
But this will always make you remember.
Some day when you become a famous barongsai dancer.
A dragon dancer.”

Lian was very happy.
She placed the dragon candle
on her bedroom table.

Before she went to sleep,
and when she woke up in the morning,
the dragon candle was the last thing and
then the first thing she would see.

For 24 years, Koh Enlai had been hoping that Lian was still alive.
But Koh Enlai became steadily more depressed.
He had been expecting something that would never come.
For many years already.

His brother accompanied Koh Enlai several times to see a psychiatrist.

They had already met three different psychiatrists.
Each of them expressed the same view.

Koh Enlai must accept Lian’s passing.
He shouldn’t wait any longer.
Lian must have died.

Koh Enlai always tried to refute the certainty of her death:
"If she died, where was the body?
If I saw her body, I would accept that she has died.
But I haven't seen the body.
Woe to me if I think my child died without evidence."

But that day, Koh Enlai changed.
The previous night, he had dreamt of Lian
dancing the barongsai dance in the afterlife.
Lian smiled at him in the dream.
She was wearing a white dress. Clean. Glimmering.
She was holding a dragon candle.
But the dragon candle was huge.
And the dragon was alive.
The dragon twisted in all directions.

Koh Enlai cried out.
He understood that Lian was gone.
Lian had sent him the dream as a sign.

It was May 14, 2022.
Exactly 24 years since the arson attack on the Klender Mall.

Koh Enlai relented. "Lian, my daughter.
I will no longer wait for you to come home.
I accept that you have already died."

The dragon candle that Koh Enlai had bought for Lian
was only the size of his hand.

That night, at exactly 00:00,
On the veranda of his house,
Koh Enlai lit the dragon candle.

"Lian, my daughter.
I am burning this dragon candle
so that its smoke wafts high into the air and seeks you."

"The candle can be transformed into a barongsai dragon dancer.
Use the barongsai that Papi has sent you."

“Dance, my child.
Dance in the afterlife.
As much as you want.”
To acquaintances,
Koh Enlai exclaimed that
Lian was now a Barangsai dancer.

But Koh Enlai rarely slept.
He hardly ever showered.
He rarely worked.

Until finally, one day
his younger brother brought Koh Enlai to a mental hospital.
Koh Enlai would live there from then on.

Koh Enlai forgot a lot of things.
But there was one thing he would never forget:
Lian was now an eternal barongsai dancer.

September, 2022

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Screams Following Liberation is an anthology of stories that express the nature of primordial conflicts that raged during the Post-Suharto Reformation Era: The Sectarian Conflict in Maluku (1999-2002), Interethnic Violence in Sampit, Central Kalimantan (2001), Interethnic Conflict in Jakarta (May, 1998), Anti-Ahmadiyya sectarian violence in West Lombok (2002-2017), and the conflict between Balinese transmigrants and indigenous communities in Lampung, South Sumatra (2012).



A Secret Taken To The Grave

As deep as the sea may be,
we can still guess what is hidden at the bottom.
But what lies in the depths of a woman's soul?
Who can fathom what is hidden in her heart?

For two hours, he had been sitting there stunned.
At his wife's grave...
Li Wei had died just a week earlier.

Jiang kept crying, grieving for this new awareness.
"Li Wei, Li Wei, why didn't you tell me?
Fifteen years were we married.
Indeed, sometimes I didn't understand your behavior."
"But if you had just told me, I would have understood."

Jiang just kept on weeping.
He was very sorry for his wife.
Three days before she died,
when doctors told her that the cancer had spread to
her vital organs,
Li Wei asked Jiang to speak face to face:

“Jiang, please forgive me.
I’ve never told anyone about this.”
Li Wei handed over some keys in a small envelope.

“This is the key to my safe in our bedroom.
Inside the envelope you will also find the code.

I want you to promise.
That you only open the safe after I’m gone.
At least a day after I’m buried in the ground.”

At that moment, Jiang was already stunned.
All these years, he thought it was just an ordinary safe.
Li Wei kept some jewelry and a good amount of cash there.

Now, Jiang began to suspect that Li Wei also kept some
confidential material there.

But what was the secret? Even Jiang couldn’t surmise.

Several days later, Li Wei died.
The day after her funeral,
Jiang’s heart went dag dig dug...

What secrets had she stored in the safe?
Upon opening the safe,
He spied 4 diaries there.
Complete with a specific year on the cover of each:
1998, 1999, 2000, 2001.

There was a letter on it. “For my husband, Jiang.”

Jiang opened the letter first:
“My dear husband, Jiang.
You’re a good writer.
I want you to write my story. To educate people.
But you must disguise my identity.”

This piqued Jiang’s curiosity.
He opened the diary.
From noon until the next morning, Jiang continued reading.
Without taking a break.
Without even lying down to sleep.

His tears kept ebbing and flowing.
After reading, Jiang burst into intermittent bouts of weeping.

“Li Wei, Li Wei..
Why did you keep this a secret from me?
I always loved you.
I always accepted you as you were”

After 15 years of marriage,
he had just found out.
He was the only one who knew
that Li Wei had been gang raped by 5 men
during the interethnic riots that targeted Chinese residents
of Jakarta in May, 1998.

Jiang exclaimed through his tears:
“Oh my God, Li Wei, my goodness!
You’re a strong woman.
Very strong.”

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It was May 13, 1998.
Fierce riots beset Jakarta.

Li Wei was just 21 years old.
She was living in an opulent house.
Indeed, there were many wealthy Chinese people living there.

At that time, Li Wei was living by herself.
The maid had returned to her village.
Her parents were in the United States visiting her older brother
who was attending college there.

Li Wei didn’t accompany them.
She was preparing for a mid-semester exam.

A group of frightening young men appeared outside.
They brought wooden clubs.
Some brought a machete.

As they walked down the streets, they shouted:
“Hey, Chinese. Get out, all of you!
You’ve become rich.
While we’re all poor.”

“Duuaaaarr”

The exterior gate was successfully broken and breached.
Li Wei was scared.
She immediately switched off all the lights.
She closed the curtains.
It was still late afternoon shortly before sunset.

Unfortunately, Li Wei’s actions were detected.
It was clear that the house was inhabited.

The men knocked down the entrance door.
They entered the rooms.

Li Wei hid under a bed.
But they easily managed to find her.
“Don’t, don’t,” Li Wei said.
“I have money.
Just take my money.
Just take my things.”

But they laughed.
The machete was held against Li Wei’s neck.
“If you fight, I will slit your neck.
I’ll poke out your eyes!”

Li Wei immediately went limp.
She lost most of her memory of what happened next.

What she recalled was pain.
Five men took turns raping her.

Li Wei could only cry.
After being satisfied with raping her,
the group left.
One of them took a small television.
Another took a laptop computer.

Li Wei cried all night long.
At first, she contemplated suicide.
She placed a sharp knife against the veins of her hand.

But Li Wei envisaged how heartbroken
her mother, father, and brother would be.

As a devout Christian, Li Wei prayed with all her heart.
“Strengthen me, Father in Heaven.
Give me light.
Show me the way.”

This prayer she repeated
Until she finally fell into a deep sleep.
When she woke up, it was already noon.
Li Wei felt a sharp pain at the bottom of her torso.

She pretended that she didn’t know where it came from.
Li Wei finally made up a story.

She would tell her family.
Their house was robbed.
But Li Wei was away at the time.
When she came home, the house was already ransacked.
Indeed, riots had spread to many Jakarta
neighborhoods where Chinese families lived.

Li Wei rushed to a hotel in the Sudirman business district.
To be safe, she took a room at a five-star hotel.

From the hotel, she called her father.
“I’m going to stay at this hotel for the next five days, Dad.
Until the violence subsides.”

Her father in the United States was very worried.
“Li Wei, I’ve read the news.
I’ve also got word from your uncle.
If something is urgent, don’t hesitate to request your uncle’s
assistance. We will return to Jakarta next week.”

Mother also expressed the same anxiety. Her brother as well.

“Li Wei, just stay at the hotel until everything returns to normal.
Mother heard that many Chinese women have been raped.”

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Li Wei managed to make her family believe her rendition of the break-in at their house. She was fortunate that she was able to keep her terrible experience a secret until the day she died.

Yet she couldn't keep this to herself.
Li Wei was wounded.
Very deeply.
Gaping trauma haunted her.
At night, her nightmares made her scream:
“Get out! All of you, get out of here!”

Once Li Wei woke up her mother and father.
They knocked on her bedroom door.
“Li Wei, Li Wei, open the door!
What is it?”

Li Wei opened the door.
She lied and told them that she had watched a horror movie earlier that day. And that the movie had disturbed her dreams.

Her parents shook their heads in disbelief.

Another concern involved romance.
By 2005, Li Wei was already 28 years old.
But she hadn't gotten married.
She didn't have a close boyfriend or fiancé.

Her parents asked her about this.
What's wrong with you?
Jiang is a good man.
But you always neglect him.

For the sake of her family,
Li Wei finally married Jiang.
However, for three months after their wedding,
Li Wei still avoided conjugal relations.

Jiang was annoyed and frustrated.
"I'm your lawful husband.
You say you love me.
If so, why are you evading intimacy between us?"

Li Wei finally gave in.
But Jiang knew,
Li Wei was aloof and cold...
She didn't enjoy intimacy.

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Li Wei could indeed keep a secret from others.
But she couldn't keep a secret from her own heart.

She became preoccupied with finding out
Exactly what happened in Jakarta at that time.
How many women had experienced calamities like her?
On May 12 and 13, 1998, rape occurred at several districts in Jakarta,
starting from Jembatan Tiga and Jembatan Lima, and quickly spreading
to Glodok, and further north to Pluit.

The government formed a Joint Fact-Finding Team (TGPF).
The commission concluded that
at least fifty-two women had been raped. ⁽⁷⁾
Nearly all of them were Chinese.

Sexual violence had occurred inside private homes, on the road
and even in front of businesses. Most rape cases involved gang
rape. Victims were repeatedly raped by groups of men. They took
turns raping their victim.

Oh my God!
They even raped women on the street in front of passersby.

7 The Joint Fact-Finding Team reported 52 confirmed cases of rape that occurred during the May, 1998 disturbances. The vast majority of rape victims were ethnic Chinese women. [https://id.wikisource.org/wiki/Laporan_Tim_Gabungan_Pencari_Fakta_\(TGPF\)_Peristiwa_Tanggal_13-15_Mei_1998/Temuan](https://id.wikisource.org/wiki/Laporan_Tim_Gabungan_Pencari_Fakta_(TGPF)_Peristiwa_Tanggal_13-15_Mei_1998/Temuan)

Li Wei also heard the testimony of a whistleblower:
On the Glodok Bridge, in front of Harco, a Chinese woman was dragged.
The men became fierce lions. They took turns raping her right there.

That was done in the open. When people were passing by.

Also involved were community institutions, such as Kalyanamitra. This institution became a command center.
They opened an active complaint post. Its purpose was to combat acts of rape against women.
Especially against the main target, ethnic Chinese women.

Kalyanamitra estimated that more than 150 rape cases occurred during the May 1998 unrest in Jakarta. ⁽⁸⁾

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Li Wei could indeed conceal her tragic secret from others.
But she couldn't keep it a secret from her own heart.

Li Wei was captivated by the story of a young Chinese-Indonesian rape victim, named Ita Martadinata Haryono.
Ita was in her third year at high school.
She was only 18 years old.
So bravely did Ita Martadinata try to fend off her assailants.

Ita had been an active and vivacious teenager.
But there was now a significant change in her behavior.
She became depressed and taciturn
in the aftermath of being raped.

Ita decided to join the volunteer team for humanity (Tim Relawan untuk Kemanusiaan/TRuK).
The team represented the interests of ethnic Chinese woman who had suffered recently from a spate of rape.

8 Another agency, Kalyanamitra, reported a much larger number of young Chinese women who were raped during the civil unrest that raged in Jakarta in May, 1998. <https://www.idntimes.com/news/indonesia/lia-hutasoit-1/kelamnya-pemeriksaan-di-glodok-1998-yang-menimpa-perempuan-tionghoa>

After extended deliberations, Ita decided to be the only victim who dared to speak out on behalf of other victims like Li Wei. She also gave counseling to fellow victims.

At that time, Ita made preparations to travel to the United Nations in New York. She was going to deliver a testimonial to the world. She was going to expose the systematic mass rape that had besieged her community during the five months leading up to the May, 1998 riots. She was going to tell her own personal experience.

However, on October 9, 1998, just a few days before her flight, Ita was found dead. Her abdomen, chest, and right arm had been stabbed up to ten times. Her neck was slashed. And her genitals had been pounded by wooden clubs.⁽⁹⁾

Li Wei now became even more frightened. She doubled down on concealing the terrible secret she had been guarding. She certainly didn't want to be savagely killed like Ita...

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The day after reading Li Wei's diaries, Jiang took a week off. He did not want to go back to work. A whirlwind storm was spinning in his mind.

These words were constantly repeated by Jiang:

"Li Wei, Li Wei...
Why did you keep this a secret from me?
I loved you so much.
I would have always accepted you as you were."

"If you had just told me, this burden that you carried for so many decades could have been less onerous. The metastasis of the cancer that recently killed you was likely accelerated by holding onto this terrible burden."

9 Ita Martadinata, an 18-year-old Chinese high school student and rape victim, was savagely murdered just days before her scheduled flight to New York to give testimony at the United Nations. https://id.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ita_Martadinata_Haryono

"I was your husband.
We were legally married.
I am the father of your two children.
I could have helped you carry your burden.
You didn't have to die so young."

Jiang disparaged himself:
"Oh, how stupid I was.
Damn me!
How could it be that I didn't know?
Why did my wife feel uncomfortable telling me?"

That day, Jiang left his two children in the care of his brother.
He wanted to be alone.
For that whole day.

Jiang drove to the house where it happened,
the house where Li Wei was raped.

Jiang just sat in the car,
gazing at the house from afar.
Jiang once again shed tears.
He wept.
He screamed without making a sound.

"Li Wei, Li Wei...
You were a strong woman.
Very strong."

Overnight, Jiang appreciated the solitude.
The silence.
The stillness.

He spent time at his house.
He didn't want to meet anyone.

That very night at midnight,
as the moon rose like a lamp in the sky,
Jiang held Li Wei's four diaries in his hands.

He asked himself,
"What should I do with Li Wei's diaries?"

Li Wei had spent four years recording her emotions
in these four books.
She only stopped in 2001.

On the last page of the fourth diary, Li Wei wrote:
“I have to forget this event forever.
As though it had never happened.
I feel pity for myself.”

Before dying, Li Wei had asked Jiang to write her story.
At first Jiang agreed.
He had decided to write it in the form of a novel.

But now Jiang reconsidered.
This story was too painful for him.

Even if he disguised the main character of the novel,
his children would know the truth:
This must be the story of their mother.

His children would not be ready.
Indeed, they would never be ready.
Nor his grandchildren.
They would also not be ready.
Nor Li Wei’s parents and brother.

That night,
after praying,
Jiang burned Li Wei’s diaries.
The four books became ashes.

While praying,
Jiang spoke to Li Wei’s spirit:

“Li Wei, Li Wei.
I burned your books with righteous intent.
Let your diaries become eternal in the universe.”

“The secret that you kept for so many years,
let it continue to be kept confidential.
Only I will know.
It is better that only I know what happened.”

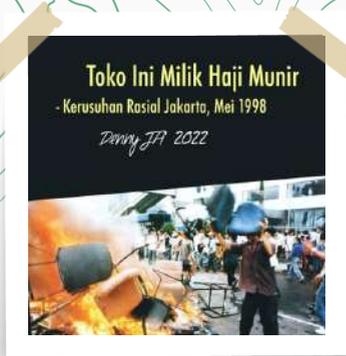
"Just like you,
I will also carry this secret
to the grave.
'Til the last day of my life..."

September, 2022

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#PuisiEsaiMini This Mini Essay Poem is an excerpt from the new book, **Screams Following Liberation**, which will be published in the near future (Denny JA, 2022).

Screams Following Liberation is an anthology of stories that express the nature of primordial conflicts that raged during the Post-Suharto Reformation Era: The Sectarian Conflict in Maluku (1999-2002), Interethnic Violence in Sampit, Central Kalimantan (2001), Interethnic Conflict in Jakarta (May, 1998), Anti-Ahmadiyya sectarian violence in West Lombok (2002-2017), and the conflict between Balinese transmigrants and indigenous communities in Lampung, South Sumatra (2012).



This Shop Belongs To Haji Munir

The rain had just abated in the city of Jakarta.
A rainbow crept slowly upward in the sky.
Illuminating the dark.
Revealing secrets...

That afternoon,
their hearts beat nervously.
Just sitting together in a closed room,
two daughters were about to open a will.
Their eyes stared intently at each other.

The notary public advised that the will was only to be opened three days after their father's funeral, which was today.
People called their father: Koh Oskar.

"What are the contents, Sis?" Lian asked, not anticipating a reply. Kaili, her younger sister, just shook her head. "I don't know, Sis. It's dark."

The will was written in their father's handwriting.
Lian and Kaili began to read the letter slowly.

"My dear children, Lian and Kaili.
"All of Father's wealth is to be given to both of you.
Please decide together how it will be allotted between you."

"However, the shop that Father owns on Jalan Jembatan Lima,
West Jakarta, I hereby bequeath to Harto Yakub."

There was a complete Indonesian Identity Card number, belonging
to Harto Yakub. The will was signed by father.
There was also a notary signature and office stamp.
As well as the signature of their uncle,
who had witnessed this legal proceeding.

Instantly Lian called the notary:
"Sir, who is Harto Yakub?
How come we have never heard of him?"

"Is this really his final will and testament? Are you certain?"

The notary answered very briefly. "It's authentic, Lian.
Why would I dare forge or alter a will? I would be imprisoned."

Kaili asked too. "Harto Yakub seems to
be quite special. Was he the offspring of a relationship father had
with another wife?"

The notary answered: "No. Your father had no other wife beside your
mother. You were his only children."

"It has something to do with the Jakarta riots in May, 1998.
At that time, you were still babies;
Lian, you were just 2 years old, and Kaili was still a baby."

"For complete information, you are welcome to ask your uncle.
My only role was to legalize the will according to your father's wishes."

Lian and Kaili became more bewildered. "May 98 riots?
Oh my God... What is this all about?"

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The two sisters quickly went to their uncle's house.
The three of them sat and talked on the veranda.

The afternoon breeze blew hard.
Branches and leaves swayed swiftly back and forth.
Several times, Uncle took a deep breath.

"I beg forgiveness, Lian and Kaili. Uncle never told you.
And your father had requested that I refrain from discussing
this with you. Until now. This is a sensitive issue."

"Your father was sick for an entire month.
Pale.
Awkward.
He felt guilty.
He wanted to forget this episode."
Lian and Kaili looked at each other. They seemed more confused.

"What really happened?" Lian asked in her heart.
Their uncle began to tell his story.
"On May 13-15, there was mass unrest in Jakarta.
4000 buildings were set on fire.
1190 people died.
At least 52 women were raped."⁽¹⁰⁾

At that time, your parents were conducting business at their shop in the
Jembatan Lima district of West Jakarta."
"Because of the riots, your father and mother closed shop
early and decided to go home."

"They had not gotten very far when your father and mother
were confronted and blocked by a gang of five hoodlums.
They were carrying machetes and crowbars."
"Hey, guys," they shouted gleefully.
"Here's another Chinese woman."

Uncle began to cry:
"Mercy, God have mercy..."

10 The Joint Fact-Finding Task Force (TPGF) investigated and reported the number of victims who had been killed, the number of women who had been raped, as well as material loss during the May 1998 Jakarta Riots. [https://id.m.wikisource.org/wiki/Laporan_Tim_Gabungan_Pencari_Fakta_\(TGPF\)_Peristiwa_Tanggal_13-15_Mei_1998](https://id.m.wikisource.org/wiki/Laporan_Tim_Gabungan_Pencari_Fakta_(TGPF)_Peristiwa_Tanggal_13-15_Mei_1998)

This happened right in front of your own father.
He could only struggle and shout."
"Why? What happened, Uncle?," Lian asked.
Uncle kept crying. He just shook his head.

"Was Mother killed there?" Kaili asked inquisitively.
"It's okay, Uncle. Just tell us. We are adults."

"Your mother was raped. And because your mother fought back,
she was struck repeatedly. And tortured."

"This happened on a public sidewalk near their shop."

"Ha!" Lian nearly fell from her seat. Kaili covered her face with her hands:
"Oh my God, Oh my God..."

Uncle continued the story:
"That's when Pak Yakub suddenly arrived.
He was your father's friend.
He defended your father and mother.
"Hey, move on, you guys! This is my brother."

"Yakub was a martial arts expert. He also brought a machete.
Initially, one or two men fought him. But Yakub deftly knocked them
down. Then the gang dispersed and ran away."

"Yakub escorted your parents back to their shop. Your
mother suffered internal bleeding. But she survived."

"Eventually, however, the inner shock and psychological burden she
sustained was too great to endure. Your mother was often ill after that.
Five years later, she succumbed and died."

"For three days, your father's shop was guarded day and
night by Yakub. To fend off Muslim gangs who were targeting
Chinese businesses, he painted the shop's security grille with the
words: 'This shop belongs to Haji Munir.'"

"At that time many Chinese shops
were emblazoned with similar slogans: "This shop belongs
to Indigenous Pribumi." "This building belongs to Muslims."
"This belongs to Haji Mansyur."

"Your father returned to the shop. He wanted to take part in guarding the shop."

"This is all I have, Yakub. My children are still small. I invested all my assets in this shop.' "

"I must take care of my own shop. With my life."

"Yakub forbade him:
'You could be killed, Koh.
If it is suspected that this store belongs to you,
it will be ransacked and looted.'"

"If you are killed, who will raise your two children?"

"Your father was stunned. The fate of his two daughters was your father's most important consideration."

"Yakub declared: "You must have faith.
Let me guard your business.
I have arranged some insurance.
Did you see this?
'This Belongs to Haji Munir.'"

"Your father was very grateful to Yakub.
Your father left the shop in Yakub's hands and went home."

"Since high school, they had been friends.
They helped each other."

"Previously, when Yakub's business went bankrupt,
your father helped him get it going again."

"Some more bad news came:
Yakub was killed in the disturbances."

"I don't know who killed him.
I don't know what the motive may have been.
Pak Yakub became another victim of a total of 1190 people who died
during the May 1998 disturbances.
"That's the story."

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A bomb exploded in Lian's heart.
A grenade pummeled Kaili's heart.

"Good grief!"

They hadn't expected anything like this.

They had never suspected that their parents had experienced
or endured such horrors.

Lian cried.

Kaili cried.

Uncle let out a big sigh.

The wind blew hard.

Lian asked:

"Does Pak Yakub have a wife and child?"

Why didn't Father ever introduce them to us?"

After all, Mr. Yakub rendered a special service to us..."

"Yes, Pak Yakub had a wife and child.

His son is the same age as you, Lian."

"But Pak Yakub's wife was angry. Very angry.

She claimed: 'It is because of Koh Oskar that my husband is dead.'"

When your father came to mourn for Pak Yakub at his house,
his wife forbade him from entering.

He was kicked out and shown no respect
in front of a large crowd of visitors.

"Don't ever step foot in my house again.

Get out of here!"

"Did Father just give up? Or did he try to visit again?"

Did he try to help Mr. Yakub's son?" Kaili asked.

"Oh, your father knew how to return the favor.

In fact, he tried many times. In different ways."

"And due to his perseverance in running the shop
on Jembatan Lima, the two of you are now wealthy."

"If at that time, the shop had been burnt down, or ransacked
and looted, it is less likely that you would now be so affluent."

“When Pak Yakub’s son began attending elementary school and junior high school, your father helped. Several times, he sent money to pay for the boy’s education. But your father’s money was always sent back to him.”

“His wife said: ‘I don’t want my family to have any relationship with your family again.’”

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Lian and Kaili had previously only heard dribs and drabs.

While they were growing up in the new millennium, the events of May, 1998 had evaded their attention.⁽¹¹⁾

However, since Uncle told them how horrible and traumatic these events had been for their own parents, they began to investigate what had happened. Especially true stories of rampant looting of Chinese shops.

They wanted to understand the true nature of the atmosphere that prevailed at that time in West Jakarta when Mr. Yakub helped their parents.

Lian and Kaili heard a lot of testimony, particularly from local residents who participated in the looting of Chinese-owned shops.

Some testified:

“I was still 16 years old at that time.

I was in a large group of one hundred people.

We walked to a shopping center near the Tomang Interchange.”

“The temperature in Jakarta was very hot.

But stronger still were our expectations.

We could just take a lot of items for free. Wow!”

Others testified: “I was not interested at first.

But my neighbor brought home a TV.

11 Looters later gave testimony of their activities and experiences during the disturbances in Jakarta on 13-15 May, 1998. <https://www.vice.com/amp/id/article/a3av7e/pengakuan-para-pelaku-penjarahan-mei-98-korban-operasi-kerusuhan-sistematis>

Another brought home a radio, a walkman, even a mattress.”
“Finally, other neighbors and I joined in.”

Some testified: “We walked for three kilometers until we arrived at Roxy Mas mall in West Jakarta. Also Topas.”

“I shouted: ‘This is our day of liberation. We are free to take anything. We are free to bring home anything.’”

“We are free to choose goods. And take them without paying. The shops were exposed to large-scale looting without much interference from the guards.”

Others testified:

“Indeed, there were provocateurs who incited the looting. Those who started it. Their torsos were sturdy and brawny. They had clearly been trained. Some brought Molotov cocktails.”

“A provocateur first threw a Molotov cocktail into a shop.

He then shouted: “Attack!”

“This all belongs to Chinese. Just take it. It’s all free!”

Others testified: “My situation was not as fortunate.

In my area, there were many police and soldiers that actually protected the shops. They released tear gas on any group that tried to loot the stores.”

Still others testified: “The situation in many streets at that time was actually subdued. Many people became reluctant to leave their house. Smoke was rising from buildings in many places.”

Heard in the distance

From Plaza Orion,

From Harco Glodok,

were rapid bursts of rubber bullets.

Many people were running around.

“Dozens of people entered Plaza Orion.

They were lobbing electronic goods from one looter to another.

Like 32-inch color TVs.

And other popular electronic goods like Sony Walkmen.”

Others testified:

"I passed by Jembatan Lima.

Many shops there had signs that read:

Owned by Haji A, owned by Haji B, or owned by Haji C."

Lian and Kaili were excited when they saw that since one of those shops probably belonged to their father.

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"Sis," Kaili reported. "I recently saw an ad.

A shop like the one we have on Jembatan Lima is asking a price of 18 billion rupiah."

"Are we sincerely ready to give this shop away to Mr. Yakub's son?"

Lian tried to allay Kaili's concerns:

"The inheritance that the two of us are receiving is actually much bigger."

"Dad always felt indebted to Mr. Yakub.

So we should graciously let it go... Okay, Sis?"

Later that day, Uncle arranged a meeting between Koh Oskar's two daughters and Pak Yakub's son, Harto. When they met, Harto was also accompanied by his own uncle, Pak Seno. Harto's mother had died five years earlier and no longer wielded much influence.

Harto had long inquired: "Uncle Seno gave me a lot of money, including money for school tuition and daily expenses. Although Pak Seno's livelihood was quite limited."

"Harto," said Pak Seno. "You have often asked. Now Uncle will finally answer."

"According to a confidential agreement, Uncle can only reveal this today. And that's only because Koh Oskar's family has allowed this information to be divulged."

“Indeed, your school fees and daily expenses were not from Uncle Seno’s money.”
“Uncle just conveyed it to you.
But the money actually came from Koh Oskar.”

To Harto, Uncle revealed the identical background story. It was the same story that Uncle had told Lian and Kaili a day earlier.

Harto cried. “Thank you so much for your help. I really didn’t know what happened so many years ago.”
“Assistance for my education is enough,” Harto responded.
“Giving me ownership of your family’s shop seems excessive. Maybe my father deserved it.
But I’m obviously not worthy of it.”
“Since I myself have never rendered any special service to Koh Oskar’s family.”

But Lian and Kaili insisted: “This has become our father’s mandate. It is his method of finally repaying the debt of gratitude he had always felt toward Pak Yakub.”

“Please accept ownership of the store.
Not accepting would be discourteous to our father’s spirit.”

However, it was finally agreed that the shop would be jointly owned and managed. And that the proceeds would be paid out to social agencies, particularly those that supported the anti-discrimination movement.

This made sense because members of Koh Oskar’s family and Mohammad Yakub’s family were victims of discrimination.

They also agreed that in the main room of the store a large banner photo of Koh Oskar and Mohammad Yakub would be hung.

Under the photo, inscribed in huge letters on the wall, would be the words that would serve as an eternal bond of friendship between the two families.

These were the words that Pak Yakub had proudly painted on Oskar Koh's Shop to protect it during the worst days of the anti-Chinese rioting in May, 1998:

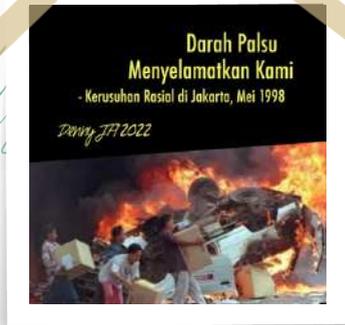
"This shop belongs to Haji Munir"

September, 2022

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#PuisiEsaiMini This Mini Essay Poem is an excerpt from the new book, **Screams Following Liberation**, which will be published in the near future (Denny JA, 2022).

Screams Following Liberation is an anthology of stories that express the nature of primordial conflicts that raged during the Post-Suharto Reformation Era: The Sectarian Conflict in Maluku (1999-2002), Interethnic Violence in Sampit, Central Kalimantan (2001), Interethnic Conflict in Jakarta (May, 1998), Anti-Ahmadiyya sectarian violence in West Lombok (2002-2017), and the conflict between Balinese transmigrants and indigenous communities in Lampung, South Sumatra (2012)



Fake Blood Rescued Us

The crescent moon appeared like a dim tapered lamp in the Jakarta sky.
But the night remained dark...
Herons flew above the water, searching for light.
Yet another story from the May, 1998 riots was about to unravel.

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Our story begins with a young couple who were looking forward to their wedding day.
They were traveling from Surabaya to Jakarta in search of old acquaintances of the bridegroom's parents.

They drove until they finally arrived.
The house was undecorated.
For two days, they had looked high and low.
Pak Yusuf was now in his sixties.

Since departing Surabaya, Maria has been asking herself:
Who was Muhamad Yusuf?
Why was he considered so important by her prospective in-laws?

A month from now, Maria would be married.
A week earlier, her fiance, Robert Chen, had suddenly declared:
“Maria, we’ve received a special assignment from my parents.”

“I have received a list of four names.
We must meet these four people in person while we’re in Jakarta.
They are considered by my parents to have rendered special
service to my family.
So they are also considered meritorious for my life.”

“They must be visited, shown respect, and be given news about our
upcoming wedding. Furthermore, my mother has asked that you become
acquainted with each of them.”

“We will also invite these four people to visit Surabaya,
specifically to attend our wedding ceremony.”

Maria read the four names:
Bobby Heng, Petrus Heng, Jiang Hendry, and Muhamad Yusuf.
Maria recognized the first three names.
They were the brothers of her future in-laws.
Robert had often told stories about his uncles.

But Muhamad Yusuf?
Even his name set him apart from the rest.

Robert had already made a request.
“Please don’t ask my parents about Muhamad Yusuf.
They are still traumatized.”

“What trauma?” Maria asked.
Robert seemed a bit reluctant to tell the story:
“It involves the May, ‘98 riots in Jakarta. I was only 7 years old.”

This only served to pique Maria’s curiosity:
Who was Mr. Yusuf? What role had he played two decades ago for the
family of her future husband?

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How amazed Mr. Yusuf was when he first set eyes again on Robert Chen.

“Wow, you have grown big and tall!”
said Mr. Yusuf excitedly,
as he embraced Robert warmly.

“The last time we met,
you were just 7 years old.
That was in 1998.
You cried, you were scared,
and you were also very sad.
Jakarta at that time was suffering from horrible daily riots.”

Robert confirmed, and occasionally nodded.
Sometimes he just smiled. At that time, he was still a boy.

After some brief chitchat and an explanation of the purpose of his visit,
Robert invited Mr. Yusuf to go out together.

They visited the residence where Robert’s family used to live.
They had sold it long ago.

“Since you left, I’ve never been here again,” said Mr. Yusuf.
They remained sitting in the car, viewing the house from a distance.

Then they returned to Mr. Yusuf’s house.

“I don’t remember everything, Mr. Yusuf.
I was only 7 years old. I just remember that our house was set on
fire. And we were forced to seek shelter elsewhere at
my Uncle’s house...”

“I would be interested to hear from Pak Yusuf.
What happened to my family at that time?”

“And why have my parents been so reluctant to talk about this?”

“Why did my older sister decide to flee and live permanently in the
United States and never wish to return again?”

Mr. Yusuf replied, "I have already promised your parents that I would never reveal this information to anyone."

"But I'm their own child. And I'm an adult. I will soon be married, too!"
Robert replied, trying his best to be both persuasive and light-spirited.

But Mr. Yusuf was still reluctant to broach and discuss this matter.
He was silent.
Robert was silent.
Maria was silent.

As their host, Mr. Yusuf felt uncomfortable.
After all, Robert and Maria had traveled a long distance to visit him.

Mr. Yusuf finally relented and began to tell his story.
With one request: That the young couple try to extract wisdom from what he was about to reveal.

The crescent moon became brighter.
The night was no longer as dark as before...

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Occasionally holding his breath,
sometimes stammering,
At times shedding tears,
Mr. Yusuf told his story.

Maria paid close attention to every detail.
She wanted to know what happened long ago to Robert's family.

Mr. Yusuf said: "I've made some notes. One day, I will rewrite this story as a play and arrange a theatrical performance."

"Of course, I will disguise any reference to your family.
People won't know."

Mr. Yusuf went inside
while Robert and Maria remained sitting on the veranda.
A few minutes later, he came back carrying his notes.

He had already neatly typed a lot of things.
While reading from his notes, Mr. Yusuf told them:

“The Jakarta Riots peaked in the middle of May, 1998.
Four students were shot dead at Trisakti University.
1190 residents of Jakarta also died.
Nearly 500 people died from arson and smoke inhalation at the
Yogya Mall in East Jakarta.
More than 50 ethnic Chinese women were raped.”

“At that time, anger at the government was surging.
Some military personnel diverted public rage at the Suharto regime by
provoking the unruly masses to attack, loot, and burn the shops and
homes of Chinese people.”

Robert and Maria listened intently. Robert wanted to know what
happened to his own family since Mother and Father had never
wanted to talk about this.

“Luxury housing belonging to Chinese families was invaded. Including
your house, Robert.” “I don’t know if you remember? Mrs. Ani, our
maid, nearly died. When the house went up in flames, she ran
to her room to retrieve her savings account book. This was the only
record she had of the money she had saved during many years of
service to your family.”

Robert shook his head. “I’m sorry; I don’t remember, sir.
All I remember was Dad holding me as he ran to the car.”
Mr. Yusuf continued:

“The atmosphere of Jakarta on the night of May 14,
1998 was frightening, eerie, and tense.
At that time, 434 buildings had been ransacked and looted.
Nearly 400 vehicles were torched.

Hundreds of looters were arrested by the police.
But thousands of others still roamed the streets,
searching for easy prey.”
Again, Mr. Yusuf glanced at his notes.

He continued to tell his story: “The most damage was done in West
Jakarta, where 255 buildings were set on fire.
In Central Jakarta, as many as 74 buildings were destroyed.

141 homes were damaged in North Jakarta, but only 4 buildings in South Jakarta.”⁽¹²⁾

“Horrific... Horrifying...” Mr. Yusuf was silent for a few moments. “Riots occurred in all areas of Jakarta. And in many other cities. “The looting activity was crazy. There were many provocateurs. It appeared that they had military training.”

“This is sad,” continued Mr. Yusuf. “During that tragic week in May, 1998, many Indonesian citizens moved out of Jakarta. Many even fled abroad. They were born here, but they had to leave just because they were of Chinese descent.”

“Some went to Singapore, the United States of America, Australia, Bangkok, Hong Kong. Your family, Robert, also fled. Initially, your family sought refuge in Bali. Your father monitored the situation in Jakarta from there. Eventually, your family settled in Surabaya.”

Mr. Yusuf looked back at his notes. “Here you see. Not only ethnic Chinese... but also hundreds of foreigners were evacuated. Embassy staff and other foreign workers along with their family. International Monetary Fund officials also left the country.”

People were panicking at the airport. Not only at Soekarno-Hatta Airport. Some emergency charter flights were being operated at Halim Perdanakusuma Airport.” Again Mr. Yusuf looked at his notes.

“Available aircraft: One Fokker F-28 owned by Mafira Air Malaysia. There was also a Boeing 737-400 from Malaysia Airlines System. As well as two Fokker F-28s and one RJ Pelita Air Service plane.”

“There was also a Manunggal Air Fokker F-28. And a Garuda Indonesia McDonnell-Douglas 11.”
“I am an airplane buff, so I recorded the details of each plane,”

Mr. Yusuf continued.
“I would like to revise this whole story as a script for a play, which will one day be performed on stage.”

12 The homes of Chinese-Indonesians in Jakarta were invaded, ransacked, and looted by unruly mobs: <https://metro.tempo.co/amp/1089250/20-tahun-reformasi-mereka-yang-menyinkingkir-dari-jakarta>

“Leaving one’s house and getting to the airport was not a simple task. Many cars were intercepted by marauding gangs. Even when fleeing Chinese families arrived safely at the airport, there were not enough planes to accommodate them. Consequently, many were forced to spend a few nights at the airport. Your family, Robert, spent two days at the airport before a plane became available.”

Pak Yusuf went back to reviewing his notes.
“About ten-thousand Indonesians fled abroad.”⁽¹³⁾

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Robert exhaled a deep breath.
Maria was shocked.
She clutched Robert’s hand very tightly.

“What about our house, Pak Yusuf?
All I remember was that our house was on fire,
and I was crying.”

Mr. Yusuf explained:
“I had been working for your father for three years at that time.
I also assisted your mother with her business. So I was living at your house. I often served as a driver for your family.”

“I was an actor during my college days, and I received a Bachelor’s degree in theatrics. My goal was to work in the theater for the rest of my life. But theater was a weak profession, and I quickly realized that I would not be able to support my family as an actor.”

“The cost of living in Jakarta was also high. I gave in to reality and moved my young family to live with my mother in Banyuwangi.”

“Your parents invited me to live in their house since they had many empty rooms. I worked and received wages from your parents. I knew your parents because we had all gone to high school together.

13 Approximately 10,000 Chinese-Indonesians fled Jakarta and sought refuge mainly abroad. <https://republika.co.id/berita/o7hb2u318/perjuangan-10-ribu-wni-keturunan-menyingkir-dari-indonesia>

I remember that they met and fell in love in high school. My fate, however, was less fortunate.”

“On May 15, 1998, eighty houses in the Camar Permai neighborhood were set on fire and razed to the ground. Another 500 houses were ransacked and looted. We were forced to evacuate from Camar Permai to the Golf Course area of Pantai Indah Kapuk. But it was difficult to find anything to eat and drink. For three days, we survived on whatever food we had.”

Mr. Yusuf remained subdued for a while as he replayed in his mind and relived the emotions he had experienced more than two decades earlier. Mr. Yusuf continued:
“Your father made a decision. His family would have to leave Jakarta. They would need to find a way to get to the airport.”

“But how could they accomplish this? The road to the airport was fraught with danger. We could easily be obstructed and robbed, especially since your family could be easily identified as ethnic Chinese. That’s when I devised a plan. Your father will never forget what I improvised. Your mother will always remember what I did that day.”

“I am a man of the theater. I have a strong imagination. I quickly went by motorcycle to organize and obtain everything needed for my plan. I only requested sufficient money to arrange and get the things I needed.”

“A few hours later, I reappeared with an ambulance and two friends from the theater. I also brought some bottles of pink Fanta, red lipstick, and black cloth.”

“This was the scene I improvised:
Your family were victims of street violence. I combined the Fanta, lipstick, and other substances to simulate blood. I asked your parents to apply this fake blood to various parts of their body. We gave you sleeping pills to keep you from crying while this plan was being carried out.”

“The back door of the ambulance was kept open. Your parents, your two older siblings, and you were all lying in the

ambulance. My friends and I swathed parts of your face and arms with bandages made from black cloth.”

“Then, as I drove, my friends stood in the back of the ambulance, shouting: ‘Make way! Emergency! Emergency!’
Meanwhile, your family pretended to be unconscious or dead in the ambulance.”

“On the road, many gangs of young men were intercepting passing vehicles. They robbed the occupants of money and whatever possessions they could easily steal.
But because we were riding an ambulance, we managed to get safely to the airport without being accosted by any marauding gangs.”

Maria was astounded by this story.
Robert was also astonished. He was unaware that he had been given sleeping pills to stay sleep throughout this ordeal.

“Your parents appreciated what I had done for them.
However, they also said that they probably wouldn’t return and live in Jakarta again.”

“I was given a large sum of money,
which I used to buy the house we’re sitting in,
as just compensation for the theatrical ambulance drama.”

Mr. Yusuf was overwhelmed by a variety of emotions as he finished telling the story. Indeed, there were aspects of this true story that were amusing, spine-tingling, bitter, sad, worrisome, and frightening.

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“One more thing...” Robert asked. “There is still one troublesome matter that has neither been discussed nor explained.”

“Why didn’t my older sister, Jia Li, ever return to Indonesia?
She has been living in America for the past 24 years. Is this also connected to May, 1998?”

Mr. Yusuf remained silent. However, he finally began to speak in a slow, subdued voice: “It would be better if I did not discuss this matter.”

"But I'm already an adult, Pak Yusuf. She's my older sister. I would like to understand what happened to her," Robert said, trying his best to persuade him.

Mr. Yusuf shed some tears. Robert and Maria glanced at each other. They couldn't quite comprehend, but they shared a foreboding that they were about to hear some gruesome news.

"Yes, it's true that you are already adults, but this has been a well-kept secret for your family."
"Are you sure you want to hear it? From the way I'm speaking, you can already tell it's not good."

Maria was apprehensive, but Robert was determined to hear what had happened to his older sister.
"Tell us anyway, Pak. Whatever the truth may be..."

Mr. Yusuf began to speak again slowly:
"When your house was ransacked and set on fire, we suddenly heard your sister screaming in a shrill voice.

Everyone panicked, but I ran in the direction of her voice. She was in the kitchen, and Oh my God, it was clear that she had been sexually molested."

"Seeing that I was equipped with metal rods, the two hoodlums quickly escaped through a back door."

"Ha!" Robert's heart began pounding quite vigorously.
"Was she raped?" Maria inquired.

"We never found out exactly what happened to her, but it was obvious she had suffered a terrible shock. She didn't speak a word for 3 days. That's enough already. I don't wish to discuss this any further."

Robert was sad, indeed quite depressed. He had just found out why his sister had never wanted to return to Indonesia.

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Unlike his sister, Robert had adopted a different attitude. He discerned some positive changes in Indonesia while he was growing up in Surabaya.

Chinese-language newspapers could now be published. Mandarin language TV programs were now broadcast. Barongsai dances and Chinese New Year processions were held at shopping malls. Some ethnic Chinese received ministerial government positions.

Robert witnessed the emergence of a new Indonesian society that was more tolerant and inclusive. Discrimination against Chinese-Indonesians began to fade.

He had just found out what happened to Jia Li. In his heart, Robert spoke the name of his older sister. He imagined hugging her and empathizing with her: "Please forgive me, Sister... Now I understand why you became angry so easily and why you took offense so quickly."

Jia Li was already 41 years old. She had never been married, nor did she have a boyfriend.

Maria had never expected these developments. She had initially believed that the purpose of their trip to Jakarta was specifically to invite members of Robert's extended family to attend their wedding.

However, it became clear that the highlight of their trip was their eye-opening encounter with Mr. Yusuf.

She had just heard of a theatrical production that occurred in the real world, not just on stage. This was the story of the "fake blood" that had actually saved her fiancé's family, allowing them to arrive unscathed and unhurt at the airport.

Maria had also found out the secrets that Robert's parents had held in strict confidence. Until now, she could only presume what these secrets might be. Even Robert himself was unaware

that his parents and sister held deep secrets in a dark vault that had remained locked for so long.

They had wanted neither to discuss nor divulge these secrets since they were so painful. They wanted to forget that these events had ever occurred, although the horrific nature of these events made them unforgettable.

The trace of these scars always lurked just below the surface in the family's daily behavior, while the actual details remained deliberately disguised.

But now these horrid details had been revealed in a drama narrated in a sensitive, respectable manner by a family friend. In Jakarta, where these traumatic events had originally and tragically unfolded.

The crescent moon waxed brighter in the sky.
Its light illuminated the darkness of the night.

September, 2022

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#PuisiEsaiMini This Mini Essay Poem is an excerpt from the new book, **Screams Following Liberation**, which will be published in the near future (Denny JA, 2022).

Screams Following Liberation is an anthology of stories that express the nature of primordial conflicts that raged during the Post-Suharto Reformation Era: The Sectarian Conflict in Maluku (1999-2002), Interethnic Violence in Sampit, Central Kalimantan (2001), Interethnic Conflict in Jakarta (May, 1998), Anti-Ahmadiyya sectarian violence in West Lombok (2002-2017), and the conflict between Balinese transmigrants and indigenous communities in Lampung, South Sumatra (2012).



**2001 SAMPIT RIOTS,
DAYAK TRIBESMEN
VERSUS MADURESE**



Evacuate First, My Dear

An irritating pain,
Slightly numb though rather deep,
seeped into Jazil's heart.

A still atmosphere took flight,
Impelled by the wind,
permeating the air in Sampit,
one afternoon in 2015.

Jazil felt lonesome
and dispirited.

Many seasons had passed by
since he had abandoned this town.

Now, for the first time in fourteen years,
Jazil had returned.
Back to Sampit.
He had returned home.
He emboldened himself.

Jazil first visited the Peace Monument,
a memorial that commemorated the cessation of hostilities
Between the Dayak and Madurese ethnic groups.

Jazil sat down on the steps.
He took a piece of paper from his front pocket.
It was an old worn letter from 2001,
fourteen years earlier.

He reread it once again:
"Evacuate yourself first, my dear.
Leave Sampit and go far away.
It's too crazy here.
When the conflict finally subsides,
Please return to Sampit.
I'll be waiting for you.
And we'll get married."
(Sanja, March 4, 2001)

Jazil was silent.
The visage of Sanja, his fiancée,
had already become integrated within his bone marrow.

Abruptly, Jazil wept profusely.
He wasn't sure why.
He tried to restrain himself,
but his body kept shaking.

The atmosphere from fourteen years ago returned.
The bloody interethnic conflict between the indigenous Dayak
and transmigrant Madurese populations.
Terrifying.
Horrific.

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It was 2001.
Jazil was only 22 years old back then.
And Sanja, oh Sanja, was a 20-year-old Dayak girl,
the love of his heart.

They had planned to get married at the next full moon.
The house, provided by Jazil's father,

was a bit squat,
but many trees kept it shady.

The loving couple took care of their new home.
“This will be the bedroom for our children,” Sanja said.
Sanja’s face was delighted with the living room.
Jazil himself had painted it.

Love permeated their new home.
Their intimacy pervaded every nook and cranny,
on ceilings, in cabinets, on tables.
Affection dangled from the windows and doors.

“Oh, you’re always at the depth of my affection,
a butterfly that always perches on my heart.”
That’s how Jazil felt.

At that time, Sanja’s parents accepted Jazil
as a member of their family.

“I don’t know if any Madurese blood remains in my body,”
Jazil told Sanja’s father, a Dayak leader.

Jazil continued, “I only heard that
my great-grandfather came from Madura.
He transmigrated to Central Kalimantan in 1930.”

“But my grandfather, my father,
and I were all born here, in Sampit.”

Then the interethnic conflict erupted.
It peaked on February 20, 2001.

Hundreds of Madurese were not only killed by Dayak tribes,
but they were also beheaded.

That afternoon, Jazil screamed loudly.
His father had just died at the hands of Dayak tribesmen.
Jazil howled and sobbed.
His screams touched the sky:

"Nooooo!
What did you do wrong, Dad? Nothing!
You were not involved in this conflict!"

Uncle asked Jazil to leave Sampit.
"But uncle, I'm going to marry a Dayak girl. I'm safe here."

Uncle retorted sharply: "Hey, do you want to die?
Open your eyes. Look at Hashim. His wife is also Dayak.
Despite this, Hashim's head was decapitated!"

Jazil was unaffected.
"My love is stronger than a thousand mountains,
It will subdue my fear," Jazil convinced himself.

That was the moment.
Sanja's elder brother came to Jazil,
and gave him a piece of paper.

It was a letter from Sanja,
asking him to evacuate.

"Where can I meet Sanja?," Jazil asked.

The elder brother explained.
"This is not the right time. It's too dangerous,
But not only for you, Jazil."

"It's also dangerous for Sanja.
It's a danger for our whole family.
We could be accused of treason."

Sanja's brother also explained that his father's attitude had changed.
Jazil was no longer welcome.
Jazil was Madurese.
And Sanja's father was a prominent Dayak figure.

Danger lay everywhere.
Every leaf, every twig and branch
became eyes,
looking for anyone Madurese.
As well as any Dayak people who gave shelter to Madurese.

That was Jazil's last day in Sampit.
He fled to East Java
by boarding a ship, escorted by the navy.

In the middle of the sea that night,
on the deck of the ship
carrying him far away from Kalimantan, Jazil shouted:

“Sanja, Sanja, wait for me.
I will soon return.
Wait for meeee!”

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In 2002,
Jazil had already been living in Surabaya for a year.
A year during which he lacked any news from Sanja.

“Sanja, my longing for you has peaked.
How are you doing?
I’m here,
I’m doing alright.
I want to marry you.
As you requested in your letter.”

“Many times have I sent letters
to convey my message to you.
Yet why hasn’t a single letter been replied to?”

Jazil originally wanted to return to Sampit immediately.
In that same year, 2002, he read some good news.

The Coordinating Minister for Politics and Security
Affairs, Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono, announced that Dayak
figures had guaranteed that Madurese people, like Jazil,
could safely return to Sampit. ⁽¹⁴⁾

14 In 2002, the Coordinating Minister for Politics and Security Affairs, Susilo Bambang Yudoyono, announced that prominent Dayak figures would ensure the safety of Madurese residents in Sampit. <https://m.liputan6.com/news/read/8824/tokoh-adat-dayak-menjamin-perdamaian-kalteng>

Jazil also heard some other promising news.
Many Dayak figures attended a meeting with
Vice-President Hamzah Haz.

Peace with the Madurese tribe would soon begin.
It would begin with a supernatural ritual. ⁽¹⁵⁾

Two hundred Dayak shamans would be deployed.
The skies of Sampit would be immediately cleared.
Vengeful spirits were to be banished and implored not to come back.

“Sanja, please welcome my return.
I’m coming home.
We’ll get married soon.”

But Jazil suddenly heard news
that sporadic violence against Madurese occasionally flared up
Dayak tribesmen were still attacking Madurese in Sampit. ⁽¹⁶⁾
“Oh, where was the guarantee that hostilities had ceased?”

Jazil shut himself in.
The death of his father,
who was killed
and beheaded,
made him quiver in fear.

By 2015,
Jazil had been biding his time for fourteen years.
During that time,
he avoided any new relationships.
He remained single
and never fell in love again.

Several women stopped by and tried
to knock on the door of his heart,
but Jazil kept that door sealed shut.

15 In 2002, the Coordinating Minister for Politics and Security Affairs, Susilo Bambang Yudoyono, announced that prominent Dayak figures would ensure the safety of Madurese residents in Sampit. <https://m.liputan6.com/news/read/8824/tokoh-adat-dayak-menjamin-perdamaian-kalteng>

16 Despite guarantees of a cessation of hostilities, there were still sporadic cases of Dayak tribal attacks on Madurese residents. <https://nasional.tempo.co/read/25768/penyerangan-dilakukan-secara-terencana>

"The door to my heart is just for Sanja.
My lover has already promised.
She will wait for me. Oh, my true love..."

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The year was 2015.
A monument now stood
in the middle of the town of Sampit,
right in the middle of the main traffic circle.
The peace monument stood
upright, sturdy, towering.
As a symbol of peace between the Dayak and Madurese people.

The monument was in the form of a dish of the Dayak tribe.
It was huge.
And surrounded by gardens. ⁽¹⁷⁾

Also standing near the monument was
the Grand Mosque of Wahyu Al Hadi.

Built even before the interethnic conflict began
was a tall wooden monument.
The wood was carved with examples of
Dayak tribal art.

This traffic circle had a dark, tragic history.
But it now represented a major tourist attraction of the town.

A new age had been inaugurated.
The Dayak and Madurese people of Sampit learned to live in peace.
Sampit was safe now for Jazil and any other Madurese person.

Jazil also had the opportunity
To visit this monument,
A symbol of enduring tranquility.

17 The Dayak-Madurese Peace Monument was inaugurated in 2015. <https://correcto.id/beranda/read/26465/melawan-lupa-ini-sejarah-tugu-perdamaian-suku-dayak-dan-madura-yang-ada-di-sampit>

For a week already,
Jazil had been in Sampit,
searching for Sanja, morning to night.
Yet there was no sign of her.

Sanja's family has already moved away
a long time ago.
Jazil's own house had been razed to the ground.
"Oh, Sampit, Sampit City.
You're no longer recognizable to me."

Finally, Jazil found Sanja's house.
His heart beat strongly.
After waiting fourteen years,
they were about to meet again.

Jazil was now 36 years old.
And Sanja was 34 years old.

In the yard,
Jazil saw a little boy,
about 3 years old.
"Oh, his face looks like Sanja's."

From the front door, a woman walked out.
Jazil's heart erupted in joyful expectation.
"Sanja, oh Sanja, I've come looking for you.
Just like you asked."

Sanja was hysterical, crying.
"Jazil, Jazil,
why didn't you contact me?
For years I waited."

"People told stories that you were gone.
That it wasn't safe to return.
Just like other Madurese.
My father assured me
he had seen your corpse."

Sanja told him
she had finally gotten married

after so many years of suffering.
The boy was Sanja's son.
She named him: Jazil.

Millions of barbed needles suddenly went flying,
and became embedded in Jazil's heart.
"Oh my God,
is there any other feeling of sadness
that is as painful as this?"

In the port,
Jazil again left Sampit.
He abandoned Sampit for a second time.

In 2001,
He was forced to seek refuge far away,
fear haunted him,
Madurese were being massacred by Dayak.

Now in 2015,
He did not leave as a displaced person,
but he left on his own.
He just had to go.

His lover, whom he guarded in his heart,
was gone.
Just like promises, lovers don't wait forever.

But Jazil didn't blame Sanja.
Her parents had deceived her,
declaring that Jazil had already died.

Oh, that night in the middle of the sea,
Was especially dark.
Jazil shouted from the deck of the ship:
"Sanjaaaaa..."
"Sanjaaaaa..."
"Sanjaaaaaaaaaa..."

Jazil discovered that
the loss of the soulmate
for whom he had longed for fourteen years,
turned out to be even more agonizing,
compared to when he was originally displaced.
Yes, this new pain in his heart turned out to be far more excruciating.

July, 2022

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#PuisiEsaiMini

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My Father Dug A Mass Grave

That sense of emptiness came again.
He felt it everywhere,
dangling on the branches of the trees,
wafting in the breeze of Sampit.

He had experienced this hollow, vacuous feeling
for many years already.

The feeling of being unworthy of being king.
Assuming power in his heart.
The sense of regret continued to settle
in his bone marrow,
gnawing at and agitating him
all day long, all month long.
For many years already.

Three o'clock in the early morning.
Nanjan was still sitting there,
on the veranda of the house,
looking out on the vast sky.

“Oh, God,
Why didn't I die?
I'm afraid to commit suicide.
Quick, come take my life.

“What more can I do?
I just want to die.”

Nanjan sent this prayer to the sky,
hoping an angel might hear it
and bring his wish to die before the Ruler of all life,
the Master of the universe.

Nanjan was 55 years old.
He looked haggard and unkempt.
He rarely spoke.
His body was anemic.

He had been sitting in a wheelchair
for the past five years.
He had withdrawn from family
and broken contact with friends
for many years already.

The Dayak and Madurese interethnic conflicts in Sampit, 2001
were the impetus and historical context for this situation.

Something very horrific,
and terribly gripping,
from that conflict continued to oppress him,
immobilizing him, making him unwilling to move on.

“Dad, it's 3:00 in the morning.
I'll take you back inside to your room again.
You need to sleep, Dad.”

Without waiting for her father's consent,
Jenta pushed the wheelchair and entered his bedroom.
She transferred Nanjan to his bed.
and turned off the lights
so her father could sleep.

Jenta had done the same thing for her father,
repeatedly,
almost every night
for years already.

She was his only daughter.
And she was fond of her father.

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Sampit, 2001.
Nanjan was once brave and masculine.
But his heart was broken.
His younger brother was killed by Madurese.

It was the year when Sampit went crazy.
Hostility between Dayak and Madurese permeated the air.

Dayak tribesmen gathered.
They came to Sampit from the Kalimantan hinterland.

They came from the north,
from the south,
from the east and west.
They traversed rivers,
crossed swampland,
and climbed hills.

The elderly Dayak leader exclaimed:

“The Bird Commander has returned.
Our ancestors from centuries past have assembled.
Breathe in the air.
Taste the air.
There are signs of their presence.”

“The time has come to take revenge.
Our traditions have been disrespected and ridiculed.
We will wage war imminently.
We will be victorious in our struggle.”

“We will cleanse Sampit
from the rubbish
of the Madurese tribe.”

Hundreds of Dayak tribesmen shouted hysterically,
as they brandished their mandau in the sky:
“We will banish them. We will kill them.
We will behead them!
We will annihilate them!
We’ll finish them off!”

The Dayak Bird Commander was Commander-in-Chief.
He was a Dayak spiritual leader that had existed for hundreds of years.
His countenance was not seen.
The more invisible he was, the more legendary he became.

He was their patron of protection.
He unified the Dayak tribes.

Dayak people believed in the Bird Commander.
He was a supernatural figure
that resided in the jungle hinterland of Borneo.

For hundreds of years,
The Bird Commander had watched over Dayak tribes,
Observing and protecting them,
Watching over them from afar.

The Bird Commander occasionally descended to earth.
He was either fully present,
or he would appear by spiritual possession of Dayak souls.

The wellspring of the true Dayak character
was the Bird Commander.
He was generally perceived as a peace-loving,
helpful, shy, and simple entity.

Yet the Bird Commander could turn resolute and valiant,
whenever a Dayak tribe was threatened, persecuted, or ridiculed.

In the eyes of adversaries, the Bird Commander could be very cruel.
As well as sadistic and merciless!

Special rituals had already been performed.
The Bird Commander had already been summoned.

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Nanjan was agitated.
He had honed his mandau many times.
It was especially sharp.

He imbibed the air.
Nanjan felt the Bird Commander talking to him.
It animated and invigorated him.

On February 20, 2001,
hundreds of Dayak tribesmen invaded the Sampit area.

Nanjan shouted out loud:
"Annihilate them!"
"Exterminate them!"
Nanjan could no longer remember
how many heads he cut off.

Nanjan felt he had entered a different realm.
Magical power enveloped him.
He felt transformed into the ancestor who provided guidance to Dayaks.
The Bird Commander had become the commanding officer.

However, a few days later, the situation changed dramatically.
Stillness.
Silence.
Quiet.
Nanjan returned to his normal self.

He saw himself driving a truck.
Behind, in the flatbed of the truck,
dozens of corpses were piled high.
Nanjan was stunned.
Some of the corpses were headless. ⁽¹⁸⁾

18 There were various reports of truck drivers carrying piles of corpses and burying them in mass graves following the interethnic violence between Dayak and Madurese. <https://independensi.com/2021/01/15/kisah-tukang-gali-kubur-kerusuhan-dayak-madura-1997/>

He saw himself digging a mass grave.
And burying scores of corpses together in one large pit.

He recalled another event.
Nanjan had killed his own cousin, a fellow Dayak.
The cousin had tried to interfere with Nanjan's killing rampage.
He shouted:
"Don't behead them, Nanjan.
Remember our great-grandfather: Damang Batu."

At that moment, Nanjan didn't care.
He lunged out at anything that got in his way.

"Stop, Nanjan, Don't do it.
Remember Damang Batu,"
his cousin appealed as he tried to restrain him.

But Nanjan continued to advance.
His eyes were red.
A bellicose spirit moved him.

Weeks passed.
The months passed by.
The mood was markedly different.

Nanjan was stunned.
The bereaved wife and child of the cousin he killed suffered.
Horribly.

He saw tens of thousands of displaced Madurese refugees.
Suffering.
Terribly.

He remembered what his cousin said:
"Damang Batu.
Our ancestor is Damang Batu."

Nanjan's sense of transgression seeped slowly into his heart .
As time went by,
his sense of wrongdoing
and the realization of the atrocities he had committed burgeoned,
engulfing and tormenting his conscience.

It felt like someone was calling him.
“Nanjan, why did you commit Ngayau?
Why did you slice off people’s heads?”

Repeatedly, Nanjan was haunted
by the images of the suffering families of
the people he had killed.

The mental image of suffering was seen by him,
emblazoned throughout the sky.

He heard his dead cousin’s voice again,
entreating Nanjan to visit Damang Batu.

“Nanjan, come to Tumbang Anoi.
Visit Tumbang Anoi.
Go on a pilgrimage to Tumbang Anoi.”

Nanjan was silent.
“Is that your voice, dear ancestor?
Damang Batu?” Nanjan asked the sky.

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Nanjan visited Tumbang Anoi.
Just by himself.
He drove the truck,
the same truck he had used to transport dead bodies a few days earlier.

It took him 5 hours to make the journey from Sampit.
A pilgrimage to his ancestor: Damang Batu.

Tumbang Anoi. Oh. Tumbang Anoi.
In that place in 1894, 132 Dayak tribes, 1000 Dayaks from all over
Borneo, Malaysia, and Brunei gathered for 3 months. ⁽¹⁹⁾

Previously, there had been a horrific inter-tribal headhunting war.
Various Dayak tribes raided and fought each other.

19 There were various reports of truck drivers carrying piles of corpses and burying them in mass graves following the interethnic violence between Dayak and Madurese. <https://independensi.com/2021/01/15/kisah-tukang-gali-kubur-kerusuhan-dayak-madura-1997/>

They decapitated each other's heads.
An aggrieved tribe would retaliate
by beheading members of the other tribe.

A peaceful resolution was sought for chronic inter-tribal clashes.
Laws based on new customs had to be agreed to.
Thus, representatives of Dayak tribes from every corner of Borneo
were in attendance.

There was substantial preparation.
This was the largest meeting of Dayak tribes that was ever held.
It required three years to organize and prepare.

Damang Batu, the widely respected
Ot Danum chief of Tumbang Anoi,
was already 73 years old.
He said:
"For the unity of the Dayak nation.
For the glory of all Dayak tribes.
Let me do the work.
Let me host this important meeting."

A thunderous voice reverberated in the sky.
The spirits and souls of their ancestors,
who had lived hundreds of years ago, witnessed the grand plan,
an immense convention of Dayak tribes.

Damang Batu led the local people of Tumbang Anoi,
They prepared fields,
on some hills,
where 60 buffaloes
and 100 cows could graze.
They bred hundreds of pigs and chickens.
And built dozens of houses to shelter their guests.

Damang Batu said:
"Let's go, my colleagues
Let's get to work, my brothers."

"1000 Dayak guests,
for three months.

We will need to provide enough food
so our guests are happy.”

The sky thundered again.
Ancestral spirits from hundreds of years ago
arrived and gave their consent.

Many tribal representatives were present.
All were prominent in their respective tribe.
Tribal chiefs.
Or titular heads.
Each delegate had to be adept in the Dayak customs of his territory.

A large convention was held.
It began on January 1, 1894.
And ended on March 30, 1894.
A duration of exactly three months.

The Dayak leaders drafted a covenant.
A deal was made.
The ancestors, ghosts, and spirits of the Dayak tribes from centuries
past, present in the trees, present in stones and air,
witnessed this agreement
And gave their consent.

This was one of the statutes they cemented:
“All of you who are present
From whatever Dayak tribe you represent.
Starting today,
According to the Treaty of Tumbang Anoi,

WE MUST STOP HEADHUNTING!

All those present shouted out in unison:
“We must stop headhunting!”

WE MUST STOP BEHEADING EACH OTHER!

All assembled shouted together in a resounding voice:
“We must stop beheading each other!”

WE MUST STOP KILLING EACH OTHER.

All the tribal delegates sang out repeatedly in unison:
"We must stop killing each other!"

Damang Batu,
The host of the event,
became even more exalted and revered.
After his death, he became a sacred legendary figure.
His legacy was handed down through his descendants.

Nanjan was the son of Damang Batu's great-grandson.

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At Damang Batu's grave,
Nanjan knelt in great respect.
Once again, magical powers possessed him.
His ears seemed to have become very large.
Voices resonated from all directions, screeching in his ears:

"Nanjan, why did you commit Ngayau?
Why did you behead so many people?
Why did you kill your own cousin?
Why did you forsake the tribal covenant we made?
Why did you betray me?"

Nanjan was silent.
He searched for the source of the sound.
He asked:
"Damang Batu,
Is that Thee?"

A sense of wrongdoing descended from the sky.
A sense of great remorse fell from the trees.
These feelings multiplied within him.
A multitude of guilty feelings seeped quickly into his mind,
and then infiltrated and became lodged in Nanjan's heart.

Nanjan sobbed heavily.
It was so overwhelming.
His whole body was shaking.

That's how Nanjan's depression materialized.
15 years later,
The psychiatrist said Nanjan was suffering from mental illness:
A Guilt Complex. ⁽²⁰⁾

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Jenta, Nanjan's daughter, awakened him.
"Dad, eat something.
And don't forget to take your medicine."

Jenta looked at the old man.
He looked enervated. He lacked any passion for life.
She hugged her father
and whispered in his ear.

"Dad, forgive yourself.
Forget the past."

From a distance, Jenta looked at her prematurely aging father.
Empty. Void. Lacking any joie de vivre.

"Dad, dad,
What more can I do?"

Jenta's heart couldn't bear his deathly demeanor.
She shed more tears.

Nanjan sat as usual in his wheelchair.
He appeared to be looking ahead.
But what he really sensed

20 Deep guilt causes long-term mental anguish. <https://voi.id/en/amp/194015/always-haunted-by-guilt-and-fear-of-making-mistakes-beware-of-guilt-complex>

was unremitting guilt dangling from the ceiling.
and unrelenting regret that lingered in the light bulbs,
the windowpanes, and the floor tiles.

July, 2022

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My Older Brother is A Head hunter

The private WhatsApp message was concise:
“Your brother, Ampong, died earlier this morning. He left behind his most treasured possession, his Mandau, a Dayak ceremonial sword. The message read: This Mandau is for you.”

“Ampong also expressed his regret if he hurt you. As his wife, I was concerned about the deterioration in your relationship. You used to be close brothers.”

“But the two of you have now been adversaries for the past two decades, not even asking each other how the other was doing. Now your brother is dead. Your disagreements are finally over.”

“It was unfortunate that the conflict between native Dayak tribesmen and the Madurese migrant population caused a falling out between you.”

Dahen read his sister-in-law’s message over and over again. He remained silent for a while.

The letter brought back long-buried memories of past events.

Many long-forgotten aspects of the terrible conflict between the Dayak tribe against the Madurese tribe, in Sampit, in 2001, twenty

years earlier were aroused simultaneously.
They came rushing back from his memory.

The cries of pain of the 500 people killed in the conflict echoed and reverberated between the ceiling and the walls of the room.

More than a thousand terrified, sobbing refugees who were rendered homeless by this conflict were suddenly manifested in his room.

And this was the image that Dahren disliked the most because it had provoked the genesis of the longstanding hostility between Dahren and his brother, Ambong.

More than 100 decapitated heads of Madurese migrant people who had been viciously beheaded by Dayak tribesmen.⁽²¹⁾ This was an old Dayak tradition, called Ngayau.

It did not suffice to kill one's enemy. The source of the enemy's power was situated in the human head.

The head of the enemy had to be decapitated, brought home, and made part of tribal revelry and traditional rituals.

Dahren rubbed his left and right cheeks.
He tried to make this unwanted conjured image leave his mind's eye.

But try as he might, the image of 100 Madurese heads persisted, and they appeared to dangle at the windows and doorway and in his closet.

"Ampun! God have mercy! Stop. Stop!!"

Dahren pounded the table. He didn't want the image to linger and haunt him any longer.

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21 Headhunting made the ethnic Dayak tribesmen more fearsome in their confrontations with Madurese during the 2001 interethnic Sampit conflict. <https://regional.kompas.com/read/2022/01/24/170506878/ngayau-tradisi-perburuan-kepala-yang-membuat-suku-dayak-ditakuti-musuh?page=all>. <https://m.liputan6.com/news/read/9010/dan-kepala-bocah-pun-dipenggal>

Sampit, Central Kalimantan, 2001.
At that time, Dahan was 30 years old.
And Ambong was 3 years older.

The two brothers, along with thousands of other indigenous Dayak people harbored anger, resentment, as well as jealousy towards hardworking Madurese migrants.

Madurese originally migrated to Central Kalimantan in 1930.
And there they gave birth to many descendants.
Now the number of Madurese had increased.
Substantially.
At the beginning of the new millennium, they amounted to more than 21 percent of the population in the Sampit area.

But many Madurese were adept and skillful.
They became more prosperous.
More prominent in the plantations.
More powerful in the mining sector.
More prodigious in retail trading.
And more daring and swaggering in nightclubs.

The Dayak and the Madurese could neither integrate nor assimilate.
If one was water, the other was oil.
There had already been many reports of friction and conflict.

There was news of Dayak women being raped by Madurese men.
And Madurese houses burned in retaliation by Dayaks.

Tracts of arable land of the Dayaks were confiscated by the Madurese.
There was also news that a Madurese family had been attacked by Dayaks.

There were glowing embers in the corn husks.
The fire was ready to flare up and burn.
The volcano was ready to erupt.

The escalation of the conflict was observed by Dahan, like gusts of wind passing by.
He wasn't sure which reports were true and which were false.
Dahan hadn't witnessed and couldn't substantiate these alleged events himself. These incidents just passed by word of mouth.

But Dahren certainly recalled one seminal event. Dahren, along with his older brother, Ambong, and dozens of other Dayaks, had assembled to hear an important speech. Hanyi, a respected Dayak tribal elder, addressed them.

That was the day when the sky in Sampit darkened. Spirits from the netherworld hovered. Peculiar primeval birds perched on trees and electric utility poles.

Hot vapor, the mother of all wrath, seeped into the heart.

“Close relatives, brethren, members of our extended family. Harken! Dayaks must unite. Dayaks must fight back. This is our ancestral land.”

“The Madurese were just itinerant migrants. They took passage here from East Java.

But now these outsiders feel more self-assured and powerful. They dare to torment and even slaughter us, too. They dare to challenge us on our own turf.”

Hanyi spoke clearly and vehemently. He poured a lot of fuel on the tinder wood that was ready to burst into flames.

“Listen carefully as I read out the events.”

Hanyi took out a notebook. He had jotted down many events in the book. ⁽²²⁾

“In 1972 in Palangkaraya, a Dayak girl was raped by Madurese youth.

In 1982, a Dayak elder was assassinated without any court settlement.”

In 1983 in Kasongan, thirty Madurese ganged up on a Dayak man.

In 1996 in Palangkaraya, a Dayak girl was raped and killed in a movie theater.”

22 The history of events that escalated and led to the deadly Dayak-Madurese interethnic conflict in February, 2001 are recorded here: <https://phinemo.com/sejarah-perang-dayak-vs-madura-persetruan-antar-etnis-terbesar/>

Hanyi continued to incite them.

"Friends, acquaintances, and relatives...

These incidents really happened. Are we just going to remain quiet?"

Are we just going to ignore these events?"

The group became inflamed.

The assembled Dayak men shouted: "No! We will fight back!

We will take revenge!"

"Here are some more recent events," Hanyi said.

"In 1997 in South Barito, forty Madurese ganged up on two Dayaks.

In 1998 in Palangkaraya, four Madurese ganged up on a Dayak man.

Last year in 2000 in Kasongan, a Dayak was killed by Madurese."

Like the other Dayak men gathered there, Dahren became infuriated.

But he also asked in his heart:

"Why does Hanyi tell only one side of the story?

Only Dayak were attacked by Madurese?

Weren't there also many cases in this interethnic conflict when Dayak attacked Madurese?"

But Dahren didn't dare debate this matter.

The mob had already become infuriated.

Shortly thereafter

came a week that Dahren would never forget.

Four days in particular that he now recalled with great sorrow and regret.

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These were the days of February 18-21, 2001.

During these four smoldering days,

the ancestral Dayak spirits gathered. The magical powers of earth, water, air, and fire materialized from a magical place long ago and deep

within the interior, far up the Mentaya river, where they coalesced and then moved south to converge in Sampit.

Dayak tribesmen from upriver retaliated.
Anger gushed from molten mountain magma deep in their heart.

The massacre of Madurese in Sampit.
Horrific.
Excruciating.
Heads were decapitated.
Heads were incinerated.
Heads were perforated.

Scores of Madurese heads
were severed from their body,
These trophies were paraded and then proudly displayed high in the sky,
while the victims' dead bodies were dragged through the streets.
These antics were turned into a ceremony
that was celebrated throughout the town of Sampit.

No one dared to stand in their way.
Not the police.
Not the soldiers.

For three days,
Hell descended on Sampit, Kotawaringin district, Central Kalimantan.

About 500 Madurese were savagely killed.
As many as 100,000 Madurese were displaced from their homes.

From Sampit, this hot magma erupted and spread far and wide.
Hell spread to Kuala Kayan, to Palangkaraya, Kuala
Kapus, and Pangkalanbun.

Hanyi and fellow Dayak leaders exclaimed:
"This is the day, the day of the awakening of the Dayak Tribe.
We are cleansing our ancestral lands from the Madurese."

The crowd cheered: "Long live Dayak! The Dayak have risen again."

Mandau, machete, and spears were brandished high in the sky.
The beheading of Madurese victims enabled Dayak men to
sublimate intense resentment and anger, a part of ancient sacred rites.

The Madurese had not expected
such a massive volcano to erupt.

The ocean waves billowed and roared in horror.
Scavenger birds flew in the skies over Sampit, seeking dead flesh.

As many as 90 percent of Sampit's Madurese fled the town
to preserve the head on their neck.

The death toll was rising.
Oh, hundreds of souls had already drifted off to the next world.

The sky, land, wind, and water in the city of Sampit bore witness.
One of the most momentous interethnic conflicts in Indonesian
history was underway.

Thousands of ancient spirits, from centuries past, came out of hiding.

It was clearly evident that in the 21st century,
the tribal revelry and ritual of beheading human beings was still intact.
In Indonesia.
In Central Kalimantan.
In the town of Sampit.

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It was within the context of this interethnic violence
that Dahren and Ambong faced off against each other.
These two Dayak brothers nearly killed each other.

They slashed at each other with their Mandau.
Dahren was badly injured in the leg.
Ambong was injured in his arms.
Only their father had the power to deescalate this terrible fight.

To this day, Dahren walked with a limp. Traces of the wounds made by
Ambong's Mandau were still visible on his leg.

"You've gone too far, beyond the bounds of decency.
An evil spirit must have entered your soul."

This was a very daring accusation that Dahren shouted at his older brother, Ambong, in February, 2001.

Dahren was angry that Ambong gave instructions, stating that the old Dayak tradition of headhunting, called Ngayau, should be revived.

Ambong asserted that the Madurese could only be frightened and defeated if the Dayak tribe reclaimed its tribal identity and resumed performing the Ngayau ritual.

“You’re the one who’s outrageous, Dahren! You’re the traitor,” Ambong replied angrily.
“Are you ashamed of your Dayak identity?
The Ngayau is Dayak. Headhunting is a Dayak ritual.
There is nothing you can do. It’s tradition!”

Dahren retorted: “The Dayak have changed. You’re evoking the Dayak of the past. Have you forgotten? Or do you just pretend not to know the history of our tribe?”

Unwilling to relent in pursuing his argument, Dahren shouted. “Our ancestors once assembled and decided to discontinue Ngayau. Beheading has already been abandoned. It is no longer an essential rite for Dayak people.”⁽²³⁾

“You’re a primitive Dayak! I’m a modern Dayak.”

These bold statements from his younger brother were too much for Ambong to bear. Finally, it was the Mandau that spoke. The distinctive machete of the Dayak tribe was swung by Ambong. Dahren parried, and turned to swing his own Mandau at his brother’s body.

Their mother was in tears. Only their father could break up this tragic confrontation.

One of Dahren’s legs was bleeding badly.
Ambong’s arms were also bleeding rather severely.

23 The history of events that escalated and led to the deadly Dayak-Madurese interethnic conflict in February, 2001 are recorded here: <https://phinemo.com/sejarah-perang-dayak-vs-madura-persetruan-antar-etnis-terbesar/>

Shortly after the Madura and Dayak conflict finally subsided in 2003, Dahren considered moving to Jakarta. Sampit had preserved its tragic wounds. It was too much to bear. It was too harrowing.

"I have to get out of here," Dahren resolved. So he relocated to Jakarta. He found work in Indonesia's capital. He decided to start a family there and lead a normal life.

Since the day of their altercation, Dahren and Ambong had never reconciled their differences.

It was now 2022. Twenty years had passed by when Dahren received the sudden news of Ambong's death.

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That afternoon, Dahren returned to Sampit. He took possession of his dead brother's prized Mandau.

This Mandau was very special to his brother. Worshiped like an heirloom. This mandau had also wounded Dahren's leg. He took the mandau and went to visit Ambong's grave.

It was quiet that afternoon. There was only Dahren and the grave site. The ground of Ambong's grave is still red. It had only been a week since his body had been buried.

Dahren sat down and meditated on his relationship with his deceased brother. He placed the mandau on top of the grave.

"Ambong, my brother. Forgive me if I hurt you. I've forgiven you for your errors of judgment.

We had disagreements and led very different lives. But you're still my brother. My blood brother. My one and only brother." Dahren kissed her brother's tombstone.

He suddenly recalled a very different atmosphere in their childhood, an incident that had occurred in the rice fields.

Dahen was 7 years old.
Ambong was 10 years old.
Dahen's foot was bleeding after stepping on broken glass.

Dahen cried. Ambong calmed him down.
"Don't worry, your big brother is here. I will take care of you."

Ambong carried Dahen all the way home through the rice fields.

Dahen felt well-protected by his older brother. He felt that Ambong truly loved him. That his brother would take care of him and protect him.

In their childhood, Sampit was very calm. It was a peaceful place.
One often heard the sound of birds chirping. The splash of river water.
A cool breeze would blow gently.

Dahen kissed his brother's tombstone again. He shed some tears.

Dahen also visited the cemetery of the Madurese community.
He lay some flowers there, too.
Dahen begged forgiveness from deep in his heart.

He expressed sorrow for the tragedy,
a tragedy that he too had experienced
twenty years ago.

July, 2022

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#PuisiEsaiMini This Mini Essay Poem is an excerpt from the new book, **Screams Following Liberation**, which will be published imminently (Denny JA, 2022).

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If You Miss Me, Look At The Brightest Star

Deep longing,
abrasive, silent, furtive,
delivered by the wind,
blew the leaves of the guava trees and
shook the wires of the electric utility poles,
one night in Sampang, Madura in 2003.

This was the evacuation area.
Thousands of Madurese heads of families were expelled from Sampit,
Kalimantan due to a violent interethnic conflict with Dayak tribesmen.

In the evacuation area, Milah looked at her decrepit watch.

It was Friday night.
It would soon be 8:30 p.m.
For the past two years, Milah performed this ritual.
At 8:30 p.m. every Friday night, she looked up at the brightest star.

Her heart beseeched in prayer, screaming in silence:
“God, please let me be reunited with my husband.
I implore Thee. Immensely.”

“How many more Friday nights do I have to wait?
It’s already the hundred and twentieth Friday night.”

Ekot’s words always resounded in her head.
Ekot was the man she had just married in January, 2001.

Milah was Madurese,
while Ekot was a Dayak man.
Milah was now stranded in Sampang.
Ekot continued living somewhere in Sampit.

Ekot said,
“Milah, one day if we are separated,
and we both miss each other, always remember this.”

“Friday night at 8:30 p.m.,
wherever you are, stop what you’re doing.”

“Look up at the sky.
Look for the brightest star.
Keep gazing at the star.
Send your feelings of longing to me.”

“At the same time,
wherever I am, I will also stare up at the brightest star.
And I’ll send you my deep feelings of longing, too.”

“We’ll be looking at the same star at the same time,
although from a considerable distance.
But It will feel as though we were staring at each other.
Gazing silently, without speaking.
That’s the deepest way to look at each other.”

Milah refused to be indulged.
“I don’t want to be separated from you!
We have just become husband and wife.
Why would we become separated?”

Ekot embraced and tried to reassure her.
“I don’t want to. Who would want to?”

Unfortunately, a calamitous conflict was brewing.
On February 18-21, 2001, a thousand people were killed.

Sampit went crazy.
The spirits of Dayak ancestors materialized and ruled the sky.
The Bird Commander from centuries past had returned.

Armed with sharp mandau, Dayak tribesmen decapitated
the heads of hundreds of Madurese men.
More than 100 thousand Madurese were left homeless and
forced to seek refuge far away.

Life-changing decisions were made very quickly.
“Listen, Milah,” Ekot’s Father said: “You and your family must leave,
you need to evacuate Sampit right away.”⁽²⁴⁾

“You can’t go with Ekot, even though he’s your husband.
You’re Madurese. You will forfeit your life if you stay,
you could even lose your head.”

Ekot interrupted. “Dad, I am Milah’s legal husband.
What if I go with Milah and her displaced family?”

It was now Milah’s father’s turn to speak.
“Reflect on this, Ekot. I already consider you my own son.”

“But you’re a Dayak. The Madurese people have been stunned and
horribly injured. They will take revenge. Even if you are my son-in-law,
you too could be killed.”

It was a quick decision.
For a while, Ekot and Milah, a newlywed couple, would be separated.
Until the crisis subsided. It was uncertain when this would happen.

It was all done rather quickly.
Milah hugged Ekot.
She certainly didn’t want to be separated. She sobbed bitterly.

24 Even intermarried couples from the Dayak and Madurese ethnic communities were forced to separate during the 2001 Sampit conflict. <https://journal.uui.ac.id/Psikologika/article/download/331/7126/15786>

Likewise, Ekot hugged Milah very tightly. He also didn't want to be separated. They both cried as hard as they could.

The two fathers were forced to break them apart and calm them down.

Milah still remembers how
they ran into the woods,
And how they were chased by Dayak tribes
when they left the shelter of the forest.

Ekot and his father brandished their mandau
and accompanied Milah and her family to ensure that they were safe.

They had already prepared sufficient food for the journey.
They spent two days and nights in the forest.
They hiked along the Mentaya River until they reached Sampit Bay. ⁽²⁵⁾

A large navy ship arrived, and together with 100
thousand other refugees, Milah departed Sampit.

The ship sailed away from the port.
Ekot would not move
until the ship was only a small dot on the ocean's horizon.

Similarly,
Milah would not leave the deck of the ship
until she could no longer see the land of Kalimantan
receding behind its wake.

"Shall we see each other again, Ekot, my husband, my love,
my soulmate? I'm inconsolable, desperately sad, frightened."

"Or is this our last meeting?
Milah shouted to the sea:
"Ekoooootttt, look for me. Please come and find me."

Milah's moaning rolled up and down with the waves.
The night became darker.

25 Many Madurese in Sampit rescued themselves by running into the rainforest. <https://surabaya.tribunnews.com/amp/2008/12/12/kehidupan-pengungsi-sampit-di-pasar-keputran-1-7>

But darker still was Milah's heart.
And murkier still was Ekot's soul.

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In Sampang, Madura,
A makeshift refugee camp was quickly built.
Milah hadn't expected
to eat tubers every day.
Rice was hard to come by.

It was unforeseen
that her family would live on a tiny plot of 2.5 meters x 3 meters.
There were no mattresses to sleep on
and no cabinets to store their meagre belongings.

Milah's life in Sampit had been
much more humane.

Milah looked at the expanse of the camp.
Alas, there were tens of thousands of refugees just like her.
All came from Sampit.
All were displaced.
All were Madurese.

The sky was more wrathful.
The nights were more painful.
Afternoons were also more languid.
Milah asked: "How long can I bear this situation?"

In Sampang,
Milah spent each morning in the fields,
pulling out cassava plants.
planting corn.
picking string beans,.

Every morning,
Milah also fed the cows.
They were not her cows.

The cattle belonged to the village chief.
He often helped Milah's family,
so Milah tried to return the favor.

Oh, when the dry season arrived,
river streams ran dry.

But there was no alternative.
The refugees had to put up with the drought.
They needed water to quench their thirst.
Clothes needed to be washed.
Their bodies needed to be bathed.
Their behinds needed to defecate.

All these needs were met by the same stream,
whose water began to run dry.

There was no entertainment there,
except on some evenings,
when they visited the village chief's house.
They gathered there and watched TV together.
One soap opera after another.

A decent meal was offered now and then.
They told stories to pass the time.

Eventually, the benevolent rulers of Sampang,
who had at first warmly welcomed the refugees,
came and delivered some bad news:

"My dear Madurese friends,
You won't be able to linger here much longer.
As we ourselves are also facing difficult times."

"Indeed, we are all Madurese.
We try to take care of and understand each other.
We try to help each other."

But you refugees have been here much too long."

Living such an impoverished existence,

Milah often got sick.
She was malnourished.
She got a respiratory tract infection
and also suffered from skin diseases.

A nurse said,
“it’s a typical disease of refugees.
It’s a disease that results from living in unhygienic conditions.
She also needs to eat a balanced diet.”

Sometimes there were good people.
The Banyuates local government provided assistance.
Free medicine.
Free milk.
Every week.

There was also some financial assistance.

Sometimes there were helpful, assertive people.
M. Said Hidayat was the
Deputy Regent of Sampang.

He said:
“The annual budgetary allocation for this county
is only five billion Rupiah.
That normally barely covers the needs of the native residents.”

“So how could that sum be enough to also finance
the lives of tens of thousands of refugees?”

One Friday night at 8:30 p.m, Milah looked up, as usual,
at the brightest star.

But that evening, Milah lamented:
“Oh, brightest star.
It’s hard to be a refugee.
It’s a heavier burden than being chased by Dayak headhunters.”

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That night Milah had a dream.
Ekot appeared before her.
He was attired entirely in white.
His skullcap was also white.
Fragrant frangipani flowers adorned him.
The flowers too were white.

Ekot was staring right at her.
The palms of his hands seemed to wave.
They seemed to signal
that Ekot was waving goodbye.

Milah woke up.
She was stunned.
In a flash, she sat up.
“Ekot, did you die?”

Milah had this same dream a few times.
The first and second time were already very disturbing.

Milah began suffering from insomnia.
Neighbors said she often daydreamed.
Sometimes, Milah talked to herself.

Milah no longer took care of herself.
She rarely bathed.
Her hair was tangled.
Her clothes were disheveled.

The third time she dreamt of Ekot, her feverish anxiety peaked.

She missed her husband very much.
She wanted to return to Sampit.
But her parents told her Sampit was not yet safe.

She often cried alone in the middle of the night:
“Ekot, Ekot,
I’m not strong enough to endure this any longer.
I miss you.
Hug me, Ekot.”

One midnight,
Milah walked out of her squalid tenement.
She began running with great speed.
Very fast.
Tears ran down her cheeks
as she wept profusely.

Milah began shouting loudly:
“Ekot, Ekot, don’t leave me.
If you go to the next world,
take me along.
I’m coming with you!”

“Ekoooooooooooooottttttt”

The other refugees woke up.
They all gathered and observed the sad spectacle
of Milah shouting by herself in the dark of night.

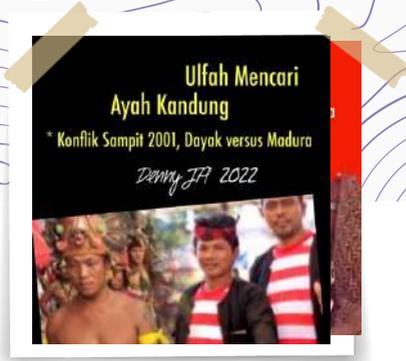
The refugees stared at each other.
They remained speechless,
but they understand each other.
They had long suspected
that Milah was mentally ill.
It was an affliction that many refugees suffered from.

August, 2022

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Ulfah Went Looking For Her Biological Father

A wounded moon shone in Sampit,
Kotawaringin, Central Kalimantan, one night in 2022.

Sad tales wafted in the wind, past trees,
past the windows and doors of houses.

The wind infiltrated Ulfah's heart.
She remained still.
Sorrow came. Deep within.

Ulfah was quite shocked.
Her heart seemed to have stopped beating.
An atom bomb had erupted right in her belly.
although by now she had already figured it out.

The wedding was still six months off.
"Mercy," she felt herself yell silently within.
"What should I do?"
She recalled a recent conversation with her parents
that had changed her life:

"Please forgive your mom and dad, dear child.
We've wanted to tell you the truth for a long time.
But we always lacked the inner strength to tell you."

Ulfah's two parents, a husband and wife, whom she had always considered her own natural Father and Mother. had both taken care of Ulfah since she was one year old.

They both continued to speak.
"However, we are Muslims.
And your marriage must be legally binding.
Whoever arranges to marry you off
must be your own biological father.
Or one of his close relatives." ⁽²⁷⁾

"We love you, dear child.
As though you were our own child.
But we're not your true biological parents."

"In 2001,
During the conflict between the Madurese and Dayak tribes,
Your father, my husband, heard a child crying."

"All around you were dead corpses.
Lying scattered about you.
The dead bodies of Madurese victims."

"You were quite lucky.
You had just passed out at the time.
You were thus presumed dead."

An even larger atom bomb erupted, over and over again,
It exploded in Ulfah's heart, it burst in her bone marrow,
It flared in her stomach.

"I was found in a pile of corpses? Because I was crying?
When I was one year old?"

"Your biological father and mother must be Madurese.
Because this occurred in the Madurese community area."

At first, my husband hesitated to take you.
But your eyes stared right into his eyes.

27 In Islamic tradition, before arranging a wedding for a bride, the terms of marriage must be agreed to by her biological father or close blood relative. <https://www.hukumonline.com/klinik/a/bolehkah-ayah-angkat-menjadi-wali-nikah-lt540945124d4e3>

Your two hands extended toward him,
asking to be carried.”

We were also Dayak tribespeople.
But we were not running amok like many others.”

“We hadn’t been blessed with any sons or daughters.
My husband was apparently suffering from an infertility spell.
Perhaps you were sent by God to be our child.
For us to take care of.”

“My husband brought you unbeknownst
and secretly out of Sampit.
We were always frightened
that someone might discover that you were Madurese.
It was not just that you might be killed.
But that we might also be killed.”

“The town of Sampit had gone insane.
Ancient spirits were roaming the sky.
Anger and violence
haunted the trees.

“Eventually, we brought you
to live with us in Surabaya.”

However, three years later in 2004
when peace and order were restored,
we returned to Sampit,
though not to our original neighborhood.

All the neighbors assumed you were our own child.”

Ulfah remained silent.
She just remained still.
Half of her breath had drifted away.

That night, in Sampit,
the sky was still. Frozen.
Holding back a reservoir of tears.

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For a week already.
Ulfah had shut herself in her room.
She didn't know what to do.
Her life seemed bland and tasteless.

Ulfah felt like a weak sapling.
Lacking roots.

She repeatedly asked herself:
"Who am I?
Please, God, Ruler of heaven and earth.
Find my roots.
I want to meet my biological father.
And my biological mother.

Suddenly, Ulfah felt born again.
She would wander
in search of her natural parents.
She would find her true roots.

She visited the surviving Madurese community in Sampit.
She spoke to anyone who would listen.
She was hungry for information.

"Oh, vast cosmos.
Send me the Goddess of Knowledge.
In Sampit, in 2001,
who had a one-year-old daughter
that lived in the Madura region,
who assumed her daughter was dead?"

For a month she searched.
She heard many things.

One man pithily exclaimed,
"We Madurese were considered rats. Slaughtered mercilessly.
Oh my God, the head of yet another Madurese man was chopped off.
So many of us were savagely beheaded!" ⁽²⁸⁾.

28 The Sampit conflict told from the perspective of the Madurese was taken from this news article: <https://www.mail-archive.com/indonews@indo-news.com/msg08441.html>

“Only divine intervention allowed me to survive.
Both my parents died.
Four of my younger siblings also died.

He spoke in a cold, detached manner.
From the vantage of a distant time.
He could no longer shed any more tears.

At that time, I was 19 years old.
I was living in Beringin Ravine.
About 40 kilometers west of Sampit.”

“Madurese people were also living in Bagendang Hilir.
In Tanah Runtuh (Sinkhole Village).
In Kuala Kuayan.”

“Nearly the entire village was annihilated.
Although some people managed to hide
or seek refuge elsewhere.
Thousands of people.

“Ever since, I have lived a solitary life.”

In a different town,
another man told Ulfah his story.

“I was ready to evacuate.
But there weren't enough sea vessels.

“I asked the officer, ‘Sir, when will another ship arrive?’”

“He said: ‘The Navy will send a KRI.
A warship of the Republic of Indonesia.’
Imagine, a ship evacuating the refugees was a warship.
They weren't fooling around.”

Elsewhere, a woman told her story.

“The Dayak tribe gave us a time limit.
We were given until Tuesday tomorrow,
‘Sampit must be cleansed from Madurese!
No Madurese will be permitted to live there anymore.’

All had to leave.
Or face certain death!”

“It was absolutely terrifying.
I was horrified. Extremely frightened. Sobbing.”
The authorities promised to protect us.”

“The officer said: ‘Dayak tribes are now prohibited from
carrying any weapons within the town of Sampit.’”

“And the Dayak War Command center in Rama Hotel
had already been disbanded.”

“We waited for our turn to evacuate.
Many were sick.
My son was 5 years old.
He died in transit, I have no idea why.”

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Ulfah got a lot of information
but nothing about her real father.

For months she searched.
Even after months of searching, there was still no trace.

For months she wandered.
After many months, there was still no clue.

She felt hopeless and heartbroken.
She wanted to stop looking.

But one day, hope arrived.
For the first time.
A ray of light at the end of a dark tunnel.

She met a family.
The woman's face!
Oh, look at her face.
It looks just like my face.

Look at her eyes.
And look at her nose.

The mother admitted.
In 2001,
she had a one-year-old daughter.
But she thought her daughter was dead.

“My husband and I had to leave quickly,
We couldn’t carry anything.
We didn’t have time to bury our daughter.
We were terribly distressed.”

“Oh my God, your face looks like mine,” said the woman.

She took Ulfah to stare in the mirror. The two compared faces.

“If my daughter were still alive, she would be the same age as you.”

“Could it be that this woman is my real mother?”

The mother hugged Ulfah.
“Oh God, may you be our daughter, whom we thought was dead.”

The old man
just remained sitting.
He looked at Ulfah.
His eyes were filled with tears.

Ulfah asked:
“Is he my dad?”

The man didn’t say much.
For the past five years,
he was sick and could no longer speak.

Ulfah explained,
A DNA test was already available. ⁽²⁹⁾
“Are you willing?
To take part in a DNA test?”

29 DNA tests are now used to ascertain the genetic propinquity of blood relationships, i.e. kinship. <https://www.amazon.com › How-D... How to DNA Test Family Relationships>

To be sure or not that we are related by blood?
That I am your daughter, and you are my biological parents.”

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With great hope and expectations , Ulfah awaited the test results.

In Ulfah's eyes,
flowers could grow on electric utility poles.
Rainwater invigorated the town of Sampit.
Oh, it was cool.

“Wow! I finally had a DNA test.
To make sure this was my biological father.
And my biological mother.”

The test results finally arrived.
Ulfah had been waiting for two long months.
The results were unmistakable.
Unequivocal.
Based on the DNA results,
there was nothing she could do.
Ulfah was not that woman's child.
Ulfah was not that man's daughter.

Ulfah was silent.
Stunned.
Hit hard.

The night darkened.
She looked up at the sky.
“Where are you, my biological father?
I've been looking for you.
To the north and to the south.
I've already journeyed in the eight directions of the wind.”

I, your daughter, am still alive.
Are you still alive too, Dad?"

The sky darkened.
But Ulfah's heart was even darker.

July, 2022

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**INTERETHNIC CONFLICT
BETWEEN INDIGENOUS
LAMPUNG RESIDENTS
AND BALINESE
TRANSMIGRANTS, 2012**



An Eye For An Eye, A Machete For A Machete

"Oh, the expanse of the Java Sea
that stores everything...
Take care of my younger sister."

"Deliver my greetings to her.
An eye for an eye.
A machete for a machete.
Tell her that I, her brother,
will keep searching for her killer."

"My dear younger sister.
Help your brother from the supernatural world there.
So that I can quickly find your killer.
And thus fulfill my promise to Mother."

Bharata was absorbed in the dark mood of that solemn day.
At the wharf of Bakauheni Port, South Lampung,
It was just 5 pm.
But the sky was already getting dark.

That day, in early November 2015, marked
three years since the Ngaben cremation ceremonies for Balinese victims
of interethnic violence in Balinuraga Village, South Lampung.

In the Java Sea,
the ashes of Prastika, Bharata's sister, were immersed.
And united with the sea.

"Return, my sister, to the water from which you came."
At that moment, Bharata released his sister's ashes from the cremation
of her body three years earlier.

Bharata tried to restrain his tears.
Since then, every year, every early November,
Bharata faced the Java Sea.

He always recalled his mother's message shortly before her death.

At that time, Prastika was only 8 years old.
Bharata was 10 years older.
He was 18 years old.

His mother was dying.
She spoke with a weak voice,
but her message was clear and potent.

"Take care of your sister, Bharata.
She is not as strong as you.
Mother is not willing to face God until I hear your promise."
"Your father in the afterlife is also listening.
Promise me, son."

Bharata promised Mother:
"I will always take care of my sister, Mother.
Don't let this burden you.
I will guard my sister with my life."

But now, every time he visited the sea,
Bharata repeatedly cried.
"I'm sorry, Mother. I wasn't able to take care of my sister.
I didn't keep my promise to you."

"I wasn't aware, Mother,
when Prastika was killed,
I wasn't there."

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October 24, 2012.
No one suspected
that three days later,
Balinuraga Village would be attacked
by a horde of indigenous Lampung men
from Agom Village.

Bharata and his wife were visiting Bali at that time.
They attended the wedding of a young cousin.
Uncle really wanted Bharata to be present.

Bharata invited Prastika to accompany him and his wife.
But Prastika said, "I'll just stay home, Bharata."
"I want to finish working on this small temple.
I'm also carving a wooden statue."

"Just send my regards to Uncle and family."

Prastika was proud.
"Brother's house is probably the best in the entire village.
Indeed, your house is not as luxurious as the King's.
But brother's house has the richest Balinese ambience."

"Still, it feels lacking without a small temple in the front yard."

Bharata was also very proud of his house.
Mother used to tell him about his grandfather's house in Bali.

As much as possible, Bharata applied the hierarchical
philosophy of Balinese architecture in his home, just as grandfather
had done with his own house in Bali:

There was a
Main Utama room,
a Middle Madya Room,
and the Lowest, a Nista room.

The building material also included a lot of carved wood.
Typical Balinese carving.

But what could they do?

It was precisely because this house had the most grandeur and the most Balinese nuances that it became a major target for arsonists.

On 27, 28, and 29 October 2012, three days in a row. Balinuraga Village was attacked. 500 young men from the village of Agom invaded suddenly.

They brought machetes, wooden clubs, machetes, air rifles, and fire igniters.

There was a commando who shouted: "Burn them! Roast them!"

"Hey, infidels.
Idol worshipers.
Pig eaters.
Lift your legs.
Go far away from here."

"This is our land.
Our ancestral land.
You are newcomers.
Yet you pretend to wield power here!"

"Blasphemy!" they shouted in fear.
The Balinese villagers wept and groaned in pain.
The flickering sound of fire. The whack of wooden clubs.
Screams asking for help.
All could be heard. Overlapping. And interconnected.

Scores of houses were set ablaze.
14 people were killed.
1,200 Balinuraga people were forced to evacuate.

When Bharata returned home from Bali,
It was too late to save his sister.
He only heard the story.

One neighbor said:
"I tried to drag your sister out of the house."

I told her to run, to leave, to go...
But she refused to leave the house.”

“She said that she had promised you.
She had to stay and guard the house.”

“I only saw from a distance.
Your sister was ganged up on and beaten.
I saw someone attack her with a machete.
From afar, I saw your house set on fire.”

Bharata cried and wailed immeasurably.
“Younger sister!
Our house was indeed valuable.
But your life was much more valuable.
Why don't you just run with the others?”

“My God, sister. What should I say to Mother?
I wasn't able to take care of you.”

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Bharata wanted to take revenge.
Alone, he infiltrated the village of Agom.
He brought a machete.

In his heart, he made a commitment:
“This is for you, my sister.
I will avenge your death.
This is also the way I apologize to Mother.”

“If I die because of this, it's okay.
The important thing is that I carry out my retaliation for you, Sis.”

But Bharata was caught by the police.
He was brought to the police station.
And he spent a day locked up in jail.

Then Bharata was taken to the refugee center
at the Kemiling Police Training School,
80 km from Agom Village.”

The Balinese elder advised Bharata.
“Stop considering revenge.
There are already ten stipulations in the peace accord.
Don’t harm what we have just achieved, Bharata.”

“If you had successfully carried out your personal revenge,
the two villages could easily be at war again.”

“I understand you lost your sister.
I also lost a child.”

The elder showed him the agreement that was hashed out
between the Lampung and Balinese communities.⁽³⁰⁾
Among other binding clauses were admonitions:
Agree to make peace.
Agree not to repeat violence.
Agree to not attack.

The signatories all agreed that if there was a dispute,
all parties would first involve their respective elders.
They agreed not to pursue legal claims against each other.
They agreed that any further issues concerning interethnic conflict be
resolved by nonpartisan law enforcement agencies.

Bharata just kept quiet.
But his heart refused.
Ancient awareness in himself spoke up:
“I have nothing to do with this agreement.
This is a personal problem.
This is my promise to mother. To hell with it all.”

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Once again, another elder advised Bharata.
We will rebuild your house.
There is a government assistance fund.

30 The peace accord between the indigenous Lampung and Balinese transmigrant communities in early November, 2012 included 10 stipulations: <https://nasional.tempo.co/amp/439634/sepuluh-kesepakatan-warga-yang-bentrok-di-lampung>

The Balinese elder showed him a document from the police.

The central government was providing financial assistance worth billions of rupiah.⁽³¹⁾
Assistance through the Ministry of Social Affairs and Public Housing.

There was rehabilitation assistance for rebuilding homes.
The assistance amounted to 11 million rupiah per house.

There would be improvements in public facilities.
Renovation of places of worship.
Renovation of schools.

Families who lost a family member in the civil unrest were also given some compensation: 5 million Rupiah per victim.

Bharata listened to the elder without any response.
He said nothing.
But his heart said:
"To hell with the assistance.
I also have money.
Very cheaply do they value my sister's life."

"But this is not a matter of money.
This involves my promise to my mother.
This is about my only sister."

Day and night, Bharata pondered his next move.

How could he identify the Lampung man who killed his sister?

Five hundred people from Agom Village had invaded his village.
Which of these 500 men swung the machete at his sister's body?

If I killed just anyone, it would have to be a villager from Agom,
but would that be appropriate or just?
Could that be justified?

31 The central government allotted financial assistance to help the hundreds of victims of the interethnic conflict in South Lampung: <https://www.beritasatu.com/archive/81570/miliaran-rupiah-untuk-korban-konflik-warga-di-lampung>

Bharata's no longer focused on his work.
At first, Bharata's wife understood.
But by now, three years had elapsed and Bharata often daydreamed.

This was a different Bharata.
This was a creature whose shoulders were too heavy
with the burden of revenge.
This creature whimpered constantly due to a strong sense of guilt.

His wife complained:
"Bharata, you don't just have a younger sibling who died.
You also have a child, who is living and deserves your attention.
"You also have a wife. I also need your warmth and your love."

"You're always depressed.
Our house has become so gloomy.
How long can this go on?"

In the middle of the night, Bharata often felt stunned.
How could he continue to bear the heavy burden
of his perceived obligation to take revenge?
Moreover, he did not know who killed his sister.
He had no idea how to find the man who was responsible for her death.

He once reported his sister's death
as a criminal matter for the police.
The police said: "That was mass civil unrest.
Five hundred people took part in the melee.
How could anyone identify which one of the 500 people
killed your sister?"

"The police could investigate.
But there is already a binding agreement between the elders in both
communities to avoid any further recriminations.
I'm sorry, but this case is closed."

"That's not fair, sir," Bharata affirmed. "This is a criminal matter.
Why should the gravity of this case be mitigated by
any agreement of the village elders?"

The policeman said:
"You are welcome to discuss this matter with your elders.

However, if the agreement is abrogated due to your actions, are you ready for your village to be attacked again?"

Due to intense reflection.

Due to the terrible burden of revenge getting even heavier, that night, after praying, Bharata dreamt.

His mother appeared in his dream.
Her whole body was adorned in white.
Mother was holding his sister on her lap.

Awakening from his dream, Bharata sobbed bitterly.
Bharata felt even guiltier than before.
He was unable to fulfill the oath he swore to his Mother.
It simply could not be carried out.

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Bharata went looking for Guru Dewo.
He was an old man who possessed magical abilities.
He was also a compassionate person.
He had the sixth sense.

Dewo had long lived a solitary existence near the forest.
It took Bharata four hours to ride his motorcycle all the way to Guru Dewo's remote dwelling.

Bharata conveyed the terrible burden he was inflicted with.
And his unbearable guilt.

Guru Dewo said:

"Son, you need to experience a climactic event.
After that, your suffering will end."

"Go to the sea where the ashes of your sister's body are stored.
Talk to your sister there. Talk from your soul.
Without words."

Guru Dewo gave Bharata some water to drink.
He clasped Bharata's head in his hands.
Bharata became still.
A sense of calm and tranquility pervaded his heart.
Supernatural stillness.

Later that afternoon,
in the Java Sea,
In early November 2015,
Bharata rented a boat.

He asked to be brought to the middle of the sea.
To the same place where he had released the ashes of his sister's body.

In the same area, Bharata prayed and spoke to his sister.

"My dear younger sister,
Please forgive your brother.
I haven't been able to find your killer.
And I can't keep holding onto this constant desire for retribution."

Bharata took a machete from his bag.
He spoke again to his sister's ashes that were dissolved in the sea.

"I have long readied this machete, Sis.
An eye for an eye.
A machete for a machete.
The person who killed you with a machete,
I planned to kill with this machete."

"Please forgive me, Sis.
I cannot complete my intention."

"I cannot bear to carry this grudge indefinitely.
I have to dispose of my anger.
I have a wife and child.
I have neglected them all this time."
"Rest in peace, Sis."

Bharata then threw the machete into the sea.
In doing so, he flung away his grievances.
He also discarded his deep sense of guilt.

Rain was falling.
They returned to the shore.

The boatman looked at Bharata's face.
It was wet.
The boatman could not distinguish the water on Bharata's face...
Which was rainwater? Which was tears?

Arriving back at the beach,
Bharata felt relieved.
For three long years,
he had thought more about the dead.
For three long years,
he had neglected his responsibilities to the living.

August, 2022

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Run, Grandson! Run As Hard As You Can!

A volcano erupted in the coastal town of Lampung.
Duaaaaarrrr...
Lava and molten magma percolated out of the belly of the mountain.
Followed by an earthquake.
Landslides rolled down inundating the entire area.
The clouds became hot.
Exceedingly hot.

But this was not a real mountain.
This erupting volcano lay deep in Dewo's soul.
For ten years, he had stored it deep within.
For ten years, his guilt had been inflamed like hot lava.

In that room,
With the help of a psychiatrist,
whom he had met ten times,
and accompanied by his wife, Nami,
Dewo cried.
He wailed...

"I was there, sir.
I hid in the bush.
And I remained silent."

“He was like a grandfather to me.
He was killed right in front of me.
I should have been brave.
I should have come to his defense.
I could have rescued him.
But I was scared and remained immobilized at that time.”

Dewo laid his head on the table.
His hands clasped his head.
He spilled out everything he had kept pent up for so many years.
And he cried uncontrollably.

Nami, his wife, also wept
as she caressed her husband’s head.

“Keep going, Dewo,” she said.
Tell him everything.
Release this seething magma.
All this poison that you have pent up for ten years.”

Dewo raised his head.
He leaned back in his seat.
He resumed telling his story.

“Just before being killed,
the old man had been walking with his grandson, Natha.
Natha was only 10 years old.
The same age as my own child now.”

“They both ran.
Our town, a Balinese transmigrant village,
was invaded by native Lampung people.
Scores of houses were burned.
That was 10 years ago, in 2012.”

“The old man lacked the strength to keep running.
He wanted his grandson to survive.
Grandpa shouted:
‘Keep running Natha, run fast.
Run as hard as you can.

Run to the forest.
And don't look back.”

“But Natha didn't want to run.
Natha said, ‘I don't want to leave you, Grandpa.’”

“But he persuaded Natha to keep running:
‘Grandpa will catch up with you later.
You run first.
You have to survive.’”

“Natha began running as fast as he could.

Grandpa, however, could only jog slowly.
He was gasping for breath.”

“The three hooligans who had been chasing
the old man caught him easily.
Oh my God, they slaughtered him.
Mercilessly.”

“There was nothing wrong with that old man.
He was killed due to his Balinese ethnicity.
Just that.”

“I'll be right there, sir,” Dewo began wailing again.
“Why did I keep silent?
That old man had been good to me.
I considered him to be like my own grandfather.”

“I beg forgiveness, Lord.
Please, Gusti... Have mercy on me.
I am ashamed of myself.
I hadn't discussed this for 10 years.”

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Eight years earlier, in 2014, Nami and Dewo got married.
Two years before that, an ethnic conflict raged between
Lampung natives and Balinese transmigrants.

14 people were killed.
Hundreds of houses were pillaged and burned. ⁽³²⁾

At that time, Dewo was 25 years old.
He had a muscular body.
He was an expert in martial arts.
But on that tragic day, Dewo did not fight.
He protected himself by hiding.

The conflict occurred between Kampung Agom, Kalianda District,
and Balinuraga Village, Way Panji District, South Lampung.

Following the riots, Dewo went to Jakarta
where he met Nami.
Just two years later, they moved to Lampung.

Since getting married, Dewo was indeed a hard worker.
But he was often silent for long stretches of time
like an absentminded person caught in a daze.
Something was disturbing his thoughts.

Sometimes he had trouble sleeping.
He shouted out even though his eyes were closed tight:
“Don’t, don’t, don’t.”

“What’s wrong, Dewo?”
Nami had always asked nicely since the first year of marriage.
Dewo only answered: “Oh, it’s just an ordinary dream.
I’m probably just stressed out from my work.”

But eight years of marriage had already gone by,
and Dewo often became abruptly silent.
His gaze was empty,
which happens to severely depressed people.

As a wife, Nami felt
that Dewo was holding onto trauma.
But he wasn’t willing to tell her why.

32 Violence between indigenous men in Lampung and Balinese transmigrant residents of Balinuraga in 2012 resulted in 14 fatalities, the loss of hundreds of houses from arson, and hundreds of displaced people in the Balinese community. <https://kompas.com/stori/read/2021/07/30/113000879/kerusuhan-lampung-2012-latar-belakang-kronologi-dan-dampak>

Nami had accompanied Dewo each time he met the psychiatrist. Finally, after two months of these sessions, the mountain in Dewo's body suddenly erupted. After 10 years of remaining tightly and deeply pent up within.

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That afternoon, on the veranda of the house in the town of Lampung, Dewo spoke at greater length.

"In 1963," said Dewo, "the sacred Balinese Mount Agung erupted. The volcanic mountain is situated in Karangasem Regency."⁽³³⁾

One district was utterly destroyed by the powerful eruption. Other adjacent districts were extensively damaged.

Residents had to be evacuated. Some transmigrated to other parts of the Indonesian archipelago. One destination for Balinese who were compelled to leave their island was far away in South Sumatra's Lampung Province.

But Balinese culture is very strong. Wherever they went, Balinese people maintained and cultivated their culture. The Balinese Hindu religion is dense.

Lampung residents realized how different Balinese Hinduism was. Lampung people were rooted in Islam. They viewed the Balinese newcomers as idol worshipers, based on: The pantheon of gods that Balinese worshiped. The daily offerings to the gods as well as the consumption of pork.

33 Transmigration of Balinese people to Lampung, Sumatra began following the catastrophic eruption of the sacred Balinese volcanic mountain, Gunung Agung, which occurred repeatedly in 1963. <http://download.garuda.kemdikbud.go.id/article.php?article=1725330&val=11673&title=Kami%20Bali-Lampung%20Politik%20Identitas%20Etnik%20Bali%20Migran%20dalam%20Masyarakat%20Multikultural%20Way%20Kanan%20Lampung>

Some Balinese were economically well-off.
They were quite wealthy.

Despite living in close proximity, Lampung and Balinese people did not integrate or assimilate.

Ignited by a minuscule provocation,
the conflicts between these two ethnic tribes
easily escalated and erupted
to the point that they were ready to kill each other.
Indeed, that's precisely what happened in 2012.

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Nami tried to reassure Dewo, her husband.
"You did not act inappropriately if you didn't do anything.
Because if you had defended the old man against the three of them,
you too could easily have been killed."

"But I was a martial arts expert, Nami.
I could have at least protected the old man.
Instead, I just looked out for myself.
I was not a knight in shining armor."

"I'm angry, Nami.
I'm upset with myself."

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Dewo continued telling his story.
"I was there, Nami.
I also attended the ngaben cremation ceremony,
where we paid our last respects to the old man."⁽³⁴⁾

34 The tale of the grandson who saved his life by running quickly was inspired by a true parallel story: http://littleadeoz.blogspot.com/2013/09/v-behaviorurldefaultvmlo_10.html?m=1

There were Balinese ngaben ceremonies for eight other people, all victims of the Balinese-Lampung ethnic conflict.

The ngaben rituas were performed at the Crematorium Building, which belonged to the Buddhist Bodhisattva Lampung Foundation. I still remember. I was there at 8 o'clock. The family of the victim arrived even earlier at 5:00 in the morning.

They looked resolute waiting for the ambulance to come. The bodies were removed from several ambulances.

Hindu priest led the ceremony: "The bodies are all here. We will begin our cremation ceremonies."

Balinese gamelan music resounded. The accelerating beat of gongs and cymbals aroused a steadily increasing cascade of tragic emotions.

The coffin was turned around three times.
The body was removed from the coffin.
The head of the body faced the sea.

The Hindu priest again spoke: "For the last time, the family may look at the deceased. But please do not shed tears."

"I held back my tears at that moment, Nami. Natha was there."

"Natha, the old man's grandson, who was only ten years old, held onto one end of the open bier. He cried, but he stood as upright and steadfast as he could."

"The more Natha tried to hold back his tears, the deeper I felt my sense of guilty."

Natha's behavior attracted the attention of all present. A woman explained:"

"This is the body of his grandfather. While the next one is the body of his dead uncle."

“Natha told me: ‘When the fight began, I was with Grandpa. Grandpa continued to ask me to run as fast as possible to the forest. Grandfather himself just walked slowly because he was too old to run. As I ran, Grandpa’s message still rang in my ears: Don’t look back.’”

“Grandpa promised to catch up with me, but he wasn’t able to.”

“Natha began shedding tears while trying to restrain the sound of his cries. He wept copious tears.”

“I felt tortured, Nami.
I felt cursed.
I saw everything.
Why did I remain silent?”

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That morning, Dewo invited Nami
To accompany him to Balinuraga Village in South Lampung.

Dewo wanted to beg forgiveness one more time.
He brought Nami to a certain spot on the road.

“Right here, Nami.
This is where that old man was murdered.
And I concealed myself right over there.”

Nami invited Dewo to pray there.
They scattered flowers on that spot.

Dewa collapsed and sat down.
He knelt.
He kissed the soil.
Then Dewo said:

“Grandfather, please forgive me.
If I could go back in time.
I would have protected you.”

"I indeed survived, grandfather.
But half my soul has dissipated.
I wasn't a gallant knight in shining armor."

Dewo cried.
Leaves, twigs, grass, wind, and clouds
All took part in his sorrow.

August, 2022

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Keeping A Distance Of 1000 Kilometers

Another restless night.
A tempestuous wind blew strongly, deeply.
The trees moved hesitantly.

It was 3:00 in the morning.
Bendi was still sitting there,
on the veranda of the house, alone.
Looking out at the distant expanse of the night sky.

“Oh Lord.
Ten years already.
I have already crossed the sea.
I’ve maintained a distance of one thousand kilometers.
Why does this shadow keep following me?”
Bendi had been living in Surabaya for 10 years.
It had been 10 years since he left his hometown in South Lampung.

Reflections from his past came again.
“Hey, infidels, Balinese...
Go far away from here.
This is our village.
Don’t pretend to be in power here.”

Bendi was there again.
He was invigorated and incited.
His eyes were burning.

He and hundreds of other native residents of Kampung Agom, South Lampung, attacked the Balinese transmigrant village of Balinuraga. ⁽³⁵⁾

Scores of houses were damaged.
Dozens of estates they burned.
More than two thousand Balinese evacuated and fled their town.
Fourteen people were killed.

In contrast to other Lampung people who carried meat cleavers and machetes, Bendi brought an air rifle.

He could no longer remember how many people he shot from afar.

Bendi entered a house.
He lunged at a door, forcing it open.
He saw an elderly woman, sitting in a wheelchair.

Bendi aimed the air rifle at the woman's head.
Bendi didn't really want to kill her.
He was just nervous.
He directed the air rifle at her, automatically, spontaneously.

But the old woman showed no fear.
It appeared that she was not just a regular person.
A spiritual aura radiated from her.

Slowly but deeply the old woman said:
"You also have a mother.
What fault do I have with you?
Your evildoing will haunt you. Until the day you die."

Bendi was silent.
He lowered the air rifle.
Stunned.

35 Violence between indigenous men in Lampung and Balinese transmigrant residents of Balinuraga in 2012 resulted in 14 fatalities, the loss of hundreds of houses from arson, and more than 1,000 displaced people in the local Balinese community. <https://kompas.com/nasional/read/2012/10/30/15124247/korban-tewas-di-lampung-selatan-jadi-14-orang>

Dozens of arrows from the eyes of the old woman pierced
the depths of Bendi's heart.

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At that time, in 2012, Bendi was 25 years old.
Indeed, Bendi and his friends won.
They defeated the local Bali community.

But the rain of arrows from the eyes of the woman
remained rooted in his solar plexus.
Rusting and corroding there.

Wherever Bendi went,
the old mother's shadow followed.

Her ominous words resounded within him:
"Your crime will haunt you. Until your death comes."

Bendi left South Lampung.
He moved to Surabaya.
He wanted to forget the conflict of Lampung versus Balinese.

He crossed the sea.
He ventured more than a thousand kilometers to Surabaya.

On a ship,
in the middle of the ocean,
On the deck, Bendi shouted:
"Hometown,
farewell.
I'm not coming back.
I'm going to stay far away from you."

With the assistance of acquaintances,
he made a new identity card:
Bendi was now a resident of Surabaya.
His birthplace had also changed.
Not Lampung Province.
But South Sumatra.

By now, he was married and had a child.
He guarded his secret tightly.
Even his wife did not know
that Bendi originally hailed from Lampung.

Bendi's family in Lampung were also unaware of where Bendi was.

This was a new life.
Bendi wanted to forget his old life.

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But the incidents that ensued...
Were they merely coincidental?
Bendi would never know.

"You're a good manager, Bendi. Keep working hard."
His leader, Rusdi, often praised him.

Bendi just found out last week.
It turned out that his supervisor, Rusdi,
was not the sole owner of the hotel.

One day, Rusdi invited Bendi to visit the house of a wealthy man who
owned a larger stake in the business.

"This is the real owner, Bendi.
I am the same as you, just a worker.
But I was given some shares in the business.
The true owner is my old friend.
He is a good person. Very good."

"This owner is low profile.
He prefers not to appear in public.
But don't be surprised when you see him.
He looks rather sad.
He always looks depressed."

Bendi said nothing.
Even though he began to ask:
“What could be causing this sadness never ends?”

Thus, Rusdi told him concisely about the man who owned the hotel where Bendi worked.
The hotel owner's house was quite large.
The exterior was clearly nuanced by Balinese style.
Rusdi gave additional information: “He is Balinese.”

Bendi's heart began to beat quickly.
But he restrained this reaction.
Bendi did not want to look angry.

They sat in the living room.
People called the hotel owner Pak Wayan.
His full name was Wayang Ardika.

In the living room,
a portrait of a 15 -year-old boy hung prominently on the wall.
Pak Rusdi explained:
“This was Pak Wayan's favorite child.
His son died while visiting his brother's house in South Lampung.

“This child did not know anything about the conflict there.
Balinuraga Village was attacked by local Lampung people.
The boy was among those killed.

“Pak Wayan had been sick for a month.
Since then, he was always depressed.
He hung up the portrait of his dead son in the living room.

“His wife and another son had once lowered the photo.
They could not bear to see Mr. Wayan in a state of constant gloom.

“But Mr. Wayan became angry: ‘Don't ever take down that photo.
Satya's spirit will continue to remain here.’
“Since then, his wife and son did not dare remove the photo.
Satya's photograph intractably remained on the wall.”

Bendi's heart began beating wildly again.
“O God, O Lord! Why have I encountered this same story again?”

Pak Wayan entered the living room.
His depressed face was immediately apparent.

Bendi's feet trembled. He felt guilty.
Bendi wanted to be honest.
He wanted to come clean about his hidden past.
But Bendi was afraid of Mr. Wayan's response.

Pak Wayan noticed Bendi's anxiety.
"Mr. Bendi, is there a problem?"
"Oh no, sir," replied Bendi, awkwardly.

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On the veranda of the house,
At midnight, incidents from the past came back,
disturbing Bendi.

He recalled some events from 10 years ago
that involved two teenage girls from the village of Agom. ⁽³⁶⁾
Bendi was fond of one of these girls.
He had fallen in love with her.

These native teenage girls were riding a motorcycle in
South Lampung when they were harassed by a Balinese teenager
from Balinuraga Village.

The Balinese boy impudently caressed one girl's thigh.
The girl on the motorbike fell.
Not only was she wounded physically;
her self-esteem was also injured.
This was clearly sexual harassment.

The clash occurred before midnight.
At 11 pm.
The following evening,

36 The interethnic conflict between the Balinese transmigrant and indigenous Lampung communities was triggered by a seemingly innocuous incident: the harassment of two Lampung teenage girls on a motorcycle by a Balinese youth. <https://www.viva.co.id/ragam/fokus/363482-lampung-selatan-berdarah-siapa-salah>

a horde of angry men from the village of Agom
invaded the village of Balinuraga.

They did not come ill-equipped or empty-handed.
They carried weapons.
Bendi was one of the young men leading the vengeful mob.

Some held machetes.
Others brought daggers and sickles.
Bendi himself carried an air rifle.

The clash continued through the night and into the next day.

The clash continued a second day.

The conflict wouldn't let up on its own.
The police had to deploy 1,500 personnel.

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"How long will I need to keep running from my past?
"How long will I need to conceal my secrets?"
Bendi asked himself.

The breeze blew on the veranda of Bendi's house that night.

"It's futile trying to keep it secret from everyone.
After all, I can't keep it a secret from my own heart.
My heart knows everything. This is precisely what is torturing me."

Bendi opened the long bag,
which had not been opened for ten years.
He viewed the air rifle once again.

Of course, Bendi couldn't know for certain
If this was the weapon that had killed Mr. Wayan's precious son. ⁽³⁷⁾

37 Besides machetes, sickles, and meat cleavers, air rifles were also used in attacking the Balinese community of Balinuraga.

At 4 o'clock in the morning.
Bendi made a decision.
It was time for him to be blunt and candid.
"I want to be open.
I have to tell everything to Mr. Wayan and Mr. Rusdi.
At the same moment I surrender this weapon."

"I do not care.
After that, will I be fired?
Just fire me, please."

Bendi wanted to sleep for a while.

Later, after getting some rest,
he would ask Mr. Rusdi to accompany him to Mr. Wayan's house.

That afternoon, however, when Bendi woke up,
he rushed to the beach.
He had brought the air rifle in a long bag.

He rented a boat.
"Sir, take me to the middle of the sea."
The boat owner answered:
"I dare not go out to the middle of the sea, sir.
However, we can sail out a certain distance."

"That's fine," Bendi replied.
The boat headed out.
When they reached a certain sea boundary,
he removed the air rifle.
And he threw it into the sea.

Bendi had changed his mind.
He aborted his previous intention to speak candidly with Mr. Wayan.

Instead, Bendi chose to keep his past confidential.
"Let my past disappear along with the loss of my air rifle."

Initially, Bendi felt relieved.
But the old woman's face soon reappeared along with her curse:
"Your crime will always haunt you. Until the moment you die."

Bendi remained silent for a quite a while.
He felt lonely.
Solitary.
Threatened.

"Ah shadow...
Why do you always haunt me?
What do you want from me?
Do you want me to kill myself?"

Bendi began to feel weary.
He wondered if he could ever evade his past
or expiate his transgressions.
The boat continued to sail back to the shore.
The sea breeze blew gently.
Yet something supernatural was present.

The reflection of a woman appeared before him.
She had died when Bendi was still young...
As he cried, Bendi called out to the woman in his heart:
"Mother, Mother!"

August, 2022

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#PuisiEsaiMini This Mini Essay Poem is an excerpt from the new book, **Screams Following Liberation**, which will be published in the near future (Denny JA, 2022).

Screams Following Liberation is an anthology of stories that express the nature of primordial conflicts that raged during the Post-Suharto Reformation Era: The Sectarian Conflict in Maluku (1999-2002), Interethnic Violence in Sampit, Central Kalimantan (2001), Interethnic Conflict in Jakarta (May, 1998), Anti-Ahmadiyya sectarian violence in West Lombok (2002-2017), and the conflict between Balinese transmigrants and indigenous communities in Lampung, South Sumatra (2012).



My Love Seems Uncertain At The Refugee Center

An overcast night in Bandar Lampung.
Will there be a full moon in the sky?
Uncertain.

Cold late-night air.
Will nature cry and rain down?
Uncertain.

The same sense of uncertainty echoed in Faras' heart.
She noticed the clock on the wall: 2 o'clock in the morning.

She had been living at the refugee center for four days.
She looked around.
At SPN Kemiling, the State Education School, in Bandar Lampung,
about 1200 Balinese were stranded.

She looked at her cellphone again.
Faras opened her cellphone nearly every hour.
No more texts from Asif, her fiancé.

Faras cried.
Where have you gone, Asif?
I have sent you so many messages, but why haven't you replied?

There was just one text message from Asif three days earlier:
"Faras, my dear, our marriage has been postponed.
We're waiting for everything to calm down."

After that, Asif just disappeared.
As if he had been swallowed by the earth.

Faras also tried to send a message via Blackberry Messenger
to Asif's younger siblings.
And also to Asif's mother.
But Faras' messages were only read.
None were replied to.

Faras remembered the intimacy.
In the afternoon, at the edge of the rice fields, at the cottage,
they had made wedding plans.
That was three months ago.

"My dear Faras,
October 28, 2012 will be a good day.
Youth Pledge Day.
Ethnic and religious differences can be defeated
by Indonesian unity."

"That will be a good day for our wedding.
You're Balinese.
I'm from Lampung.
Let's get married on Youth Pledge Day.
We will represent an Indonesia that can overcome
its religious and ethnic differences."

"Ah, Asif," Faras mumbled to herself deep in her heart.
"You're always good at making me happy."

However, on 27 October 2012, the day before the wedding,
young men from the village of Agom, where Asif was from,
attacked the village of Balinuraga, where Faras lived.
There was Chaos. Hostility. Enmity. Conflict.

Dozens of houses were damaged. Incinerated.
Faras' house was also destroyed.

Hundreds of people attacked.
Fourteen people died.

Nearly the entire population of Balinese transmigrants
in Balinuraga were forced to flee.
The wedding was postponed.

Faras removed some cloth from a bag.
It was Lampung Tapis cloth.
A special gift from Asif.

“This will be our wedding dowry,” said Asif.
He told her about the Tapis cloth.
“Look at the pattern in this cloth. This is typical Lampung weaving.
The thread is cotton with a silver color.”

“This is a type of Tapis Cucuk Andak cloth.
The motif is a household theme.”
“I have been searching for this special cloth for a year.
I want to give you a dowry of high artistic value.
From my own local tradition. Only for you, my love.
As a token of our marriage.”

Faras had met Asif three years earlier.
“Oh, my sweetheart is very good at stringing words together.
He is well-read. But indeed the regional sentiment is thick as well.”
Faras’s heart had often been cheerful.

“But Asif, where are you now?
I’m your future wife.
Four days have I been stranded in this refugee center.”

Faras continued to speak from her heart.

“I know, Asif. It is impossible to meet me here.
It’s a distance of 80 kilometers from your village.
You are also from Agom village.
My community is still upset by the behavior of men from your village.”

“But you can reply to my messages on BBM.
We can stay in contact.”

“Why did you disappear? I’m depressed, Asif.
Where are you, my soul mate, my future husband,
father of my future children? I need you.”

It was getting late into the night.
But Faras’ heart was dissolved in sadness. Uncertainty.

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That night Faras could not sleep.
She was very uncomfortable in the refugee center.

Faras recalled when her village was attacked.
“Hey, infidels...
Go far away from here.
This is our land.
You are newcomers.
But you pretend to wield power here!”

The Balinese villagers fought back.
But the native people of Agom village were more prepared.
They appeared suddenly.
About 500 men.

They were well-equipped.
They wielded machetes, meat cleavers, and air rifles.
They knew how to quickly set a house ablaze.

The Balinese were disorganized.
The attacks happened repeatedly.
Each day.

And this was the outcome:
A total of 1,200 residents of Balinuraga Village, Way Panji,
South Lampung, were evacuated.
And given refuge at the Kemiling Police Training School (SPN)
in Bandar Lampung. ⁽³⁸⁾

38 As many as 1,200 Balinese were given shelter at the Kemiling Police Training School (SPN) in Bandar Lampung following the violent attack by ethnic Lampung men against the Balinese transmigrant community of Balinuraga. <https://news.okezone.com/amp/2012/10/30/340/711094/kerusuhan-lampung-warga-mengungsi-di-spn-kemiling>

Police said: "This is the safest place. For temporary shelter."

The Balinese deputy at the refugee center explained:
"We will dwell here for a while. Later we can return
to our own village, to Balinuraga."

The elder recited statistics from a piece of paper.
"In this refugee camp, there are 279 heads of family.
There are 364 men,
497 women, and
247 children."

"At 10 pm we evacuated Balinuraga Village.
On Monday, October 28.
Some took a big bus.
Five big buses.
Five trucks.
Those were Crowd Control trucks belonging
to the Lampung Police and Marines."

"Two more buses will come.

The deputy continued to convey information.
"The Lampung Social Service Department is assisting us.
There is a soup kitchen that provides food for refugees."

At the refugee shelter, many children were crying.
Many parents looked pale and frightened.

Some asked: "Why were we attacked?
Why was our house burned down?"

The community leader tried to calm and reassure the refugees.

"It was just a bad misunderstanding."

"There are rumors that two Lampung natives were killed by Balinese.
Although that's not true."

"Rumors are also circulating that two Lampung girls
were raped by Balinese youth.
That's also not true."

“The truth is that two Lampung girls fell from their motorcycle as they passed through Balinuraga on Saturday afternoon. The girls were residents of Agom Village.”

“Some Balinese youths came to help them. But a rumor was spread that these Balinese wanted to rape them.”

The refugees just listened. But most could not believe that scores of houses in Balinuraga were burned down due to such a minor misunderstanding.

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In the large hall of the Kemiling Police Training School, Faras tried to sleep.

“I have to be healthy. I need to get enough rest. I have to be strong at the wedding.”

She closed her eyes.
But all she could see was Asif's face.

Faras wondered. She analyzed. She extrapolated.

Oh my God! Why can't I contact Asif anymore?

Faras remembered the conversation.

“I respect your religion, Faras.
But in Indonesia, marriage is first and foremost a religious ceremony.”

“My father is a cleric at the mosque.
He has given his consent for me to marry you.
But you have to convert to Islam.”

Faras wanted to marry Asif. She truly wanted to.
But abandoning Balinese Hinduism, the religion she inherited from her parents, was a major dilemma.

Indeed, if she wasn't ready to convert to his religion, said Asif, they couldn't get married.

Faras swayed back and forth.
For a week, Faras was ill.
She ate less. She slept less.

Faras' parents understood the stress she was encountering.
Faras' parents gave their consent with one condition.

It would be alright if Faras converted away from Hinduism.
They also conceded that the wedding could include Islamic rituals.
But the wedding ceremony would have to be performed with Balinese customs at Faras' house in the village of Balinuraga.

Asif's father agreed to these terms. However, Asif's uncle,
who was very strict in his religious beliefs did not approve.

The uncle said: "Faras may indeed convert to Islam. But her family will still eat pork. They will continue to worship Hindu gods and goddesses. These are pagan traditions."

Faras' family was extremely angry:
"Just cancel the wedding. You're ready to convert to his religion.
Yet they still ask for more. Don't forget that Satya proposed to you.
He has wanted to marry you for a long time. A fellow Balinese..."

But Faras' heart was only for Asif.
Finally, a compromise was reached.

Faras would convert.
The wedding would be performed according to Islamic tradition.
But the wedding reception would be conducted according to Balinese customs at Faras' parents' house in Balinuraga.

But now Faras' house was scorched and gutted by arson.
Faras cried: "Are my marriage plans also in flames?"

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Good news suddenly arrived.
Balinese and Lampung leaders negotiated an end to hostilities.

Traditional leaders from the two communities met and hammered out a peace accord. They made a joint announcement.⁽³⁹⁾

Present were the traditional leaders of the Lampung community. Present was the King of Bali. Present were Lampung political figures. Present were Balinese political figures. Not only from the villages of Agom and Balinuraga but also from other villages and districts.

The meeting was guarded by the police. The accord was signed by the king of Bali, I Gusti Ngurah Arya. And also signed by the Chairperson of the Lampung Customary Council (MPAL), Kadarsyah Irsya. Other Balinese and Lampung figures also signed the accord.

The elders who were present declared:
“The terms of this agreement must be conveyed to the Balinese of Balinuraga. Particularly those still displaced at the SPN refugee center.”

“The terms of this accord must also be known to the Lampung people in Agom Village. It is insufficient for traditional leaders to know the conditions set forth in this peace agreement. The local common folk in both communities must be aware.”

Faras jumped with joy.
“Wow, how happy my heart is!”

Immediately Faras sent a BBM text:
“Asif, my future husband. The dispute has subsided. Like your message... Our marriage can be rearranged. Don’t take long, dear. What about holding the wedding next month?”

39 A peace accord was signed by leaders of the two communities (Agom and Balinuraga villages) as well as the Balinese king. <https://news.detik.com/berita/d-2081098/redakan-konflik-raja-bali--ketua-adat-lampung-buat-maklumat-bersama>

"Nothing has really changed. Only the date...
We can change it from 28 October (Youth Pledge Day)
to November 10 (Heroes' Day)!" Faras' heart blossomed.

By now, Faras had abandoned Balinese Hinduism and become a Muslim
as her prospective groom, Asif, had stipulated.

But a day, a week, and a full month had passed by...
And still no news was heard from Asif.
Faras visited Asif's house in Agom Village,
a distance of 3 kilometers from Balinuraga.

But there was no Asif.
His sister told Faras that Asif had moved to Jakarta a month earlier.
"Is there a message for me?" Faras asked.
His sister replied: "No, there is no message."

Faras met with Asif's parents.
She asked how the wedding plans were coming along.
Asif's parents requested that Faras discuss this with Asif.
"We, his parents, will support whatever decision Asif makes."

Asif's father spoke up.
"The ethnic conflict between the local Lampung and Balinese
communities is real. Bitter. Difficult.
This must be recognized and understood.
Differences in ethnicity, let alone differences in religion,
have not been easy for our two families,
whose villages were only recently split asunder by violence."

This was circuitous language.
Spoken politely and indirectly.
But Faras caught the overt meaning of his words.

Out of Asif's house, Faras swiftly fled.
She ran as hard and as fast as she could.

She opened her eyes as wide as she could
and saw reality...

She saw the road.
She saw trees.
But what she really saw before her was Asif's face.

Shedding copious tears,
Faras tried to shout,
but only succeeded in shouting silently,
In a mute voice,
the saddest and most pathetic of screams:
"ASSSIIIIFFFFF,
Why did you give up on us???
Why did you give in to them???"

August, 2022

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A Bloody Heirloom

The sky outside was stormy.
But the sky in Prabu's soul was even more turbulent.

A heavy downpour accompanied by lightning besieged Jakarta.

Prabu sat in a cafe.
Alone.
Separate from others.
Seeking distance from the crowds.
Shortly before midnight.

Once again, he read the personal WA text from his beloved mother:
"Prabu, come back home.
This may be the last time you see your father.
The family has already gathered here."

Mother had sent the same message three times.
The words differed slightly each time.
Three messages this week.

He had abandoned Lampung a decade ago.
During those ten years, he had no intention to meet his father again.

The scar on his left arm was still discernible
The wound in his heart was even more evident.

Very hard had his father hit him 10 years ago.
Very harsh was his father's voice at that time:
"Go far away from here. You're not my child anymore.
You are insolent and a shame to your ancestors."

It had all begun with the interethnic conflict between
indigenous Lampung and transmigrant Balinese villagers in 2012.
A decade earlier...

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Blues music at a Jakarta city cafe continued to play.
A steady heavy rain only added to Prabu's sombre mood.
He had been sitting in the cafe for 5 hours.
But his mind was elsewhere.

Prabu recalled the genesis of the strong quarrel with his father.

Residents of Agom Village, in South Lampung, were inflamed.
A hot fire blazed in the hearts of many village youths.

That night, Prabu and 500 other young men attacked Balinuraga Village,
the local ethnic Balinese settlement.

Concealing themselves in the dark shelter of the night,
they prepared to attack.
They wielded wooden clubs, firearms, sickles, and machetes.
Prabu himself brought a chandung, a ceremonial Lampung dagger.

When they entered Balinuraga, they advanced in unison.
"Assault!
Attack!
Set fire!"

The still night was now disturbed.
Screams of anxiety and weeping, mixed with curses and blasphemy.

The wind became restless.
Trees stood stiff.

“Hey, infidels.
Flee from our land.
You are unwanted newcomers.
Sacriligious pork eaters.
Idol worshipers.
You pretend to be the tough guy here.”

“Please...”
Have mercy...”

It was no longer clear who was screaming.
A chaotic atmosphere.
Fire spread everywhere.

More than 2000 Balinese ran from their houses
and scattered in all directions.
Fourteen people died.
Dozens of houses caught fire. More than 1000 Balinese were displaced,
assisted by the police.

The next morning, Prabu was still sleeping
When Father entered his room.
Father awakened Prabu,
pulled him upright by grabbing Prabu’s bedclothes,
Father forced him to get up,
and made Prabu lean against a wall.

“You bastard!”
Heavy-handed slaps and blows landed one after another
on Prabu’s face.
Mother was also there,
but she could only cry.

Father brought the chandung, a Lampung ceremonial dagger.
There were still blood stains on it.

“Hey, you impudent bastard. This is not just any chandung.
This is a family heirloom.

It is an important part of our heritage.
It is handed down from one generation to the next.”

“My father respectfully took care of it, maintaining its holiness.”

Then Father pointed to the chandung.
“And whose blood is this?
Did you murder someone with this heirloom? Since when did you
become a killer? There are no traces of killers in our ancestral lineage.”

“You ignoramus!”
Father repeatedly landed heavy slaps and punches on
Prabu’s face and body.
“Enough, Papa, enough.” Mother interceded while weeping.
“Lord have mercy,” shouted the mother.

Prabu could have retaliated and hit his father.
Indeed, Prabu had a bigger body.
But he didn’t do that.
He just tried to defend himself from the barrage of blows.

“Listen, father.
I defended the villagers.
The Balinese there almost raped my best friend.”

“I took a stand there.
I took a risk.
Together with other young men.
Where were you last night?
Father was too chickenhearted!
You chose to remain safe at home.”

This only made Father even angrier:
“You are an even bigger imbecile than I thought!
Father is certainly not a coward.
And I am certainly not a hooligan with blood on my hands.”

Father hit Prabu once again.
Mother tried to intercede but slipped and fell.
Father was surprised to see Mother fall.
He approached her and helped her stand up again.

“Open your eyes, Father,” continued Prabu.
“That’s just an ordinary dagger.
It lacks any heirloom quality.
Father is crazy about heirlooms.
The purpose of a machete is to cut.
It is not for display.
Even more so to be treated as sacred!”

Father’s wrath reached its zenith.
“You’re insolent to your ancestors.
Get out of here!
I don’t want a murderer living in my house.
You’re not my child anymore.”

Mother cried.
That was the last time Prabu saw his father.

Mother quickly arranged Prabu’s departure to Jakarta.
Prabu lived there with an uncle, his Mother’s brother.

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The color of the sky had changed.
Prabu’s life changed direction.

At first, Prabu felt like he had been dumped into Jakarta.
But as time went by, he came to like the big city.

In Jakarta, Prabu found work.
He got married.
His father did not attend the wedding.
Only his mother and younger siblings came.

A sense of sadness permeated Prabu’s heart.
Father was no longer present during the most important
stages of his life’s journey.

Prabu also never invited his wife, a local Jakarta Betawi woman,
to visit his father in South Lampung.

When his child was born, Father didn't send greetings.
As usual, only his mother and younger siblings stayed in contact.

Prabu told himself that for all practical purposes, his father was dead.
"I no longer have a father," exclaimed Prabu as this tragic awareness became deeply planted in his heart.

But the events of the interethnic conflict with the Lampung Balinese community had never faded. Prabu was still haunted by this unfortunate incident.

Prabu was always interested in any related developments.

In 2017, five years after the conflict, Prabu read some disturbing news.

Pak Mu, the former Village Chief of Agom, had been arrested.
He was accused of extortion.⁽⁴⁰⁾

Prabu recalled an argument with his father.
This occurred even before men from Agom invaded Balinuraga.

"Mr. Mu is not a good leader.
Don't praise him too much," said Father.

At that time, Prabu felt quite confident
that the Agom Village chief was a good role model.
Prabu believed that his father was just jealous.
Indeed, Prabu was quite close to Mr. Mu.

Prabu also recalled some brief efforts at peaceful reconciliation
with Balinuraga before he and other men from Agom Village
stormed the Balinese town.

Mr. Mu stood in front.
He held command.
Indeed, the negotiations were very tough.

40 The former Village Chief of Agom Village was apprehended by police in a sting operation that targeted graft. <https://m.tribunnews.com/regional/2017/01/20/mantan-kades-minta-jatah-kompensasi-uang-pembebasan-jalan-tol-rp-375-juta>

Mr. Mu said: "Public accusations have veered far from the truth. There was no sexual harassment."

Later, Mr. Mu also refuted the notion that the attack in Balinuraga was partly motivated by economic inequality.

"There are still many Lampung residents of Agom Village who are more financially secure than many Balinese.

However, Mr. Mu's efforts fell short in quelling public sentiment and quenching the thirst of young Agom men hellbent on revenge.

Yet Mr. Mu could have actually averted the assault on Balinuraga. He could have prevented 500 Agom men from attacking the Balinese village. ⁽⁴¹⁾

As the village head, Pak Mu held sway, and his words were heeded.

The Lampung family whose daughter was harassed had relented. Appropriate compensation paid by the implicated Balinese family, according to common law, could have quickly resolved the matter.

Pak Mu, representing the village of Agom, had apparently negotiated a settlement with Balinuraga Village elders.

But now, five years later, Prabu suddenly realized that Pak Mu was nimble in twisting the meaning of words to suit his own purposes. But he was not equally strong in taking assertive action.

After hearing the evidence against Pak Mu in the extortion case, Prabu suddenly concurred with his father's long-held view that Pak Mu was neither an honest nor an effective leader.

The good or bad intent of a village head became the final word. It became apparent that Pak Mu's bias was a major factor that precipitated the mass rage, arson, and violence in Balinuraga.

41 Delicate negotiations between Agom and Balinuraga villages yielded a peaceful resolution of the interethnic conflict. <https://nasional.tempo.co/amp/439268/bentrokan-lampung-selatan-dipicu-pelecehan-seksual>

Because of Prabu's own participation in the mass riots,
his life had changed forever.
Indeed, Prabu no longer felt like he had a father.

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Prabu finally relented.
He acceded to his mother's request.
As quickly as possible, Prabu returned to South Lampung.
Back to the village of Agom.

There was a sense of sadness when
Prabu stepped back on the soil of Agom Village.
Also a sense of quiet. Stillness.
"Oh, here I was born.
Here I grew up and spent my teenage years.
This land I almost forgot."

When he arrived at his old house,
Father had already died.
The extended family was weeping.
Prabu was surprised that he couldn't shed a tear.

His inner distance from his father was so remote.
Cold. Insensate.

Prabu attended the funeral.
He sat in the house greeting visitors during the first day
through the third day of the initial mourning period.

On the third day, Mother invited Prabu to talk.
The two of them, just two pairs of eyes.

"Before he died, your father decided:
This chandung should be handed over to you.
You're the oldest son.
Later, you will bequeath it to your eldest son.
This tradition has been honored for many generations."

Prabu objected. "Mother is the one who should keep it."

Mother was angry. "Don't force me to violate your father's request."

"It's a mandate that Mother must carry out.

After that, it's up to you. If you want to dispose of this chandung, that's a risk that you should take very seriously."

Prabu finally accepted the chandung.

Prabu intended to return home to Jakarta by boat.

In the middle of the sea, he would cast the troublesome chandung overboard. He did not believe that this was truly a family heirloom.

This chandung had been the aggravating instrument that piqued his father's anger and caused Prabu to be banished forever from his parents' home.

The ship sailed to the West Javanese port of Merak.

In the middle of the sea, Prabu unwrapped the chandung.

He got ready to cast it into the sea.

He looked at the chandung for one last time.

He gripped the handle of the chandung.

His father had once mentioned that his ancestors had carved it.

But only after fasting 7 days.

Prabu felt the grip of the Lampung ceremonial dagger.

For some reason, a sense of stillness pervaded his heart.

Just as Prabu was getting ready to cast the dagger into the darkest depths of the sea, he saw light emitting from the chandung.

Sparkling light. Radiating light.

Very cool. Yet brilliant.

This event took place in a flash.

Hardly three seconds.

Prabu was shocked.

He instinctively slumped and fell down.

The light from the chandung felt magical, strange,
unparalleled, and jolting.

The light also conjured Prabu back to the distant past.
To a moment in time when he was still a child.
His father was beside him.

Oh, that event! Prabu still remembered.
He was only five years old.
His feet were injured by sharp glass.

Father ran and carried him to the closest clinic.
“Hold on, son... Try to tolerate your pain.
Share it with your father.
You will recover.”

At that time, Prabu cried.
It really hurt.
His father hugged him while carrying him.
Prabu felt protected.
Cared for.
Loved.

Father stayed overnight with him at the hospital.
Prabu could still remember.
How Father always accompanied him.
Wiped away his tears.
Strengthened his heart.
Hugged him.
Very warmly.

Mother at home took care of his younger siblings.
Upon coming home from the hospital,
Father bought Prabu some toy daggers
that Prabu had asked for previously.

On the deck of the boat that night,
From Bakauheni to Merak,
Prabu remained silent.

A very deep and sad sensation infiltrated his heart.
Prabu wept:
“Dad, Dad. Forgive me.”

“Please forgive me for misunderstanding you.
Forgive me for not visiting you when you were sick.
Forgive me for not being at your bedside
when you breathed your last breath.”

Prabu wept deep within.
Without making a sound.
He only shouted in the chambers of his heart.
His sorrow reverberated deep inside.

Prabu embraced the chandung.
He now saw the heirloom dagger with different eyes
although the light that had come out of the chandung was no longer
there.

Prabu became uncertain.
Did light really emanate from the dagger?
Or was it merely an illusion?

But one thing had certainly changed.
He canceled his plan to throw the chandung into the sea.

Prabu decided.
He would save the chandung as an heirloom,
which he would later bequeath to his own child.
The family tradition would continue.

Prabu smiled.
A momentary event on the ship had changed him.
He used to criticize his father about the family heirloom.
Now he himself would cherish his ancestral heritage.

September, 2022

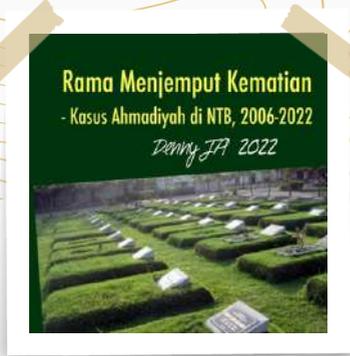
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**INTERETHNIC CONFLICT
INVOLVING THE AHMADIYYA
COMMUNITY IN LOMBOK,
NTB, 2006-2022**



Rama Prepares to Meet his Death with a Peaceful Heart

Is this what is called the “supernatural world”?
He had never heard that sound before.
Harsh yet mellifluous
Seductive yet stomping.
Within a quiet atmosphere.
Substantially still and silent.

The tunnel appeared long.
Extremely long.

Very dark. Black. Deep and thick.
He envisioned himself standing very small in an immense tunnel.

At the end of the tunnel, there was bright light. Rays of light.
Also vast. Brilliant yet not dazzling.

Rama awoke from his slumber.
With a anemic body,
he sat lethargically and still in bed.
It was only 3:00 in the morning.

Rama sighed and beseeched humbly within his heart:
"Astaghfirullah...
Please forgive me, Allah. I beg forgiveness, my Lord."

This image had repeatedly intruded on his dreams.
Rama asked himself within his heart:
"Does this mean that my death is nigh?"

Ainun, his wife, had also awakened.
"Dreaming again?" she asked.

Rama said nothing. He did not want to increase his wife's anxiety.
Four days ago,
Rama had visited the doctor, accompanied by his wife.
When they arrived, Rama asked his wife to stay in the waiting room.

"Ainun, wait a few minutes. There is something I need to
discuss with the doctor. Alone."

The doctor spoke to him: "Rama, you have prostate cancer. Stage four."

"Please, doctor... Tell me everything I need to know.
I want to prepare properly. How much longer do you think I will live from
a medical position?"

Rama said, "I believe that human life is God's business.
But speaking purely from a scientific perspective,
how much longer can I survive, Doctor?"

At first, the doctor was reluctant to answer.
However, since he was being urged, especially encouraged, the
doctor spoke plainly:

"From a purely medical stance, you may calculate the end of
your life coming any day now, sir."

Rama was silent.

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The wooden baton had become a prized wall decoration.
It had been hanging right there in the living room for many years.

The truncheon was standing upright. Beside it, on the wall,
a plaque was inscribed: "Amar Makruf Nahi Mungkar."

That's a religious battle cry. A command to those who are pious.
"Enforce righteousness. And abhor evil."

Rama had deliberately placed the wooden club on the wall.
He was very proud of that truncheon and showed it off...
To friends.
To his extended family.
To guests.

Rama often told the story with a gallant spirit:
"This was the battle club that I used. I don't recall
how many bodies of Ahmadiyya people I bashed using this club."

"The contents of the houses of those heretics
I pillaged and destroyed using this sturdy club.
They must have known the risk entailed.
Those religious blasphemers deserved to receive punishment."

Rama reflected on that time.
On that occasion, he and other enforcers of religious dogma
invaded the Ahmadiyya community of Ketapang,
in Gereneng Village, East Sakra District.
In the adjacent neighborhood of Montong Tangi. ⁽⁴²⁾

Rama could always be counted on to take part:
He said proudly: "Religion calls me!"

"Hey, people with heretical teachings,
Scram from here. Get out of our village. You bring misfortune."

Window glass, cupboard glass,
all were shattered when Rama swung his club.
Whoever dared to engage him in this fight would have

42 Ahmadiyya villages in West Lombok, West Nusa Tenggara were invaded and attacked in 2006.
<https://www.bbc.com/indonesia/indonesia-44187364>

his body bashed by Rama's wooden club.
His arms were battered by the club.

Anyone who was still resisting, anyone who dared to fight back would feel his head whacked by Rama's club.

Rama exclaimed to him. "This wooden club is worthy of a place of honor. Hey, club. Thank you. You helped me uphold religion firmly."

Rama was now sitting in the living room. He was staring at the wooden club perched as usual on the wall.

But this was now a different Rama.
His gaze was also different.
This was a new Rama
who was courting the encroachment of death at any moment.

The proud feeling that he used to have each time he looked at the club now evaded him.
Why does looking at it taste so bland?

Each day, Rama would sit there, often for 30 minutes without a break. Sometimes for hours. Rama sat staring at the wooden club, mounted on the wall and wondering why his previous sense of pride had vanished.

Ainun, his wife, asked: "What's the matter, my dear?
Why do you keep staring at that old club on the wall?"

That afternoon,
Rama cried.
Very hard.
Uncontrollably...
For a long time.

Ainun was frightened.
Rama had always been gallant.
He never cried,
especially like this.

Ainun tried to understand.
Rama was sick. Perhaps critically ill.
Ainun didn't know the extent of his terminal illness.
She had not been told the true nature of Rama's fatal disease.

Ainun was not aware, either
that the doctor had told Rama
that his death was imminent, knocking at his door.

"I miss my mother, Ainun.
I want to be hugged by my mother."
Rama lamented that afternoon. Also while crying.

"Just pray, my dear.
Insha Allah, in the hereafter, your mother will hear you."
Ainun hugged her miserable husband.

While remembering
how very long ago her mother-in-law had died.
Even more surprised was Ainun at the frequency
of her husband's pathetic bouts of weeping.

Finally Rama told her.
"Ainun, the hour of my passing is in the hands of God.
My body already feels different.
The time of my demise will arrive soon, Ainun."

"Sir," Ainun said, shocked and scared.
"Don't say that!"

"I've been to the doctor, Ainun."

Ainun cried as she hugged her husband.
Rama also cried as he embraced his wife.

All this he would soon leave behind.
Imminently.

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That afternoon, Rama gathered his wife and two children.

Fifteen years ago, in 2006,
when Rama invaded the Ahmadiyya community in Ketapang,
Akbar was still 10 years old.
Rahmi was only 8 years old.

It was now 2021,
It didn't feel like fifteen years had passed by,
during which his two children had grown to adulthood.

After speaking bluntly about his dire health condition,
and each member of the family hugged the others and sobbed sadly,
Rama delivered his message.

"I would like to leave this world without carrying any burden.
Insha Allah, there is no financial debt to settle."

"But there's one thing that's been vexing me."
Before he could finish the sentence, Rama began bawling again.
His body quivered and shook.

Ainun once again hugged her husband,
crying too in a subdued voice.
Akbar and Rahmi were in tears
as they gazed at their parents from their sitting position.

"I want," continued Rama, "Mother, Akbar and Rahmi to represent me.
I would like you to visit the Ahmadiyya refugee camp
in Transito, Mataram."

"I don't have much money.
Give them what remains in my savings.
Twenty million rupiah.
Tell the community leader there
that I wish to donate this money to supplement their budget,
specifically to meet the educational needs of Ahmadiyya children."

"Don't forget to express that I apologize profusely
from the bottom of my heart."

Ainun, Akbar, and Rahmi looked at each other,
surprised by how much Rama had changed.

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Ainun, Akbar, and Rahmi visited the Transito refugee dormitory and met members of the Ahmadiyya community there. They exchanged greetings and blessings.

Ainun, Akbar, and Rahmi heard many stories.

“When I first moved here in 2006, the refugee facilities were minimal.”

Another chimed in:

“Each family was given a corner of a larger room.

The partitions that separated the families were election banners.

One was emblazoned with the red logo of Megawati’s PDI-P Party.

Another featured the yellow banner of the Golongan Karya Party.

As well as PKB.”⁽⁴³⁾

They laughed.

As if there was no sadness there.

“The average area of a family room is 8 × 4 meters.”

“In 2013, there was clear progress.

The partitions dividing the living spaces were changed from political party banners to non-partisan cloth.”

“In 2015, there was still more progress.

The cloth dividers were replaced by partitions made of real plywood.”

“Now we’re sleeping on beds,

Whereas in the past, our bedding was just cardboard.

At first our body ached.

It took a while to get used to sleeping on a real mattress”

“In the past, 800 Ahmadiyya adherents lived here,

but now only 120 Ahmadiyya residents remain.”

Akbar asked: “Is there any government assistance?”

A woman answered. “Yes, there is. Government assistance occasionally comes. It’s mostly for the elderly population.”

43 By 2021, Ahmadiyya refugees had celebrated Lebaran (Eid ul Fitr) 15 times at the Transito Dormitory in Mataram, West Nusa Tenggara. <https://www.cnnindonesia.com/nasional/20210513034534-20-642069/rindu-jemaat-ahmadiyah-15-kali-lebaran-di-pengungsian/>

Rahmi asked: "What kind of work do you do to support your family?"
A man replied: "We refugees work odd jobs. I'm an online motorcycle jockey. My neighbors do some trading in the market."

The woman explained again: "We don't know how long we will stay in the refugee dormitory. We attempt to make ourselves comfortable here. We try to improve the facilities here as much as we can."

"This is the 15th time we will celebrate Eid here at the refugee center."

Ainun asked: Don't you want to return to Ketapang, your hometown?"

The man answered in a loud and bitter voice. "That's what we want. Our land is there. Our pastures and rice fields are still there."

"Although our house was burned to the ground, it is still our land. I inherited that property from my family. Some Ahmadiyya here even bought their own land there. We have certificates of ownership."

"One Ahmadiyya man tried to return to Ketapang. He wanted to live there again. There were others who just wanted to go back and raise livestock like they did in the past."

"He had just erected a wall when he was quickly reprimanded by the authorities. Some brought their cattle to graze there again, but they left quickly. They were scared that they would be raided and attacked again."

"At first, living in a refugee camp was an especially miserable experience. Many were seriously depressed. Some almost lost their mind."

Ainun conveyed her husband's message.

"Please accept.
This is a donation from my husband.
My husband apologizes for everything he did.
I'm really ashamed to come here."

"But this is a mandate from my husband.
He is seriously ill.
He felt like he didn't have much time left.
My husband didn't want to face God with a burden in his soul."

Ainun cried.
The man, woman, and community leader were silent.
They were moved.

They accepted the donation.
Even if it was from a person who had attacked and evicted them.
This was an endowment from the heart.
From a person who was about to die.

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Ramadan was over, and Eid had arrived.
Takbir echoed in the sky throughout Mataram.
The holy vibrations spread, carried by the wind,
infiltrating and shaking the windows and doors of the house.

Rama was sitting in a wheelchair.
In the afternoon, he asked his family to take him.
Rama wanted to visit Transito.

There, Ahmadiyya followers were celebrating
their fifteenth Lebaran (Eid) at the refugee center.

Rama wanted to apologize once again for the violence he had done.
Rama's basic religious beliefs had not changed.
But his mood as he approached his last breath of life
had made him more aware.

He must be gentle in upholding religion.
Rama said to himself:

"There can be no coercion.
There can be no violence.
You can't act as judge and jury by yourself.
Now I have to atone for all my transgressions.
Before death comes."

It was still nighttime on the first day of Eid.
In the courtyard,

Rama asked the family to take down the wooden club,
the one he had previously been so fond and proud of.

The cudgel was now lying on the grass.
Rama soaked it with kerosene and incinerated it.
"Byaar!" It was burnt to a crisp.

Ainun, Akbar, and Rahmi were silent.
They let Rama do as he pleased.

In the middle of the night, Rama had another dream.
About the supernatural world.
About the size, length, and darkness of the tunnel.
About him being there.
About that light.
Oh, how quiet. How cool. How peaceful it was...

But something was different.
Rama no longer woke up from the dream.
Rama continued sleeping.
In an eternal slumber that would last forever.

August, 2022

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Mahama Decided Not To Seek Asylum In Australia

"Indonesia, we have always loved you since long ago. But do you love us as well?"

This was what Mahama was meditating. In the distance, he saw the red and white flag waving on Indonesia's Independence Day, August 17, 2021.

His family had been living there, in the Transito Dormitory, a dwelling complex set aside for local Ahmadiyya refugees in Mataram on the island of Lombok, NTB since 2006.

Fifteen years had elapsed since the Ahmadiyya community was violently driven out from their homes and land in Ketapang, West Lombok.

Mahama could not comprehend why his people had been forced to move.

All he knew was one thing:
They believed in the faith of Ahmadiyya.

Mahama heard the voice of Soekarno, the first President, resounding in the sky, transformed into bursts of lightning and thunder, resonating like an immense prayer in the clouds, shouting in a loud voice:

“The most essential manifestation of unity:
Indonesia exists for all its people!”

The leaves on the trees in the refugee camp sang a patriotic
song, Indonesia Tanah Airku.

The afternoon winds blew on the rocks scattered on the ground
in the encampment,
causing them to sing the National Anthem in unison like a choir:

“Indonesia raya, merdeka-merdeka.
Tanahku negriku, yang kucinta.”

“Great Indonesia, free and independent
The land of my native country that I love.”

“But,” Mahama contemplated, “Does Indonesia love us as well?”

“We too are Indonesian citizens. We too were born in this country.
But why have we been forced out from our hometown?”

“We too are Indonesian citizens. We grew up in this land,
yet why have we been compelled to live as refugees on our own island
for the past 15 years?”

“We too are Indonesian citizens. We were born here; we spent our entire
childhood here. Yet why are we not protected to practice the same
religious beliefs we inherited from our parents?”

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Mahama would never forget that event.
Ketapang, Lombok in 2006.
A large horde was shouting angrily, attacking his people,
and setting fire to their houses, while cursing them.⁽⁴⁴⁾

44 Most of the Ahmadiyya refugees at the Transito Dormitory (Mataram, Lombok) were people who had been forced out of their homes in Ketapang, West Lombok. <https://ntb.idntimes.com/news/ntb/amp/ahmad-viqi/15-tahun-di-transito-pengungsi-ahmadiyah-minta-perhatian-gubernur-ntb>

"Allahu Akbar.
Shedding the blood of these Ahmadiyya heretics is halal; it is condoned.
Their religious teachings are deviant.
Let's sweep them away.
Let's finish them off!
Attack!"

Mahama was just 10 years old at that time.
Mahama sobbed.
He screamed.
He was extremely frightened.
He yelled out in a loud voice:
Motherrr!!! Fatherrr!!!

Mahama could not understand
why these people would want to hurt his family.

He recalled that his father tried to resist them.
He did not want to be thrown out of his own home.
"We are also citizens here!
This is our land.
Our ancestors lived here long before yours arrived!"

But the marauders shouted even louder:
"Hey, deviant heretic.
Your folks are like poison here.
Our town is contaminated,
It has become cursed
because of you."

Mahama's frail grandmother collapsed.
She nearly fainted.
Grandma asked Father to relent and leave, perhaps only temporarily...
To avert the threat of violence.

These were the initial circumstances that forced them to leave and move
to a transit dormitory for refugees in Mataram.

There in Transito, approximately 800 Ahmadiyah were settled.
They lived in cramped housing, only 10 square meters per family.

The dividing partitions separating Ahmadiyya households were originally cardboard or billboards with photos of political candidates left over from the elections.

These hapless refugees were initially assured that they would only reside there temporarily. The perpetrators of the Ketapang riots would be arrested. And Ahmadiyya families would be allowed to return to their old homes in West Lombok.

Their hearts blossomed with hope.
"Alhamdulillah,
God is not slumbering.
The authorities are working on our behalf."

Yet 15 years had elapsed.
And they were still in limbo.

Mahama stared once again at the red and white flag that was still fluttering in the breeze that afternoon.

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By now, Mahama was already 25 years old.
He was fortunate that his uncle had defrayed
his college tuition in Jakarta.

He had graduated and was now working in the capital city.
Now and then, he would travel to Lombok to visit his mother
and siblings, whom he greatly missed.

Mahama's father had already passed away after
living with a heavy heart.
And his grandmother had died even sooner.
Suffering made them age and die prematurely.

One evening as he sat on the veranda, Mahama looked
out at the sky and inquired,
"Is there anything truly wrong or deficient with us?"

“Aren’t we all the same at our inception?
We all start out as infants
We don’t choose who our parents will be.
God makes that decision.”

A baby whose parents are Muslims will be brought up in the Islamic faith.
A baby whose parents are Christians will be brought
up in the Christian faith.
A baby whose parents are Hindu will be brought up in the Hindu religion.

It is merely coincidental that if we have Muslim parents,
whose understanding of Islam reflects Ahmadiyya teachings,
we will be inculcated with the Ahmadiyya faith.
What is wrong with that?”

“Aren’t we all the same when we are born?”

Muslim parents will teach their children the tenets of Islam.
Christian parents will teach their children the tenets of Christianity.
Hindu parents will teach their children the tenets of Hinduism.
Ahmadiyya parents will likewise teach their children the tenets of Islam
but the principles of Ahmadiyya.

Can’t religious teachings differ from each other?
Christians believe that Jesus was crucified and
that he died on the cross.
But Muslims do not believe that.
So it is possible for religions to disagree and still coexist.

Muslims and Jews do not eat pork.
But Christians do not observe this prohibition.
So it is possible for religions to agree or disagree on the same issue.

Muslims believe that God commanded them to face Mecca when
praying, yet the Buddhist religion has no such concept.

Buddhists do not have daily prayer services.
They meditate.
And they do not face a certain direction when meditating.
Yet these differences between religions are respected and condoned.

“Why then aren’t we permitted to believe in the tenets of Islam while observing the principles of Ahmaddiya?”

Mahama posed this question to himself repeatedly.

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“I love Indonesia,” Mahama asserted.

“Because of that, I’m not going to request asylum in Australia.”

Mahama still remembered that occasion.

It was May 15, 2008.

At the Australia Consulate office on Jalan Mpu Tantular Road in Denpasar, Bali.

A group of Ahmadiyya people from the Mataram transit dormitory had gathered there in the neighboring island of Bali.

They wanted to emigrate to Australia.

They requested asylum.

They wanted to fly to Australia and stay there.

They were accompanied by an LBH Bali activist.

He represented the Freedom Alliance for Tolerance.

Thirteen members of the Lombok Ahmadiyya community attended.

They represented 138 other members who were considering asylum abroad. ⁽⁴⁵⁾

All of the people who sought asylum came from the dormitory.

Yes, the Transito dormitory that housed the Ahmadiyya refugees in Mataram.

An Ahmadiyya spokesman said: “We are not keeping anyone from going. Threats and intimidation have come repeatedly.”

Another figure from the Ahmadiyya community chimed in:

“Seeking asylum in Australia has become a practical option.

45 A large group of displaced Ahmadiyya people requested asylum in Australia. <https://m.liputan6.com/news/read/3966067/rencana-eksodus-jemaah-ahmadiyah-ke-australia-11-tahun-silam>

Since we are not protected in our own country,
shedding our blood is now considered halal or sanctioned.”

Mahama and his father were invited to join others seeking asylum
in Australia. However, Mahama’s father was not ready to do so.
Mahama took the same stance as his father.
Neither of them was interested in leaving Indonesia
despite the persecution.

When Mahama was already an adult, his father told him:
“Our forebears in Indonesia joined Ahmadiyya in 1925.”⁽⁴⁶⁾

“Your great-grandfather fought for Indonesian independence.
Alongside Soekarno, alongside Hatta, alongside Sjahrir.”

“In the previous century, our lives were peaceful.
Our religious faith was protected.
Things only became problematic in 2006
after a fatwa was issued against us.”

“Son,” Father said.
Your great-grandfather, Grandfather, Father,
and you were all born in this country.
We should also be buried here. Don’t ever abandon this country.
We too belong to this tropical archipelago.”

“Some local thugs expelled us. But they do not represent Indonesia.
Don’t let this weaken your love for Indonesia.”

Mahama was stunned.
He hadn’t realized the depth of his father’s passion for Indonesia.
But Father was disappointed and frustrated.
He suffered terribly later on.
He became severely depressed.

Father exerted efforts to lobby support,
but the local government would not accede
Their land in Ketapang was left to lie fallow.
Their houses had been demolished and razed to the ground.

46 Ahmadiyya people have been living in Indonesia since 1925. <https://www.kompas.com/stori/read/2021/11/25/120000779/sejarah-ahmadiyah-di-indonesia?amp=1&page=2>

They were forbidden to return to Ketapang.
The excuse was that this was for their own safety:
“You could all die if you returned.”

The civil authorities frightened and intimidated them.
All the time.

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In 2013, Mahama was still attending college in Jakarta.
“Oh Zayda, you are so beautiful.”
Mahama had fallen in love.

Zayda was the cure for his wounds.
If Mahama was a honeybee, Zayda was a flower.
If Zayda was a honeybee, Mahama was her hive.

When Zayda became quite ill
and needed to spend a week in hospital,
Mahama visited her each day.
In the evening, Mahama was willing to rest on a sofa.
With his legs stretched out.

Zayda would occasionally wake up in the middle of the night.
And Mahama would also wake up to be with her.
It made Zayda feel relaxed and assured when
she saw Mahama there, always accompanying her.

They eventually made plans to get married.
Mahama’s future in-laws really liked him.

However, the news finally arrived.
Zayda’s parents found out.
“Oh my God, Mahama is Ahmadiyya!”
Zayda was forbidden to meet him again.
The jackfruit tree had changed color.

“Let’s just elope and run away, Mahama.
Take me with you,” Zayda demanded.

“I generally respect my parents.
But I don’t approve of their stance.
Their whole attitude has changed just because you are Ahmadiyya.”

“Oh Zayda, my darling.
I would certainly like to elope with you.
But I know
that you would suffer.
I don’t want to separate you from your parents.”

Zayda sobbed while embracing Mahama.
Mahama’s heart wept in even greater despair.

“I thought that being a refugee in one’s own country would
be the peak of misery.
But being forced to separate from one’s soulmate is an even
higher pinnacle of despair.

The moon was shedding tears.
Roses in the garden were crooning a sad song.
The wind was telling a tragic tale of squandered romance.

Mahama became quiet again as he searched for an answer.
How could it be that just because he belonged to the Ahmadiyya sect,
the love of his life had been forfeited.
How could this happen in modern Indonesia?

That afternoon on August 17, 2021.
Mahama stared intently at the red and white flag.

He spoke directly to the flag,
which was waving proudly In the breeze:

“I love you, Indonesia.
But do you truly love me, too?
Are you willing to defend and protect my people, too?”

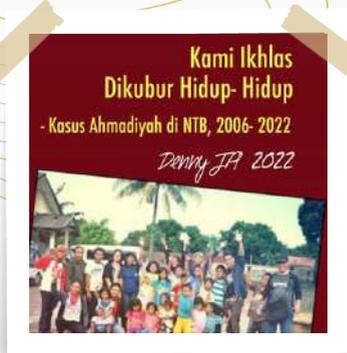
The flag did not respond.
The sky turned gray, and a pounding torrential rain descended.
But the pain that surged in Mahama's heart was even more intense.

August, 2022

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We are Sincerely Ready to be Buried Alive

One sad afternoon
in August, 2022.
Shortly before Indonesia's Independence Day...

The wind wrestled with the trees.
It sought to escape, to be free, and return to the clouds.

Birds rebelled within the confines of their cages.
They too wanted to fly freely back to their nest.

Majdi, a TV reporter, sat in a pensive mood.
In Wisma Transito, Mataram.
On Lombok Island, West Nusa Tenggara.

He was affected by the turbulence.
He felt the pent-up inner screams of the Transito residents.
Their desire to be free.
To return to Ketapang Village,
their hometown on the same island.

For sixteen years already,
they were compelled or forced,
to live in a refugee camp.

For sixteen years already.
They were urged or goaded
not to return to their own land in nearby Ketapang.
They were forbidden to return to the place where they were born.

They couldn't live in the village where they had been raised.
Although they too were Indonesian citizens.
Indeed, they had been Indonesians for many generations.

He read the document again.
A certain quote struck him.
It stomped on him. It hit him very hard.

"If we are considered to have defiled Islam,
You may throw us into prison.

"We Ahmadi residents, refugees, men, women, old, young,
even children, are all willing, physically and mentally, and in all sincerity,
to be incarcerated.

"If there is absolutely no place for us in your prison,
then dear mayor, please dig graves for us.

"We, Ahmadiyya refugees, Indonesians who have been driven from our
own homes and land, men, women, old, young, and even children,
are sincerely ready to be buried alive."⁽⁴⁷⁾

Majdi saved this text
as relevant research material for his TV report.

The editor had given him an assignment.
"Majdi, Independence Day is coming, and
we would like you to investigate a critical issue."

In response to Majdi's idea,
the editor sent a screenshot via his private WA.
The text from the lead editor nearly shouted out at him:

"There is nothing more ironic than this story, Majdi.
These Indonesian citizens have become long-term refugees

47 D Johan Effendi interviewed members of the Ahmadiyya community and expressed their essential thoughts in writing. <http://theahmadiyya.blogspot.com/2011/09/surat-djohan-effendi-untuk-petinggi.html?m=1>

in their own country. From 2006 through 2022.
For sixteen years already.”

Another message from the Lead Editor:

“Find the cause.

Conduct research. Explore.

Highlight the humanistic message.

That’s our special talent.

This Republic is now celebrating 77 years of independence.”

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Majdi wanted to understand:

What provoked public animosity in Lombok toward Ahmadiyya?

To the extent that Ahmadiyya adherents were driven out

from land they had lived on for many generations and

were prohibited by local Sasak Muslims from returning to their homes.

Instead, they were forced to seek refuge in a “transit” dormitory.

In 2005,

a year before Ahmadiyya residents were expelled from

their village in Ketapang,

The Majelis Ulama Indonesia (MUI) issued a fatwa (decree):

“Ahmadiyya religious teachings are misguided and heretical!”

MUI exclaimed:

“Ahmadiyya preaches deviant principles

that lie outside traditional Islam.

This unorthodox sect must be disbanded.

The differences between Ahmadiyya theology and mainstream

Sunni Islam can neither be reconciled nor tolerated. “⁽⁴⁸⁾

Three years later,

an official government policy was promulgated,

The Joint Decree of 2008,

48 The 2005 MUI fatwa (religious decree) regarding the Ahmadiyya faith: <https://news.detik.com/berita/d-412058/mui-kembali-fatwakan-ahmadiyah-sebagai-aliran-sesat>

which was signed by the Indonesian Minister of Religion, the Minister of Home Affairs, and the Attorney General. ⁽⁴⁹⁾

The contents of this decree triggered even greater hostility. “Give a warning and order to adherents and administrators of the Indonesian Ahmadiyya congregation.”

“To the extent that they claim to be members of the Muslim community, they must stop proselytizing and spreading their particular faith. They must also stop preaching religious interpretations that deviate considerably from mainstream Sunni teachings.

“It is the spread of a deviant ideology that acknowledges the existence of a latter-day prophet, thus superseding the Prophet Muhammad.”

Majdi frowned. The ministers were government representatives. Why should they be involved in adopting a certain stance concerning differences in religious understanding within Indonesian society?

What should the benchmark be for determining the extent to which differences between religions can be tolerated?

Isn't belief in a supreme deity the most important thing? Yet different concepts of God can apparently be tolerated.”

“Islam states that God commanded Muslims to face Mecca when praying. Followers of other religions do not believe in that commandment.”

“When they pray, they don't care about the Qibla. They have a different image of God, and they use different religious texts and liturgy.”

Yet this can be tolerated.

49 The 2008 ministerial announcement (SKB No 3, 2008) by three high-level Indonesian government officials concerning Ahmadiyya: <http://ahmadiyah.org/skb-3-menteri-tentang-ahmadiyah/>

And the government does not interfere regarding which beliefs are right. The government generally does not prohibit Indonesians from believing in competing mainstream religions.

Christianity states Jesus died on the cross.

While Islam assigns Jesus the status of a prophet born of a virgin, Islam does not believe that Jesus was crucified.

Yet this too could be tolerated.

What Muslims believe about Jesus is not considered blasphemous by Indonesia's Christian community.

In the Old Testament, it is clear that the Prophet Abraham was commanded to sacrifice his son, Isaac.

However, modern Muslims believe that the son who was intended for sacrifice was Ishmael, Abraham's son by his wife's handmaiden, Hagar.

What would happen if government intervened and mandated as official policy the belief that the son in the biblical story was Isaac? Or Ishmael? In that case, certain "non-standard" beliefs would be prohibited.

Hasn't Ahmadiyya existed in Indonesia for a century since 1925?

And now, Ahmadiyya adherents exist worldwide, living in 200 countries.

Why was it only in the post-Reformasi era that freedoms that Ahmadiyya previously enjoyed were curbed by a joint decree of 3 ministers?"

Majdi confirmed this. He wanted to make an accurate, balanced report.

He tried to disprove his personal line of thinking.

Majdi began again:

"Weren't there as many as 4200 faiths in the world?

The trend was clearly in the direction of greater diversity in society.

"What happens when the government doesn't protect everyone equally?" Majdi muttered.

"The state must allow religion to be the domain of society.

The state must condone the unrestrained interpretation of religion as it applies to community affairs.

The state must neither interfere in nor demonstrate preferential treatment for any religious interpretation at the expense of another.

Countries normally prohibit and restrict: violence, coercion, and crime.

Belief in a certain understanding of religion should not be a criminal act.

“Ah,” complained Majdi. “It is difficult for me to balance and differentiate data and facts.”

“My belief in human rights is my choice. Does this make me biased?”

Majdi wanted to be somewhat self-critical.

“I could be more neutral...”

But should I be neutral for an issue that is as important as this? Should I adopt a neutral stance for fundamental matters that involve the rights of citizens?”

This inner conflict also confused Majdi.

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However, when these rights pertained to the welfare of children, Majdi was neither confused nor hesitant.

Regarding the condition of the Ahmadiyya children at the refugee dorm, Majdi never doubted his stance.

Ahmadiyya children were born and grew up at the refugee center. On the other hand, their parents had grown up in their hometown.

The children’s playground facilities were limited and inadequate.

This was also true about their food.

About their health.

About their education.

They were all inadequate.

Majdi was adamant:

"I will write a report.

I will make the mistreatment of Indonesian Ahmadiyya children the main subject.

I will prioritize the deliberate neglect of their growth, body and soul.

Particularly the lack of a healthy environment in which to grow up in."

Majdi looked at the amount of savings in his online account.

He decided to donate some of his savings to meet the needs of educating the children who were living at the refugee dormitory.

Majdi gathered the children.

"I'd like to treat you to dinner. What would you like to eat?"

Majdi was rather surprised by their answer.

Most of the children asked for Kentucky Fried Chicken.

They had seen it advertised on TV.

That afternoon, Majdi visited Mataram's main street.

He brought back some Kentucky Fried Chicken.

Later, as he watched the children eating at the refugee center, he thought of his own children.

Majdi's children were 7 and 10 years old.

They were similar in age to these Ahmadiyya children.

Majdi remembered a recent argument with his wife:

"You're always busy, too busy with your work.

With your TV reporting."

"When can you spend some time with our children?"

"When Rafa celebrated his 10th birthday, you were not at home."

"Dava participated in a play on the school stage; you were not present."

"They also need their father."

Majdi was silent.

The Ahmadiyya children at this refugee center were really something.

They amplified his role as a father, which he had tragically neglected.

In his heart, Majdi called out to his own children.
"Rafa and Dava,
Forgive your father."

"Dad hasn't spent enough time with you.
But Dad really loves you."

Majdi would ask permission from the leader of the local community.
He wanted to climb a mango tree he had seen near the Transito dorm.
Majdi wanted to pick two mangoes, one for each of his children.

He would tell his sons.
"This is not from the supermarket.
Your father climbed the tree himself.
From the original tree in the town of Mataram."

Returning home from his visit to Transito,
Majdi wanted to hug his two children.
He wanted to hug them deeply.
Passionately.

August, 2022

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Welcome Suffering As Though It Were An Honored Guest

The moon wept in the town of Mataram
one night in 2021 on Lombok Island, West Nusa Tenggara.

The leaves had lost their stems.
The branches had lost their trunk.
And the trunk had lost its roots.

In that room, Arum's tears kept flowing.
It was 1:00 in the early morning.
The third day following the death of her beloved husband, Natan.

She saw the framed work of poetry still hanging on the wall.
It was a gift from her husband a week before their marriage.
Just three years ago. She read it again and again:

"Welcome suffering
as you would welcome a supreme guest.
Because it bestows the message of God.
For your spiritual growth." Jalaluddin Rumi.

"For my beloved future wife, Arum."
2018.
Natan

She glanced at the handwriting.
She touched the ink.
She wanted to feel the vibrations that remained there.
The vibration of Natan's hand when he wrote the inscription.

Arum recalled the day when she first met Natan.

But suddenly Arum's feet began to shake.
She felt too weak to stand up,
so she lay down and recalled
the previous 15 years of her life.

The incident in Ketapang, Lombok in 2006 still left scars.
Trauma. Gaping psychological wounds.

The room felt as though it were spinning.
The ceiling spun 90 degrees and became a wall; it spun again and
became a floor, then a wall, and finally reverted to a ceiling again.

Arum patted her cheeks.
She wanted to make sure this was truly happening.

The disruption returned:
The sound of marauders.
Of self-righteous wrath:
"Hey, you heretics.
Ahmadiyya.
You bastards!
Get out of our village!"

Others shouted in reply:
"Just kill the Ahmadiyya.
Shedding their blood is condoned and consecrated."

The sound of the blows.
The sound of crackling flames.
Curses. Threats.

Mixed with screams, wailing, and weeping.
The trees shook anxiously.

At that time, Arum was only 14 years old.
She was scared to death.
The horde had set her house on fire.
The house belonging to her neighbor, a fellow Ahmadiyya,
was pillaged and torn down.

Arum saw her father being beaten with a wooden club.
He was bleeding badly.
"Fatherrr." Arum shouted loudly, hugging her father.

Arum broke down and shouted at them:
"We are not to blame!
Why are you so cruel?"
That man rebuked her. He used very coarse language:
"Your people are like poison.
Our village is unfortunate.
Due to your sacrilegious teachings."

A hard blow hit Arum's head.
Arum fainted.
She didn't remember anything else.

When she regained consciousness,
Arum was with her family,
along with 800 other members of the Ahmadiyya community.
They had already been evacuated.
Father said that Arum had remained unconscious all day.

They were now living in Transito, a refugee camp, in Mataram, Lombok.

Arum's world had changed.

This is where Arum became acquainted with Natan.

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Arum attended a new school in Mataram alongside local residents.

Arum didn't understand. Why did the teacher hate her?
Arum's seat in class was separate from the other students.
The teacher said, "That is a seat for an Ahmadiyya child."⁽⁵⁰⁾
Her classmates laughed. They jeered and mocked her.

After school, Arum would walk back to the transit dormitory.
When she passed a neighborhood, someone might pelt her with a small stone. Or she risked being cursed:
"Hey, infidel child. The child of heretics!"

During school recess, she went to the schoolyard.
Arum wanted to make friends and play with students who were the same age.
But she was always rebuked:
"Hey, misguided person.
Stay over there.
Don't get close to us."

That's when Arum met Natan,
He was one of the oldest students, and he had a robust body.
He was an expert in karate and was thus feared by his peers.
Three students had once ganged up on Natan,
but he fended them off and defeated them handily.

That afternoon Arum cried in the schoolyard.
She didn't understand what was wrong.
She never hurt or attacked anyone.
She never talked back at those who scolded her.
She just wanted to have friends
like any other teenager would.

One day, a particularly rude schoolboy approached Arum
and spat at her.
Natan came quickly and punched him.
"You are so rude to a girl. Now you can face me," he shouted.
They fought. They hit each other.

50 Displaced Ahmadiyya children at the Mataram Transit Dormitory suffer from discrimination and lack of birth certificates and other official documents. https://www.bbc.com/indonesia/berita_indonesia/2013/08/130802_anak_ahmadiyah

It went on for several minutes.
Until a teacher interceded and broke up their fight.

Both students were punished.
The teacher told them to wait outside in the schoolyard
until class was over for the day.

After that, Arum became close to Natan.
Every day when they went home from school,
Natan escorted Arum home to the refugee dormitory.
Natan made sure that no one would hurt Arum on her way home.

It once happened that a man threw a stick at Arum.
Natan responded by beating the man with the same stick.

As a result, Natan acquired many enemies.
He was derided as a defender of heretics and apostates.

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Natan was not a follower of the Ahmadiyya sect.
He was a mainstream Sunni Muslim.
His father was a Muslim cleric.

But unlike most of the local people in Mataram, Natan was friendly.
He often visited the refugee camp.
He would chat with Arum's father.
For ten years, Natan had been friends with Arum.
Arum often told him stories about the trouble they encountered.

Babies born in refugee camps had difficulty getting birth certificates.
Many Ahmadiyah residents found it difficult to get ID cards.
Due to a problem with the "religion column".

"We are Ahmadiyya, but our religion is Islam." Arum said.

"So why do they refuse to include "Islam" in our ID card religion status?
According to an officer,
Ahmadiyya is not recognized as a legitimate form of Islam.
As a result, most of us cannot obtain an ID card."

Without government documents,
Ahmadiyya children had trouble getting enrolled in public school.

“What kind of future will Ahmadiyya children have if they can’t attend school?” Arum complained.

Natan often helped. He once arranged the registration of ID cards for Ahmadiyya people.

He also helped with official birth certificates for Ahmadiyya babies.

Natan was able to arrange these government documents because his father had many connections.

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Arum’s father once asked. “Natan, what makes you different? Why are you helping us Ahmadiyya?”

Natan told him about his father.
His father used to live in Wonosobo, Central Java.
There, adherents of mainstream Sunni Islam and Ahmadiyya coexisted in harmony. ⁽⁵¹⁾

Natan said: “There is the Baitul Islam Mosque.
A mosque with large green window frames.
Measuring 6 × 10 meters.

“The mosque stands in the foothills of Mount Pakuwojo.

“That is the mosque of the Ahmadiyya congregation.
They are residents of Wonosari hamlet.
Wonokampir village.
Watumalang District.

51 In Wonosobo, Central Java, adherents of the Ahmadiyya sect and followers of mainstream Sunni Islam cooperate and get along well with each other. https://www.kompasiana.com/amp/katedrarajawen/mengapa-syah-ahmadiyah-nu-dan-lainnya-bisa-damai-di-wonosobo_5528cb846ea83424518b4599

“What is special is that only 100 meters from the Baitul Islam Mosque stands the Baitul Huda Mosque.
That is a mainstream Nahdlatul Ulama mosque.

“These two mosques are nearly side by side.
But the proximity of the two mosques is symbolic.
More important is the closeness of Ahmadiyya and NU residents who live side by side.
They manage to live in peace there in Wonosobo.

“They conduct many activities together.
Service for the general community.
Funeral services. When people die, they visit each other and help arrange the burial together, NU and Ahmadiyya.

“Prior to wedding ceremonies, NU figures arrange the nuptials for receiving wedding gifts from Ahmadiyya figures. And vice-versa.

“Mubalik Ahmadiyya participated in arranging the school curriculum.
At the annual meeting, Ahmadiyya invited the Chairman of NU and the Chairman of Ansor Wonosobo.”

Arum was stunned.

She asked: “Natan, what makes Wonosobo so different?
Why are they able to get along with Ahmadiyya there?”

Natan said, “that’s due to the gracious and resolute attitude of the Wonosobo Regent.”

“The Regent of Wonosobo is a wonderful leader.
He invigorates the principle of tolerance.
And he is also willing to take risks.⁽⁵²⁾

“The Regent created a forum within Wonosobo districts to streamline and enhance religious communication.

52 The Regent of Wonosobo has steadfastly defended the civil and religious rights of Ahmadiyya residents. <https://nasional.tempo.co/amp/506151/cara-bupati-wonosobo-kholiq-redam-konflik-agama>

“Whatever the religion may be
Whatever the particular religious faith
and beliefs may be...
Let’s sit together and
discuss solutions.

“Tolerance is discussed there.
And pumped from there.”

Natan said, “My father is a close friend of the Wonosobo Regent.
I was taught by my father to be brave and defend the religious rights
of minorities.”

Arum complained:
“Why is it so different in Ketapang as well as here in Mataram?
Many teachers discriminate against us.
Many local government officials remain silent when our people are
confronted with prejudice and violence.”

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Natan was not only great at fighting.
He also read a lot.
He enjoyed writing poetry.
In conversations, Natan often quoted the aphorisms of Jalaluddin Rumi.

Arum and Natan finally got married.
That was a very beautiful moment for Arum.
The sky was full of fruit and flowers.

Natan gave Arum a famous Rumi quote:
“Welcome mourning as a great guest.
It carries God’s message.”

In most situations, Arum agreed with the quote.
The suffering of being discriminated against
had generally made Arum stronger.

Arum met many charitable donors,
and she helped arrange schooling for Ahmadiyya children.
However, Rumi's quote didn't apply in one case:
Natan's death.
This was a totally different affliction.

That year, in 2021,
Natan was exposed to Covid-19.
And he died.

Arum cried.
She protested.

She asked God to turn back the hands of time.
So that she could see Natan again.

Arum shouted in her heart:
"God, what you took from me
was not merely my husband.
He was the stems for my leaves.
He was the trunk for my branches.
He was the roots of my trunk."

"I cannot accept this suffering,
the terrible pain of my husband's death,
as an honored guest.

"No, God. No!
My husband's death is not a supreme guest."

"The sun of my life has set."

Arum just kept on wailing.

That night, in the city of Mataram,
the moon wept.

But it was not just the moon that cried.

August, 2022.

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Sorcery In The Glaring Gaze Of An Old Woman

Stunned, Baka woke up.

He sat up in bed.

It was only 3:00 in the morning.

Repeatedly,

The same dream had awakened him.

The old woman's glaring stare...

Her eyes, her face, and her ominous words:
"This supernatural power will transform you!"

Ancient energy filled the room.
Silence that magically radiated from walls, lights, windows, and doors.

Baka remained silent.
He had already prayed earlier that night.
He begged forgiveness for his transgressions
while requesting divine guidance.

He wanted to know the meaning of this dream
that haunted him,
that intruded on his sleep night after night.

Events in Ketapang, West Lombok, NTB, one afternoon in 2006,
just a few weeks earlier came back to him. ⁽⁵³⁾

His room became a big screen.
His head became a projector.
Various images, events, and emotions were projected.

Baka along with dozens of local residents had invaded
and attacked a local Ahmadiyya community.

“Hey, your teachings are heresy.
Go far away from here.
Your blood is halal.
Allahu Akbar!”

The sound of blows, curses, crying, echoing in the past.
Also the sound of fire that crackled as it burned down dwellings.
And the frightened screams of Ahmadiyya children.

Glass windows were shattered. Houses were pillaged and ransacked.
Furniture was smashed and overturned.

Baka was twenty years old.
Self-righteous anger from the sky pervaded his spirit and body.
With a wooden club in his hand,
he attacked Ahmadiyya people.
Without mercy.

His wooden club struck out at anyone who was there.
Baka knocked over a dining table in a house,
He threw a chair through a glass window.

Baka entered a room.
He overturned a heavy cupboard until it fell.
Baka was unaware

53 Information regarding the forced evacuation of Ahmadiyya people from their homes and land in Ketapang, West Lombok, NTB: <https://liputan6.com/news/read/117680/nasib-pahit-jemaat-ahmadiyah>

that the cupboard had fallen on an old woman, the owner of the house. The old woman's legs were badly injured by the impact of the cupboard falling on her body.

Baka held the wooden club and readied it to strike a blow at whoever was lying on the floor. With a bloody face, the old woman gazed at Baka. The light in her eyes was very sharp. There was sorcery there.

The old woman spoke in a strange, deep, and low voice: "The supernatural power will transform you! Now leave here at once!"

The movement of Baka's hand that was about to hit the woman's head was magically restrained. Baka became still and silent. It was as though time had frozen. Baka was stunned.

An electric current stung his body. Baka and the old woman became locked in an exchange of stares for quite some time.

In his confusion, Baka turned around and ran out of the woman's house. A horde of marauders was still busy destroying Ahmadiyya dwellings.

On his way home, Baka was stunned again. Something strange had entered his heart.

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Fifteen years had flown swiftly by. Baka was now living in Jakarta. He had become a successful businessman. He had amassed a large sum of money.

But the glaring gaze of the old woman still encroached, often through dreams.

Sometimes her stare flashed in his mind
when Baka was quietly praying or working.

Baka inquired and found out
that the old woman was still alive,
but her legs were paralyzed due to a cupboard falling on her.

Baka also heard that the old woman was a religious teacher.
She could treat sick people.
Many people sought her advice and took it seriously.
Her tongue became harsh because her prophetic
words often came true.

Baka experienced a peculiar sense of regret.
He became apprehensive
concerning what ominous fate might befall him.

Baka read again on the internet:
Persecution of Ahmadiyya ⁽⁵⁴⁾
from 2004 to 2014
resulted in the forced closure of at least 30 Ahmadiyya mosques.

In 2008 alone, there were 193 documented attacks on Ahmadiyya in
various corners of the country.

In 2011, Ahmadiyya people in Cikeusik, Pandeglang, Banten Province
were persecuted.
Some Ahmadiyya died during the brutal violence in the village.

The local government in Kuningan, West Java unsympathetically
demanded that Ahmadiyya abandon their “heretical beliefs”
if they wanted to obtain a KTP, an Indonesian identity card.

On Bangka Island,
Ahmadiyya residents were asked to convert to Sunni Islam
if they wanted to avoid being expelled from their village.

Baka started to recall the events of 2006.
He had been living in Ketapang on the island of Lombok.

54 Information on various forms of persecution that displaced Ahmadiyya people have
suffered in Lombok, NTB: <https://www.vice.com/id/article/mb7ex3/jalan-tak-ada-ujung-pengungsi-ahmadiyah-di-lombok>

He had participated in a brutal attack on Ahmadiyya villagers.
800 Ahmadiyah residents were expelled from their land.
They were forced to live in a transit dormitory in Mataram.

Fifteen years had gone by,
but the Ahmadiyya community were still refugees
on their own island.

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Baka had indeed changed.
He had chosen a more gentle religious path
He refrained from any further violence.
He no longer supported any form of religious coercion.

Yet he still felt something obstructing him:
the glaring eyes of that old woman.

Baka had become a successful businessman.
He was involved in diverse business ventures,
including an Umroh travel agency, hotels, and mining.

But something was still haunting him:
the glaring gaze of that old woman.

Baka often donated to charities.
He had helped many people.
He believed that his fortune came from God.
He considered it as a deposit, a means to compensate
by assisting less fortunate people in society.

But he always felt a pebble in his shoe.
the way that woman had stared at him many years ago.

Baka searched for a solution.
He did not want to be haunted any longer by her angry glare.

He sought advice from a clairvoyant who was known for his wisdom.
Many called him their Guru, their teacher.

“What should I do, dear Guru?”

“The way that old woman stared at me has been torturing me from then until now.

Her angry gaze has been following me for the past 15 years.”

The clairvoyant invited Baka to pray together while clutching Baka's head in his hands.

Baka began to cry.

He wept very hard.

His whole body shook and quivered.

Deep within.

Slowly, Baka exclaimed: “Please have mercy!”

“What vision was revealed to you?,” inquired the psychic.

Baka replied while weeping, as he tried to hold back the tears.

“I saw scores of Ahmadiyya children.

They are stranded at the Transito refugee dormitory in Mataram.”⁽⁵⁵⁾

“I also saw myself there.

I was participating in ruining the lives of those children.”

The psychic asked Baka to stop sobbing.

“Listen, Baka,” he said.

“This is the path you must take if you truly wish to cleanse your soul:”

“Seek out stranded Ahmadiyya children.

Wherever they may be.”

“Help them by paying for their education.

So they have a chance to grow up and lead independent lives.

Do this with a willing heart.”

“But don't do anything to hinder their religious identity.

Let them grow up practicing their Ahmadiyya faith,

the religious heritage that their parents bequeathed to them.”

55 The Ahmadiyya community of West Lombok, NTB has been forced to live in a “refugee transit dormitory” in Mataram for the past 15 years. <https://projectmultatuli.org/cerita-jemaat-ahmadiyah-di-lombok-yang-diusir-dan-masih-mengungsi-selama-15-tahun-di-asrama-transito-kota-mataram/>

“This is the only way you can heal your deep inner wounds.”

Baka’s inner self split in two.
The old Baka
battled with the new Baka.
“Must I really do what he said?”

Baka meditated on this decision for quite a while.
The glaring stare of the old woman continued to haunt him.
And he still heard her ominous pronouncement:
The supernatural world will transform you!”

Baka assembled five employees.
He asked them to work in a concealed and quiet manner.
It was imperative that Baka’s own family not find out.

The five workers were each instructed to seek five Ahmadiyya children,
Wherever they might find them.
And to treat them as foster children.
Their school tuition and living expenses would be paid by Baka
Until each Ahmadiyya child grew up to become a successful adult.

“And these children should not be made aware
that I am financing all their expenses,” Baka requested.

A year went swiftly by...
Baka peered at his face in the mirror.
Many years ago, he had pillaged Ahmadiyya dwellings.
He had assaulted Ahmadiyya people with a wooden club.
But now he was surreptitiously funding
the education of Ahmadiyya children.

Baka was currently enabling Ahmadiyya children to grow up
with an appreciation of their particular religious principles.

Baka recalled once again
the dark stare of that old woman.
And her ominous words:
“The supernatural world will transform you!”

“Yes. Yes, it’s true.
The supernatural world has indeed changed me,”
Baka mumbled in awe.

A year had gone by already.
And the old woman’s stare no longer haunted him like it had before.

August, 2022

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#PuisiEsaiMini This Mini Essay Poem is an excerpt from the new book, **Screams Following Liberation**, which will be published in the near future (Denny JA, 2022).

Screams Following Liberation is an anthology of stories that express the nature of primordial conflicts that raged during the Post-Suharto Reformation Era: The Sectarian Conflict in Maluku (1999-2002), Interethnic Violence in Sampit, Central Kalimantan (2001), Interethnic Conflict in Jakarta (May, 1998), Anti-Ahmadiyya sectarian violence in West Lombok (2002-2017), and the conflict between newcomers and aboriginal communities in Lampung, South Sumatra (2012).



**MALUKU SECTARIAN
CONFLICT (1999-2002)**



The Pastor's Turning Point And The Crazy Bamboo

The pastor woke once again from his slumber.
It was 2:00 in the early morning.
The pastor couldn't sleep soundly.
It had been like this for a week already.
He had awakened two or three times each night.

Once again he recited a prayer:
"I'm sorry, Lord.
If my actions were wrong,
Thou canst judge me.
I accept everything.
Guide me to walk in the right path."

Feelings of regret hung high in the ceiling of the room.
A strong sense of self-reproach stuck to the light bulb, the
window panes,
and the walls of the room.
The pastor's tears flowed down to the floor tiles.

The news hit him.
Very hard.

A whole Muslim family in Maluku, as many as six people, had just been slaughtered. ⁽⁵⁶⁾

Indeed, thousands of victims had died.
The conflict in Maluku had become insane.
The bloody conflict between the Christian and Muslim militias had transformed fighters into a pack of hungry tigers.
They preyed upon anyone who did not belong to their fold.
However, the slaughter of an entire Muslim family, a couple and their four children, was the peak of insanity.

It had been quietly rumored that the perpetrators of this barbaric act belonged to a small Christian group that called themselves “The Roses”. This group had visited the pastor a week earlier.
They spoke to him with tears in their eyes. “Reverend Robert, the Muslim Jihad militia killed my father. Even though he was an elderly man. They are so cruel. My mother is traumatized. She has remained silent, she can’t speak.”
Another said his uncle had been slashed to death with a machete while walking down the road. Another stated that his child had been shot in the head. A church had been gutted with fire.
They were scared and insecure. The pastor reassured them. He fortified their faith. They prayed together. The pastor said: “Protecting oneself, defending religion, and strengthening the church are righteous deeds in a holy war.”

The pastor gave directions.
“Contact this man.
He will give you weapons
for self-defense.
Support our religion.
Defend our church.”

Reverend Robert gave each of them a rose.
It was a symbol of courage.
A symbol of righteousness.
The pastor named them “The Rose Group”.

The special touch of the pastor became a mantra.
Ants grew into elephants.

56 One Muslim family, six people, was slaughtered in the Maluku conflict. A similar thing happened to the Christian community. <http://media.isnet.org/kmi/ambon/gatra01.html>

They felt the transformation.
The power of heaven entered their soul.
They shouted enthusiastically:
“Hallelujah! Hallelujah!
Thank God!”

The pastor had not suspected...
The Rose Group was possessed.
From that day on, they did not just act in self -defense.
They attacked.
Savagely.
Like wild beasts.
An entire Muslim family was slaughtered.
None remained.
They were all dead.

“Forgive me, God! Forgive me, God!
This was not what I intended.
Have mercy!!!

The pastor cried and howled
as he kissed his crucifix.

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It was the year 2001,
when Maluku went crazy.
Scores of mosques were ransacked.
Scores of churches were gutted and burned.
Thousands of Muslims were killed.
Thousands of Christians were slaughtered.

Children of age 10-13 years.
They readied their machetes for battle.
They also killed each other.

The conflict had expanded, not only in Ambon,
but it had also spread to every island in Maluku.
Not only to large towns
but also to remote villages.

Birds of prey and scavengers flew in Maluku skies seeking carrion.
Satan and the devil rose from hell and invaded the bodies of killers
who fancied themselves to be holy warriors.

Blood flowed from machetes and axes.
Anger reverberated through spears, arrows, knives, rifles, and bazookas.

On behalf of religion, in the name of holiness, they eviscerated
the necks of young boys.

They cried out:
"Allah is the Greatest!"
Then they butchered.
"Hallelujah!"
Then they slaughtered.

In Maluku, it is still known as Crazy Bamboo.
It had been a tradition for thousands of years.
Long before Christianity and Islam reached their shores.
Since the days when Maluccans were adherents of animism.

A long bamboo rod, two and a half meters long.
Only 8 centimeters in diameter.
Side by side, seven strong men hold onto the bamboo.
Frankincense is burned.
A shaman recites a spell.

"Abracadabra!"
The bamboo moves.
Rotating first to the right and then to the left.
The seven men struggle.
They can't restrain the movement of the bamboo.

The Bamboo Spirit is only restrained
When the shaman stops it.

In 2001, the crazy bamboo was incarnated in the souls of Maluku people.
None were able to resist the spell of
the Crazy Bamboo King.
Many Maluccans became the Crazy Bamboo King's servants.

The major difference is that this Crazy Bamboo issued commands:
Kill them!
Finish them off!
Slaughter them!
Shoot bullets!
Sling arrows!
Swing machetes!
Stab them with knives!
And this time, no shaman could halt it.

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One day Reverend Robert heard some news
that buoyed his spirits.
Efforts to resolve the Maluku sectarian conflict had begun.

Heads of the Christian and Muslim militias met in Malino, South Sulawesi
The central government had initiated this conflict resolution process.
All weapons would have to be handed over.

There was something that made Reverend Robert even happier:
The friendship between Reverend Jack Manuputty and Ustad Abidin
Wakano ⁽⁵⁷⁾

They were the principal clergymen of these two religious communities.
They preached that Maluku's Christians and Muslim were brothers.
These two clergymen moved from the community,
for the community,
And through the community.

They reacquainted the two warring factions.
They encouraged Christians to visit and spend time in the Muslim
community.
Likewise, they encouraged Muslims to visit and spend time among
the Christian community.

There were two teenagers who had been soldiers.
They had been active participants in the sectarian carnage.

57 The friendship of Reverend Jack Manuputty and Ustad Abidin Makano brought a new spirit of peace in Maluku: <https://www.cnnindonesia.com> ›Pro ... 'Provocator' Peace from Ambon

These youngsters had killed other combatants as well as innocent civilians.

The Christian boy was named Ronald Regang.
The Muslim boy was named Iskandar Slameth.

Ronald was only 10 years old when he joined the battlefield.
Iskandar was 13 years old when he joined Laskar Jihad.
Now Ronald and Iskandar were friends.
They were designated Ambassadors of Peace. ⁽⁵⁸⁾
They actively invited others to become agents of peace.

Reverend Robert contemplated these new developments.
“Am I like Judas Iscariot, who betrayed Jesus, if I no longer encourage the Christian community to wage war?
“Will I betray my coreligionists if I not only defend the Christian community but also the Muslim community?”
“They are all sons of Maluku.
They are all human,
They harbor the same fears,
They express the same anger,
They also possess the same love.”

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Reverend Robert had reached a turning point.
He not only maintained and upheld the sanctity of the cross and the gospel. Muslim prayer beads and a Koran also lay upon the table in the room.
He was learning some new lessons.

He accepted this risk.
He was often misunderstood by both sides of the religious divide.
By the Christian community, he was considered insufficiently militant in protecting the church from marauding Muslims.
By the Muslim community, it was believed that

58 Two child soldiers from the two belligerent religious communities forged a bond of friendship and became ambassadors of peace. <https://news.okezone.com/amp/2018/05/05/340/1894773/kisah-persan-friend-pendeta-and-ustad-bawa-mantan-tarantara-tantuda-anak-ambon-jadi-duta-perdamung>

he had studied Islam specifically to facilitate the conversion of Muslims to Christianity.

In 2002,
Maluku was still vulnerable
even though the Malino Peace Accords had been signed and agreed to.
Open war could easily break out again.

But this was now a different Reverend Robert.
He was reborn. It was not apparent where the rays of light came from.
Like before, his heart was pounding,
But now a different fire was burning in his soul.

That afternoon, Reverend Robert released a pair of doves
They swiftly flew into the Maluku sky.
The guardian angel of peace descended from heaven,
Accompanying these two doves,
Once again disseminating
Seeds of love in Ambon.
Seeds of peace in Maluku.

July, 2022

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When Weapons Had To Be Turned Over

Maluku, 2002.

Wounds were still gaping.

Trauma was still wafting in the town air.

It stuck to the leaves of the trees in each village.

Fear, anxiety, and revenge still flowed in gutters, on streets and through alleyways.

At Walid's house in Ambon City

On a table

lay a long homemade rifle.

About 15 bullets also lay scattered on the table.

He had been staring intently at the gun for a few hours.

He stroked it.

He caressed it.

He cleaned it with a silk cloth.

Repeatedly.

Walid had not truly reconciled himself

to the terms of the Malino II Accord (2002), which

required that combatants voluntarily relinquish their weapons.

Peace could only begin by disarming local people of weapons.

“Should I hand in my rifle?
Surrender the only guarantor of my family’s safety?
This was not just a weapon.
This is my life.
My wife’s life.
My son’s life.”

“Can that agreement even be trusted?
Could anyone trust a Peace Agreement between the
Christian Laskar militia and Muslim Jihad militia?
Could ravenous tigers be transformed into doves that fly and coexist in
friendship, hand in hand?”

“Only this rifle can I believe in.”

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Walid didn’t actually like weapons.
He had never touched them previously.
They were instruments of violence.
He was a follower of Mahatma Gandhi.
He believed in leading a non-violent life.

But misfortune had changed his views,
two years earlier in February, 2000
when his son, Simon, was only 13 years old.

He was forced to concede his principles.
The armed conflict between the Christian and Muslim militias had
become absolutely insane.
In this sectarian conflict,
anyone from a different religion could be targeted and killed.
It didn’t matter if it was a woman.
It didn’t matter if it was an elderly person.
It didn’t even matter if it was a young child.

Clear and firm were his directions.
“Attack!
Finish him off!

No need to care who is right, who is wrong?
Because if you didn't kill, you would be killed."

Walid would never forget the incident.
The pickup car entered his yard.
It sped toward him in a hurry.

The driver, an old friend, shouted. "Walid, Walid.
Quick!
Take Simon.
Come quickly!"

His friend carried the boy's body, which was limp and dripping
blood all the way from the car.

Before Simon's body was even touched by Walid, Walid's
wife began screaming hysterically.

"Simon, what's happened to you?"
She shook Simon's body.
There was no reaction.
She gave Simon artificial respiration.
There was still no response.

"Simonnnn! Don't leave your mom, son.
Have mercy!
You are barely 13 years old.⁽⁵⁹⁾
You're still a child.
How could you possibly understand this cruel world?
But why did you die?
Who would have the temerity to kill such a young boy?"

Walid tried to calm his wife.
He embraced his son's lifeless body.
He hadn't expected this. How could people be so cruel and callous!
Even a wolf is not as insensitive and vicious as this.

59 Even young boys of 10-13 years of age became involved in the Maluku conflict. <https://www.bbc.com › indonesia › t...Mantan tentara anak Ambon: 'Kami berdamai ...>

It was dangerous to hold a funeral procession and public burial.
So they did what they could and held a simple funeral.
And Simon was buried in the backyard of the house.

But also buried behind the house was Walid's previously sympathetic heart and sunny view of life.

Walid's wife remonstrated and argued with him:

"Dear, you still have me.
And we still have Dimas.
You are the head of the family.
Protect us.
You mustn't be naive.
I fear for our safety, dear.
What if our house is attacked?
How would you fight and defend us?"

"They are all tigers.
They are all lions.
I live in constant fear, my dear!"

That was the first time in his life
That Walid even thought of possessing a weapon.
And for good reason.
Initially just to defend his family.
To protect them.

The Laskar Jihad militia not only gave him a weapon.
They also trained Walid in using it.

At the end of the long-barreled weapon,
Walid carved the name: Simon Alfarabi,
the name of his eldest son who had been killed.

This horizontal war was crazy.
He looked in the mirror.
He did not even recognize his inner self anymore.

In the past, he was active in conflict resolution.
Now times had changed, and he became an expert in shooting.

He didn't know how many people he had killed.
Walid wanted to forget it all.

He had to concede his old pacifist beliefs.
It was no use holding onto them in this crazy Maluku era.
This weapon was his guardian angel.
It instilled a sense of security in him.
It also held onto many memories.
But now due to the Malino Accords,
his weapon would be considered contraband.

If Walid didn't turn it in, he would violate the agreement.
He would become a public enemy.

Yet if he did surrender it,
what would happen if the war erupted again?

"Oh, I don't want to lose any more children.
It was horrible enough losing Simon."

Walid did not sleep that night.
Midnight eventually became dawn.
Walid remained perched by the window.
Staring at the weapon. Holding it in an embrace.
Anxiety slipped in through the windows, permeated the doorways,
then rose again pervading the ceilings of his house.

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Malino is a beautiful area. It is located at the foot of a hill
in Gowa, South Sulawesi.
The beauty of nature softens the mind.
The cool air muffles rancor.
Malino was chosen as the site to negotiate a cessation of
hostilities in the Maluku conflict.

60 Even young boys of 10-13 years of age became involved in the Maluku conflict. <https://www.bbc.com › indonesia › t...Mantan tentara anak Ambon: 'Kami berdamai ...>

Previously, there had been a similar sectarian conflict in Poso, Central Sulawesi. Malino was used as the venue to reconcile the Poso conflict. That was two months earlier in December, 2001.

It was now February, 2002.

It was time for the Maluku conflict to take its turn in Malino.⁽⁶⁰⁾

It was time to negotiate an end to sectarian violence.

Jusuf Kalla was there in his capacity as Coordinating Minister for People's Welfare.

Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono was also there in his role as Coordinating Minister for Politics and Security.

Da'i Bachtiar was also present as the National Police Chief.

Representatives of Maluku's Christian Community and Christian Laskar militia were present as well as representatives of the Muslim Community and Jihad Laskar militia.

At that assembly,

Everyone was all smiles.

But stronger sinister emotions probably lurked below these happy faces... Who knows?

Scalding hearts were covered, adorned with stylish batik shirts.

They alternately made similar speeches:

"Approximately 8 thousand Maluccans lost their life.

Maluccans killed Maluccans.

Three years already.

How long could this be allowed to continue?"

The economy was ruined.

Unemployment had piled up.

Homeless people abounded.

Towns and villages festered with

Hostility,

Fear,

Trauma,

Barbarism, and

Murder.

61 Disarmament, including the handing over of guns and weapons held in many households, was a crucial condition for establishing peace in Maluku. liputan6.comSebelas Kesepakatan Mengakhiri Pertemuan ...

In Malino, a new chapter in Maluku history was chartered.⁽⁶¹⁾
Eleven points of agreements were reached. Among them:
All sectarian militias and guerrilla forces must disband.
All weapons must be handed over.
Outsiders who went to Maluku to fight must return home.

They all shook hands.
Hands touched hands.
But it was unclear if the act of shaking hands involved a connection
between two human hearts.
Does shaking hands truly make a connection with the soul?

Representatives from the central government made speeches:
"The Maluku conflict has unfortunately metastasized beyond the
immediate area.
It has unwittingly caused the issue of RMS separatism to re-
emerge. An unwanted connection of Maluku to
Afghanistan and Pakistan has also been formed.
Consequently, not only was Maluku in danger.
Indonesia was also in danger."
The central government formed two commissions
related to issues of Law and Security.
It was also creating Economic and Social Commissions.

There is always an economic component in sectarian conflicts. On the
other hand, religious conflicts may serve to amplify economic problems.

Official army and police forces would be strengthened. In
courthouses, laws would be applied impartially without prejudice.

It was now time for pastors and ustads to take turns
addressing the assembled guests:
"Maluccans have been killing fellow Maluccans for much too long.
A new era must commence.
A peaceful era.
An era in which all Maluccans may see each other as brethren
and behave as related kin."

But could it be that easy?
Wounds were still gaping.
Trauma haunted Maluku; it stuck to tree leaves; it was scattered on the roads. It was imprinted in the air and lodged in the heart.

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At home,
Walid debated with himself.
Should he hand over his weapon?

It was still dawn.
Walid walked to the yard behind his house to visit Simon's grave.
He brought the weapon.
After reciting the Al-Fateha prayer,
Walid wailed loudly. His whole chest shook.
"Simon, my dear son. Please forgive your father for not being able to protect you. I have searched high and low in every corner of Maluku to find the one who killed you. But I still haven't found the person who murdered you."

"I used to be determined.
I would use this weapon to kill your killer.

"But now, I request your permission, my dear son.
I can't replace an eye with an eye.
Likewise, I can't kill the person who murdered you.

Have mercy for Maluku. Have pity on father too.
Your father's heart is not in this war anymore.
I have to hand over this weapon.
Maluku must try to be peaceful again."

Walid tried to allay his heart. Whatever ensued,
he wanted to begin with good intentions.
He would start by handing over his weapon.

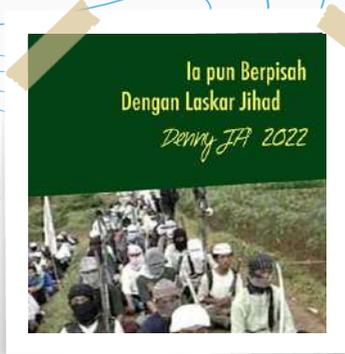
“Yes, Allah, please strengthen me.
Reinforce my good intentions.”
From Simon’s grave,
good intentions began wafting into the air, blown by the
wind, scattering twigs and leaves, and touching the human heart.

July, 2022

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He decided to leave the Laskar Jihad Movement

The prayer beads were still hanging on the wall. They had always been there. For the past 22 years.

Each time Adrian looked at the prayer beads, his heart began pounding vigorously. He experienced a flood of mixed emotions: Sadness. Anger. Regret. Sometimes tears flowed from his eyes.

“Alwi, Alwi. If I could turn back time, I would not have asked you to come back home to Maluku.”
“It would have been better if you had remained working in Jakarta. It would have been better if I had taken care of Mother and our younger sister Tina in Ambon. I’m very sorry, elder brother.”

I recalled that night, a dark night at the dawn of the new millennium in January, 2000. Alwi was seriously injured. Christian troops had launched an attack. Muslim troops tried to hold back their advance.

Both sides were fully exposed in this battle. It was either kill or be killed. The shrill sounds of slashing machetes and gunshots mixed with shouts and angry expressions.

Adrian carried Alwi. Blood covered his body. They passed a malodorous path. They smelled the stench of rotting corpses along the road.

“Adrian, just lay me down here.”

“No way, Alwi. I have to bring you home.”

“Don’t, I’m no longer strong. And it is too painful.

Just lay me down here, please.”

Adrian lowered his brother’s body. “Take the prayer beads from the chain around my neck,” Alwi said.

Adrian took the prayer beads and placed them in Alwi’s right hand.

While lying down, Alwi recited his last dhikir prayer. He kept reciting the dhikr. His fingers moved and clutched the prayer beads. Until he uttered his last breath.

Adrian cried in uncontrollable bursts of grief.

He hugged his only brother.

“Have mercy, God, have mercy...

Alwi, what should I tell Mother? Oh my God.”

Adrian’s eyes widened. He stood up straight and tall.

The night was already still and quiet again. Adrian raised his hands defiantly. He imagined that he was calling out to his enemies, the Christian Brigade (Laskar Kristen): “You are all bastards. Rotten bastards!!! I will finish you off, all of you. Wait for my revenge!”

Adrian held onto Alwi’s prayer beads. He hung them on the wall in his bedroom. Many items in his room had come and gone. But the prayer beads had a permanent place. Always hanging there. Always. For the past 22 years.

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Adrian recalled the raucous atmosphere.
It was 1999, the days of the early riots.
He called his older brother Alwi, who was working in Jakarta.

“Bro Alwi, please come home to Ambon.
Take care of Mother and our younger sister, Tina.
I can’t take care of them on my own.
Our area is going to be invaded by the Christian Brigade.
Mother is afraid.”

“But I have just begun working here, Little Brother. What would everyone say if I immediately requested leave to go home,” Alwi replied.

“Please return home, Brother. The situation is getting worse. Many of our distant relatives have been killed. This is more urgent.” Adrian asked Alwi to seek information. Jafar Umar Talib was planning to go to Maluku.⁽⁶²⁾ He was recruiting many Muslim fighters to assist Muslims in Maluku. Since then, Adrian and Alwi recognized Jafar Umar Talib as their guru in many fields: High Priest. Commander. Lone Commando.

Jafar Umar Thalib was not a Maluccan, but he cared about others. Jafar was born in Malang, East Java, but he helped protect Muslims in Maluku.

He was a veteran of the Afghan freedom fighter movement. He once met Osama bin Laden. However, Jafar didn’t share the same viewpoint.

Jafar was trained by the Mujahideen in Afghanistan to face the threat of the Soviet Union.

Later, In Maluku, under Jafar’s command, the Jihad Laskar was created to counter the local Christian Brigade.

He remembered those days, the period of the Laskar Jihad consolidation. “If one mosque is damaged, then one of their churches will also suffer damage. Takbir! Allah is the Greatest.”

“If they kill one Muslim, one Christian will we kill too. Takbir! Allah is the Greatest.”

62 Jafar Umar Talib formed Laskar Jihad, and brought many Muslim fighters to Maluku to protect fellow Muslims from attacks by Maluccan Christians during the sectarian conflict of 1999-2002: <https://m.liputan6.com/news/read/33680/jafar-provokator-atau-kambing-hitam>

“An eye for an eye. A life for a life!”

Adrian did not remember how many mosques were destroyed. He also did not recall how many churches were similarly destroyed. What he knew was that scores of houses of worship had been razed to the ground.

Since the arrival of Jafar Umar Talib, the Muslim community had been more organized.

Better trained.
More militant.

Under Jafar's leadership, Laskar Jihad also grew more confident. “We are brave and right, not only because we defend fellow Muslims. We also defend NKRI, the founding principles of the Republic of Indonesia. Conversely, our Christian foes are a separatist movement. They want to secede from Indonesia and establish a separate country: RMS! We must defend our country.”

“Takbir! Allah is the Greatest!”

Adrian also noted. Commander Jafar was impolite and impertinent to the Indonesian government.

He did not like the president at that time, a woman.

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Adrian was different from his dead brother, Alwi. Alwi was merely a pious person, obedient to religion, But Adrian aspired to be more than that.

He was a soldier.

He was a warrior.

He wanted more training
to become a paramilitary specialist

He wanted expertise in assembling bombs and using weapons.

He wanted to learn how to agitate crowds and provoke violence.

At the young age of 17, he joined the Mujahideen in Seram Ambon. He was chosen to take part in specialized military training.

Once Adrian practiced on a mountain,
Mount Waisana on Hitu Island, Ambon.
Participants arrived from various regions of Maluku. About 30 men.

“We must form our own army. We do not trust the Indonesian police. We do not trust the Indonesian army. We will create our own police force. We will train and deploy our own soldiers. Takbir! Allah is the Greatest!”

All participants agreed and exclaimed takbir together: “Allahu Akbar!”

Adrian had a chance to go to Pakistan.
He visited a place called Baitul Mujahideen in Muzaffarabad.
And trained there alongside other mujahideen,
He participated in military exercises in the mountains. ⁽⁶³⁾

How happy Adrian was.
He was adept at attacking.
He was an expert in defense.
He was proficient in operating dangerous weapons:
AK 47, AK 56, SKS, M16, MP5, GRENOP.
He was also an expert with G2, G3, Sneeper Draganop, DSK 12,7.

At dawn, at the top of the mountain,
he vowed: “Maluku, Maluku,
I will defend you.
Oh, Christian Brigade, I am coming for you.
I am Adrian, a weapons expert,
I will imminently become the leader of Laskar Jihad.”

Adrian doesn't remember.
How many Muslims he defended.
How many Christians he killed.
What he knows is: Many. Scores of each.

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But the situation quickly changed.
He was despondent.

63 At that time, Muslim militants often acquired and practiced paramilitary skills in Pakistani training camps <https://islami.co/kisah-seorang-jihadis-menolak-pinangan-isis/>

In 2002, Laskar Jihad in Maluku dissolved.
They withdrew 3,000 troops out of Maluku.
Weapons were handed over or confiscated.
Their commander, Jafar Umar Talib, was arrested.
Commander Talib was tried and sentenced.

His associates became fugitives from the law.

Adrian was not as brave now as he had previously thought.
His heart was fearful, too.

He surreptitiously contacted his mother. Through one channel.

His mother replied, "Don't come home yet, Adrian. The authorities are still looking for you. You could even be shot and killed. Be careful. Mother has already lost Alwi. You're my only son now."

They met at his hideout. She embraced Adrian and didn't want to let go of him.

"Calm down mother, calm down. I can take care of myself. I certainly don't want to die." Adrian hugged his mother. Now Adrian was crying.

It was if Adrian had become a baby again. It was a strange feeling. This feeling had snuck up on him stealthfully. Mother's warm embrace. Mother's gentle affection. He had missed having these sensations for a long time. During this period he had lived only with violence and anger. He missed tenderness. He longed to be lulled by kind emotions. Love. Affection. Serenity.

For many weeks, Adrian remained in hiding. He ran to the mountains.

He ran to the forest. He often starved. He and his fellow Laskar Jihad troops had scattered. He heard that Maluku had to be peaceful. Christians and Muslims needed to restore their brotherhood. The enmity that had raged between these two communities had to end.

One dawn, for some reason, Adrian cried. He suddenly recalled one of his spiritual teachers.

His teacher's voice resounded in his heart. It echoed: "Pursue your religious faith with a humble and gentle heart."⁽⁶⁴⁾

Adrian also remembered the words of Sheikh Abdul Aziz bin Baz Rahimahullah:

Adrian remembered that: "This era is the time to be gentle. This is not the time to be brutal.

"Preach gently.

Impart Islam in a gentle manner.

Beyond any doubt, this approach will reach and touch the heart.

From one heart to another."

"Urge people to follow the path of your Lord with gentle wisdom and kind lessons and argue them in a good way." (QS An-Nahl [16]: 125)

Adrian felt upset and restless.

His heart became a stage for two competing actors.

Sometimes the face of Jafar Umar Talib took center stage, making him feel harsh and full of anger.

At other moments, the face of the Sheikh Abdul Aziz appeared, which made him feel calm, peaceful, and gentle.

2005

was the year of enlightenment.

Adrian's soul was reincarnated.

His heart separated,

His mind separated,

He abandoned the harsh Laskar Jihad style of religion.

He chose a softer gentle form of Islam.

But he couldn't possibly forget Maluku in 1999-2002.

Alwi's prayer beads

Were always there.

Although they were clean,

64 Preaching with gentleness <https://m.republika.co.id/amp/nkf7kb34>

The shadow of past violence was still present,
The night that the prayer beads were drenched in blood,
The blood of his brother Alwi gushed on his hands as Alwi invoked
God's name and accepted his own death.

"If time could be turned back, I wouldn't have called you, Alwi
I wouldn't have asked you to come home.
Then you wouldn't have needed to come here, you wouldn't have had to
witness the inexplicable madness, and you wouldn't have died.

That was the era when Maluku went crazy."

The sound of the early morning call to prayer.
Slowly and solemnly, Adrian performs his ablution.
The water feels cool as he washes his face.
And washes his heart.
Very enjoyable.

He had never felt serenity as deep as this,
the gratifying peace he has experienced since adopting a
gentler interpretation of Islam.

July, 2022

#PuisiEsaiMini

This Mini Essay Poem is an excerpt from the new book, **Screams Following Liberation**, which will be published imminently (Denny JA, 2022).



Why Did They Kill Each Other In Maluku?

His grave was kept clean.
Neat.
Undisturbed.
Twenty-three years had already passed.

The tombstone still clearly read: Bille Wattimena.
Died: December 16, 1999.
Bille lost his life among thousands of other young people who perished,
in bloody primeval riots,
in the early days of the Post-Suharto Reform era:
In the Maluku Conflict that raged in 1999-2002.

That afternoon
Unable to rid herself of grief and sorrow,
Unable to erase the wounds,

Beside the grave, feeling listless, sad, and gloomy,
Sat Eva Subarkah.
On her way home every day,
She always visited his grave.

"My dear Bille,
This is Patimura, our child,
He is already 24 years old.

When the war first broke out,
When you left us forever,
he was only one year old.
He doesn't remember your face,
his own father's face."

"It's been twenty years since I left Ambon for Jakarta.

I feel helpless, Bille.
Living here,
my heart screams.
Always.
Yet you still call out to me.
Always.
I always find time to visit you.
Always.
I bring our son.
Always."

The afternoon winds blow.
Lifting and scattering leaves.
Eva's tears dribble down her cheeks,
They become a flowing stream,
They become a steady rain,
creating lakes,
And a salty ocean.

Patimura hugged his mother.
Although he couldn't long for his father
Whose memory had faded long ago.

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But Eva will always remember that day.
The day Bille died.

They were a young couple.
Married only 2 years.
Maluku was ablaze.
A storm of fury besieged towns and villages.
A gigantic dragon spewed flames of hate and misery.
That day, love became the first casualty in Maluku.

Bille said: "My dear, I am now following Agus Wattimena. ⁽⁶⁵⁾
He has formed a brigade of Christian soldiers.

Our fellow Christians,
Have been killed by Muslims.
We will attack the Muslim community in Batu Merah.
Troops from Mardika village, fellow Christian soldiers,
Are ready to fight alongside us, body and soul."

Bille had sharpened machetes, prepared a lot of knives,
All very sharp.

Eva was crying.
Bille hugged her.
"Bille, don't go.
Let's not get involved in this.
Your son is still a baby.
You should consider that many people in Batu Merah
are members of our own extended family."

"Calm down, Eva, my darling.
I'm not going to die.
You know I'm great at fighting.
Agus Wattimena, our leader,
has accomplished a lot for me.
I won't let him attack on his own.
Allay your fears, my dear,
Love of my life."

65 In the Maluku conflict, Agus Wattimena organized Christian troops and thus mobilized the military might of the local Christian community to respond to similar armed threats from the Muslim community <https://www.faktakini.info/2021/01/investigasi-tempo-tentang-laskar.html?m=1>

Eva tried her best to restrain him,
To keep him from leaving, by any means.

But Bille was mightier.
He was determined.
"Take care of Patimura,"
Bille instructed while kissing Eva's forehead.

This turned out to be the last time
Eva saw Bille alive.

Early the next morning,
As the sun rose on a wretched dawn,
A loud banging resounded on Eva's door.
Four people were carrying Bille's body.
He was covered in blood.
And no longer breathing.

Eva cried to the depths of her heart.
Very loud.
Screaming, screeching.
Her cries pierced the gray morning sky.
Penetrated the dark,
Transcending space and time.

"Billeee...
Billeee, don't leave me.
Your child is still a baby.
Billeee.."

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It was now 2005. It had been four years since Eva moved to Jakarta.
The Maluku conflict never left her mind.
She tried to understand: What had actually happened?
Why did Moluccans go crazy? Killing each other? Moluccans
killing Moluccans?

66 Some analysts have connected the Maluku conflict to incitement by elite interests in Jakarta. <https://sejarahlengkap.com/indonesia/penyebab-perang-ambon/amp>

She heard rumors.

The Maluku conflict had been provoked and promoted from Jakarta.

A brigade of army troops had been sent from Jakarta to Maluku.

Religious hostilities were not the chief cause of this strife:

Religious differences had only been used as a ploy to exacerbate the conflict. ⁽⁶⁶⁾

Maluku must riot. Maluku must be inflamed. Maluku must bleed.

Eva didn't know how much of this was true. And for what end or purpose?

She also heard that beside her husband, another 8,000-9,000 lives were lost.

29,000 houses had been burned down,

45 mosques destroyed,

47 churches vandalized,

719 shops looted,

38 government buildings attacked,

And 4 banks reduced to rubble. ⁽⁶⁷⁾

"My God," Eva exclaimed.

"What really happened there?"

How had Bille, her husband,

a loving person,

full of love,

become transformed that day into a monster?

Why did he turn into a beast, sharpening knives and machetes in a desperate "kill or be killed" scenario?

At his grave, Eva had always cleaned her husband's grave with her heart and with all her soul. "Bille, my love. I will always miss you."

The evening as twilight was falling, darker still was the pain in Eva's heart, which she would never comprehend and never stop inquiring on: Why at that time did Maluku run amok?

July, 2022

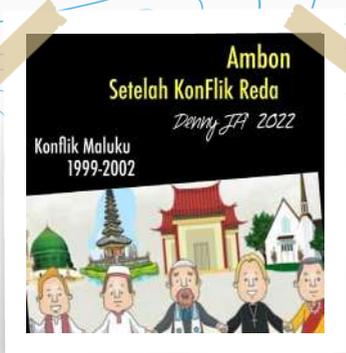
67 For data regarding human casualties and deliberate damage resulting from the Sectarian Conflict in Maluku (1999-2002), see: <https://www.dimensinews.co.id/196417/deretan-konflik-antar-agama-di-indonesia-pasca-reformasi.html>

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Ambon In The Post-Conflict Era

Previously,
anxiety permeated the leaves of Ambon's trees.

Fear, anger, and revenge were
suspended from electric power poles and concrete buildings.
Hostility was scattered on streets and alleyways.

Now, many years later,
a different sun was shining in Ambon. A different moon glowed.

It was now Christmas Eve, 2017.
Sunu's heart trembled.
It was the first experience of this sort in his life.

He was a Muslim.
Together with scores of other Muslims, Sunu had volunteered
to protect the local church. ⁽⁶⁸⁾

For the past hour, Sunu had been pacing back and forth,
walking slowly, circling the church.

68 Muslim youth helped protect church services on Christmas Eve in Ambon, 2017. <https://regional.kompas.com/read/2017/12/24/22080461/malam-natal-di-ambon-wujud-toleransi-antarumat-beragama>

Looking for evidence that someone might try
to attack the church that evening.

Faintly, he heard a holiday carol, welcoming Christmas,
from inside the church.

“Silent night, Holy night.

All is calm, all is bright.

Round yon Virgin, Mother and Child.

Holy Infant so tender and mild.

Sleep in heavenly peace.

Sleep in heavenly peace...”

Sunu kept still and quiet

As he stood alone in a corner of the churchyard

Sunu remained silent.

Suddenly tears welled up in his eyes.

He tried to restrain them,

but the tears kept flowing.

Sunu cried, not due to the singing, but because
he suddenly recalled his late father.

Three years had elapsed since his death.

A long illness had taken his life.

Shortly before he died,

Father invited Sunu to talk about something,

just the two of them.

“Sunu, please help your dad.

For many years, Father has been living with

a terrible burden of guilt.

My feelings of remorse are too heavy to carry to the grave.

“In 2000, Maluku went insane.

For some reason, Father also went insane.

Your brother was killed by the Christian Militia.”

Sunu’s father spoke haltingly,

interspersed with coughing.

“Father joined a violent horde.
And Father helped burn down the church.

“But what Father most regrets
Involved a Christian youngster.
He was still in his teens.
But Father killed him.
Father slaughtered him in the churchyard.
I did so to avenge your brother’s death.”

Sunu listened as his heart started beating strongly.
He let his father complete his confession.

“Your father is not a bad person, Sunu.
But that’s what happened.
Father got carried away by the atmosphere.
That was a very different era in Maluku.

But Dad has been plagued by self-reproach since then.
I feel deep pangs of guilt, son.
I regret my actions very much.

The face of that teenager continues to haunt me.
Father didn’t even know him.
He just happened to be at the church.

That teenager had a mother.
He also had a father.

For many years, Father has kept this story under wraps.
I never spoke of this to your mother.

But Father must tell you, Sunu.
Father does not have much longer to live.

Father wants to atone for this sin.
But Father’s body is already weak.
Help your father, Sunu.
So that Father’s spirit can remain serene in the afterlife.
Please help me expiate this terrible sin.

Be kind to Christians.
We all share Ambonese heritage,
We all share Maluccan lineage.
If you have funds, besides donating alms to the mosque,
also make a donation to the church.

Help Dad, Sunu.”

Father started to cough again.
His body was getting weaker.

Sunu calmed his father.
“Yes, Father, don’t let this weigh so heavily on your mind.
Inshallah, I will be able to fulfill your request.”

Afterwards, Christmas Eve was always meaningful for Sunu.
He recited the Alfateha prayer in his heart.
He sent this prayer for the dead to his deceased father.
Sunu wiped away his tears.

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In 2010 and afterwards,
Ambon veered from its violent path and moved in a very different
direction.

The battering sea waves that had been so stormy, frightening,
and pounding began to calm down and subside.

The crashing waves were replaced by the sound of a breeze,
which billowed and blew gently, and slipped refreshingly into the heart.

Nearly two decades earlier,
the people in these islands
had been transformed into insatiable rapacious tigers.

The Christian Laskar brigade, yelling Hallelujah, fought Muslim Jihad
militia, who shouted Allahu Akbar, as both sides slashed their opponents
with machetes and stabbed each other with daggers, in an orgy
of sadistic bloodletting.

As they shouted Allahu Akbar and Hallelujah,
rifles and pistols flared,
with shots directed straight at their enemy's head.

Now, this madness was no longer apparent.
Times had changed.
It was a very different story.

In 2022, in Tual, Maluku
three miniature houses of worship were built to celebrate the recognition
of the town as a model of religious tolerance.

A Protestant church, a Muslim
mosque, and a Catholic cathedral were constructed side by side ⁽⁶⁹⁾.

Don't let the violence return!
Oh, don't let that turbulent era recur!
These miniature houses of worship are the fruit of tolerance of
thousands of Maluccans who previously experienced appalling grief and
misery during the sectarian conflict.

On Tanimbar Island, Maluku,
In 2022,
a Quran recitation contest was held.
Even though local residents are mostly Christian. ⁽⁷⁰⁾

Everything was fine now.
Everything was peaceful.

In 2021, in Ambon,
Scores of Christian youths participated in protecting several mosques
when the post-Ramadan Eid al-Fitr prayers were held. ⁽⁷¹⁾

69 In 2022, the construction of three miniature houses of worship was completed in the town of Tual: a Protestant church, a Muslim mosque, and a Catholic cathedral were built side by side. <https://dispar.malukuprov.go.id/peresmian-miniatur-toleransi-umat-beragama-oleh-gubernur-maluku-di-tual/>

70 On the mostly Christian island of Tanimbar, a Quran recitation contest (Musabaqoh Tilawatil Quran) was held peacefully. <https://nusantara.rml.id/read/2022/03/25/528088/meski-penduduknya-mayoritas-non-muslim-mtq-provinsi-maluku-sukses-digelar-di-saumlaki>

71 Christian youth helped protect local mosques in Ambon during the 2021 celebration of Eid al-Fitr. <https://pemilu.kompas.com/read/2021/05/13/121618178/indahnyatoleransipemudakristen-di-ambon-ikut-amankan-shalat-id?page=all>

Children whose parents had previously burned down mosques were now safeguarding them.

In 2019, Ambon received the Harmony Award from President Jokowi. The Minister of Religion determined that Ambon could now be considered a paragon of tolerance. It was recognized as one of the best cities in Indonesia in terms of religious harmony.

Ambon even gained recognition from other countries. A special Afghan delegation visited Ambon. They studied the recent history of the city. A horrible sectarian war had broken out previously. But now Ambonese of different faiths helped each other and accepted their religious differences.

In the past, anger and hostility ruled the streets of Ambon. They reigned oppressively. The townspeople were their slaves. Now, doves flew peacefully side by side in the skies of Ambon City.

Since 2014, Islamic and Christian music have been performed together on the same stage.

Consider the opening ceremony of the Church Choir Festival in Ambon. A parade replete with diverse culture Was filled with both Christian and Islamic music.

Behold the opening ceremony at Ambon's Independence Square. Tens of thousands of residents attended. They watched, listened to, and experienced the collaboration of Christian and Muslim participants: the musical artistry of Salam (Islam) and Sarani (Christian) in harmony.

The Church Choir Festival participants came from near and far, from 11 districts and towns throughout Maluku. The audience enjoyed the collaboration of 100 trumpet blowers from the Christian Sarani community. They also appreciated the drumming performance from the Muslim Salam community.

The mixed audience responded enthusiastically to the performances,

which united both the individual mind and the collective sense of harmony, experienced by spectators standing in front of the main stage.

Ambon was indeed different now.
Maluku was no longer the same.

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But Sunu realized that
an explosion of religious conflict could reignite.

He had read history.
In the distant past, Ambon had also been quite harmonious.
Cooperation between the Muslim and Christian communities had
been facilitated by the old tradition of Pela Gandong in Central Maluku.

Yet in 1999-2002, the flames of anger and murder enveloped Ambon.
So what precipitated the crisis that his father's generation had become
embroiled in twenty years earlier?

A ruined economy.
Hostilities that were fanned and became overblown.
The divisive seeds of widespread religious zeal that had been sown.

It only needed a small lighter to ignite a full-scale war.
Peaceful doves were quickly transformed into vicious tigers.

That afternoon, Sunu, a Muslim, visited his father's grave.
He invited Dewi, his sweetheart, a Christian girl.

As he peered at his father's grave,
Sunu imagined his father listening to his thoughts.

From deep in his heart, Sunu exclaimed:
"Father, you can remain at peace in the afterworld.
Sunu has already expiated Father's sins and fulfilled Father's request."

July, 2022

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Epilog

DEPICT ACTS OF INJUSTICE THROUGH ESSAY POETRY

FORMULA FOR ESSAY POETRY

Denny JA

She was only 11 years old at the time. But she could already tell that a particular tradition was unjust. Why shouldn't a tiny girl go to school just because she's female?

The reason was the Taliban, who were in power in Pakistan. Sacred tradition assigned men the responsibility for family and society. She considered this to be an improper custom. Years later, she elegantly expressed this biased tradition. She stated that tradition does not come from above. God did not create tradition. We are the ones who establish traditions. We can also amend it if we believe it is unjust.

She also expressed her concern about the injustice faced by girls who were unable to attend school on her own blog in Urdu. It was all written under the pen name Gul Makai.

Adam B. Ellick, a journalist, heard about this little girl's story. The journalist produced a New York Times documentary about this young author. The remaining events are considerably more significant. In 2014, the 17-year-old girl was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize. She is remembered as the world's youngest Nobel Peace Prize recipient.

Yes. Malala Yousafzai is the name of this young woman.⁽⁷²⁾

The preceding example serves as inspiration for us. What an unexpected influence a piece of writing may have. Malala did not have the power to change the injustices she experienced as a kid, but her writings motivate others who are stronger to take action.

72 Malala Yousafzai was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in the most humble of circumstances. <https://regional.kompas.com/.../malam-natal-di-ambon> <https://www.guinnessworldrecords.com/records/hall-of-fame/malala-yousafzai-youngest-nobel-prize-winner>

Whoever we are, no matter how tiny our involvement, exposing injustices that we are aware of is always beneficial to many others. There are numerous methods for expressing injustice. An essay poetry is a simple approach to tell the story of injustice.

Why? The story of injustice is portrayed in fictitious form in essay poetry, with footnotes referring to true events. The story of injustice is told more forcefully in essay poetry, making it more poignant, memorable, and motivating.

Here are ten guidelines and rules for writing about injustice and humanitarian issues in essay poetry.⁽⁷³⁾

1. Feel for and seek out instances of injustice that affect us. Someone may have been subjected to discrimination. Or is it an instance of someone's human rights being violated? Or is this an issue of arbitrariness? Or about any problematic humanitarian situations.
2. Look for the case in trustworthy web news sources. Why should it appear in the news? It is an indication that instances of injustice have garnered widespread notice.
2. Include the news source as a footnote in your essay poem. Essay poetry, unlike other genres of poetry, must refer to an actual occurrence.
3. The genesis and biological mother of essay poetry is the footnote. Footnotes play an important role and must be present. The footnote is not meant to provide a definition or explanation of a term, but rather to reference the written accounts of events found in various media sources.
4. Compile critical information about the unfair event. The uniqueness, interest, or extremeness of an event determine how people feel about it. In the essay poem, present the key components of the event.

73 Thank you to everyone in the essay poetry community who helped to improve these ten steps and principles.

5. Create a drama around the event to make it more poignant. The drama is made up. Create some of our own fictional characters for the story. Essay poetry is also characterized by imagination, which is based on facts presented in footnotes.
6. How long and brief are essay poetry works? It's just been made more adaptable. What matters in one essay poetry is the occurrence of injustice, and the drama of our imagination is thorough.
7. How do you compose an essay poetry? The form consists of stanzas with poetic choice of diction, which is not dissimilar to poetry writing in general. It is distinguished by the factual and fictional aspects that comprise a significant portion of the essay poetry, which is supplemented by footnotes. The purpose of footnotes is to assist readers who want to learn more about the facts presented.
Of course, the laws of writing must also be followed, including writing words in line with language norms. A valid and correct use of the language you use; need not conform to any particular style.
8. Imagine this essay poetry being filmed as a short or feature film. There is enough drama in the essay poem to rival that of a short tale or novel.
9. You can find examples of this essay poetry in Denny JA's new book, *Screams Following Liberation* (2022), or in the longer version, *In the Name of Love* (2012).
10. The essence of essay poetry is the fictionalization of actual events/facts in order to touch the heart, conscience, and humanity more profoundly.

Starting in 2022, every December will be designated as "Essay Poetry Month." Along with the Human Rights Month in December, there will be more structured invites to expose injustice through essay poetry during that month.

1 October 2022 at dawn in London

