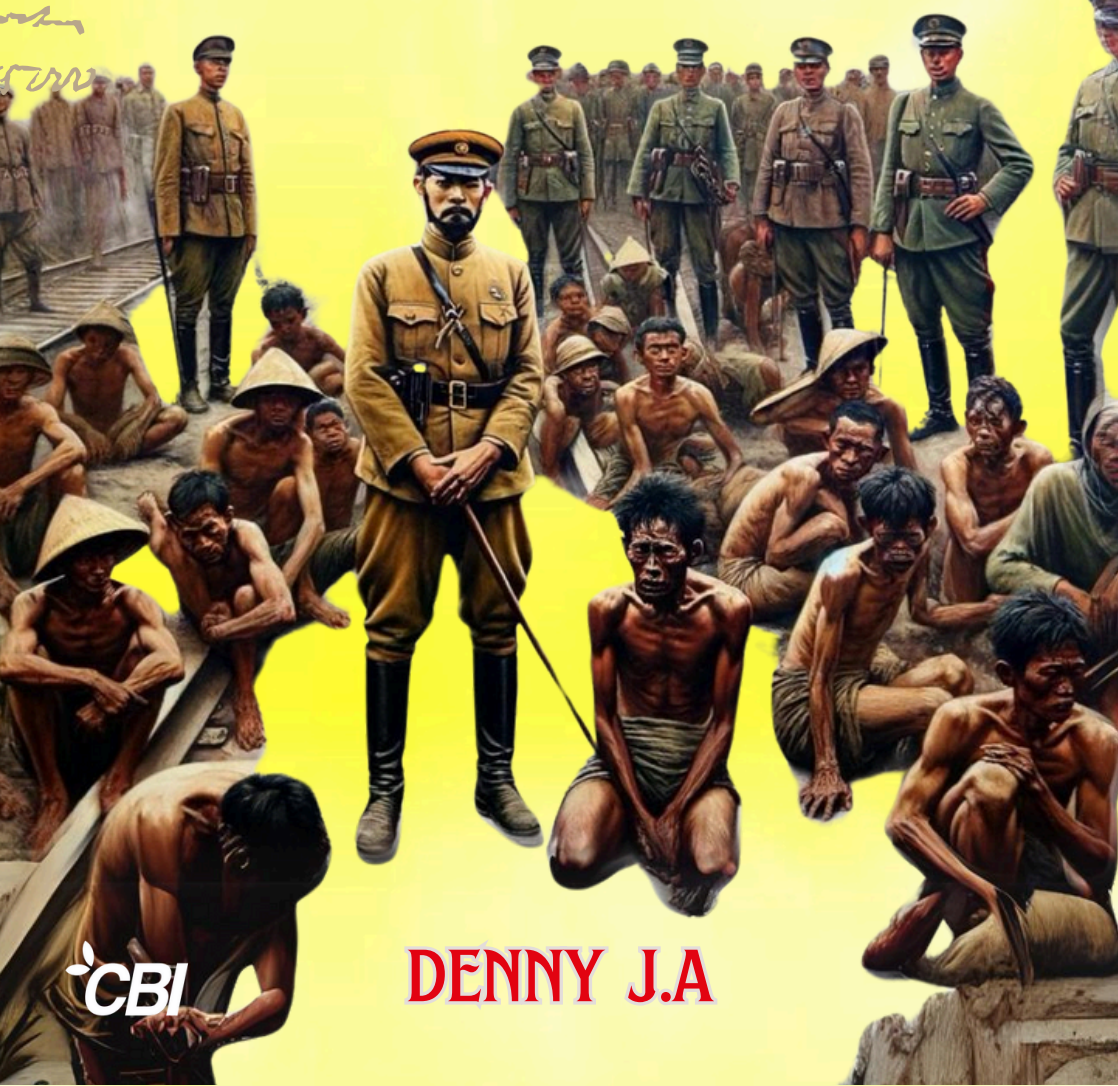


THE REMNANTS
of the
Independence Era

Essay Poetry Expression



CBI

DENNY J.A

THE REMNANTS
of the Independence Era
(ESSAY POETRY EXPRESSION)

DENNY J.A



CERAH BUDAYA INDONESIA
2024

The Remnants of the Independence Era (Essay Poetry Expression)

Author & Painter : Denny JA
Editor & Layouter : Studio Janggi

Published by: CERAH Budaya Indonesia, Ltd.
Pages: 80

First Edition June 2024

Copyright: Denny JA



PT CERAH Budaya Indonesia
Menara Kuningan ILT. 9G
Jalan HR. Rasuna Said Kav V Block X-7, South Jakarta
Indonesia

Table of Contents

Preface	-----	i
----------------	-------	---

CH. I : INDIGENOUS GIRLS FORCED TO ENTERTAIN JAPANESE SOLDIERS

Poetry 1: Do Not Name Me Comfort Girl	-----	1
Poetry 2: Rara's Perpetual Quest for Sari	-----	5
Poetry 3: Seeking Grandmother's Eternal Rest	-----	10
Poetry 4: For fifty years, I Kept the Secret Sealed	-----	15
Poetry 5: She Bore the Wound to Her Dying Breath	-----	19

CH. II : THE SAGA OF INDIVIDUALS COMPELLED INTO FORCED LABOR

Poetry 6: Samin Lies Dead along the Anyer-Panarukan Trail	-----	24
Poetry 7: Wahidin and the Death Rail	-----	29
Poetry 8: In Search of Grandfather Amidst Kalimantan's Forests	---	34
Poetry 9: In the Name of the Deity of Justice	-----	39
Poetry 10: Homeward Bound in Search of Memories	-----	44

CH. III : THE CHRONICLES OF THE NYAI AND CONCUBINES OF DUTCH MASTERS

Poetry 11: A Dutch Girl's Quest to Find Her Granny in Cimahi	-----	49
Poetry 12: Nyai Dedeh's Pursuit of Fireflies	-----	55
Poetry 13: Nyai Asih's Heartbreaking Arrival in the Netherlands	---	61
Poetry 14: Dutch Gentleman Uncovering His Past in Surakarta	-----	67
Poetry 15: Mother from Ciawi Seeking Her Dutch Child	-----	72

WRITER'S BIOGRAPHY	-----	77
---------------------------	-------	----

PREFACE

Bung Karno's Lament and Essay Poetry Expression

DENNYJA

Soekarno articulated these poignant words:

"My heart felt as though it were being crushed. I was the one who directed them towards their demise. I sent them to endure forced labour."

These words, which I have rephrased, are documented in the biography **"Bung Karno: Connecting the Tongue of the Indonesian People,"** penned by Cindy Adams in 1965.

This was a moment of profound reflection for Soekarno on his role in mobilising the populace to engage in Romusha labour during the Japanese occupation (1942-1945).

Bung Karno never anticipated that the people he urged to assist the Japanese through forced labour would essentially become slaves.

Many followed his call out of love and loyalty, only to meet tragic ends. They suffered grievously, enduring torture and hardship.

They were deprived of adequate rest and nutrition, packed into overcrowded trains for transport within Java, or onto ships when sent abroad.

Many perished en route. Their bodies were discarded into the sea, left to decay on the streets, or buried in mass graves, some even beheaded.

Others succumbed to diseases such as malaria and dysentery, or died from exhaustion and starvation. Torture claimed many lives as well. Those who survived were often mere skeletons, their bodies emaciated and frail.

We can still find numerous photographs of Romusha workers, resembling living skeletons, on Google.

At that time, Soekarno, as a leader, found himself in a precarious situation. He was striving for Indonesian independence, while Japan had already vanquished the Dutch.

In 1942, Japan established PUTERA (Labor Center), chaired by Soekarno and supported by Hatta, Ki Hajar Dewantara, and Kyai Haji Mas Mansyur. During this period, there were two divergent strategies: revolutionary resistance against Japan (non-cooperation) and collaboration with Japan (cooperation).

Indonesian fighters were divided in their approach. Soekarno and Hatta opted for the cooperative path, collaborating with Japan, hoping that Japan would support Indonesia's quest for independence.

Conversely, other politicians such as Soekarni, Chaerul Saleh, Adam Malik, Armunanto, A.A. Maramis, and Achmad Soebardjo chose the non-cooperative path.

Soekarno was willing to lead the mobilisation of the populace, hoping to garner Japanese sympathy. However, the suffering endured by the workforce soon became intolerable, even to Soekarno himself.

The number of Romusha coerced into labour by the Japanese in Indonesia was estimated to be between 4 to 10 million people.

Out of this number, approximately 270,000 Romusha were sent outside Java, including to Thailand and Burma, where they worked on projects such as the infamous Burma-Thailand Railway.



The plight of the Romusha is but one narrative among many of those who were displaced and marginalised during the era of independence. Another harrowing tale concerns the indigenous girls who were coerced into becoming "**comfort women**" for Japanese soldiers.

On her first day, Mardiyem was repeatedly assaulted by Japanese soldiers, forced to serve 10-15 men each day.

This traumatic ordeal persisted daily for years.

Mardiyem's story is just one of the countless tragic accounts experienced by women throughout Asia during World War II. Approximately 200,000 women were forced into sexual servitude for the Japanese military.

These women hailed from various countries, including Indonesia, South Korea, and China. In South Korea, they are referred to as "*comfort women*."

Many were subjected to the same brutal treatment as Mardiyem. The physical and emotional trauma they endured was profound.

This trauma led to long-term health issues, depression, and social stigma. Many of these women never fully recovered from their horrific experiences.

When Japan ultimately lost World War II in 1945, Japanese soldiers abandoned their posts, leaving these comfort women without protection. They found themselves in an extremely vulnerable state.

Returning to their hometowns was not an easy option. They faced severe social stigma and were often labelled as prostitutes for the colonisers.



Another issue prevalent during the independence era was the plight of indigenous girls who were compelled to become mistresses, concubines, or unofficial wives of Dutch masters.

A notable example of such a story is that of Nyai Ontosoroh, a renowned fictional character from Pramoedya Ananta Toer's acclaimed novel "*Bumi Manusia*" (This Earth of Mankind).

The real-life counterpart of Nyai Ontosoroh is Sanikem, a native woman coerced into becoming the mistress of a Dutchman named Herman Mellema.

Although fictional, her story mirrors the harsh realities endured by many native women during the colonial period. Sanikem was compelled to live as a concubine without the status of an official marriage, suffering from exploitation and societal discrimination.

During the Dutch colonial era, the practice of concubinage, or "*nyai*," was widespread. It is estimated that tens of thousands of native women became nyai for Dutch men.

These nyai were officially employed as domestic servants but were often also the sexual partners of their employers.

They had very limited rights and were frequently regarded as "indigenous furniture." Like property, they could be sold or relocated along with the house they occupied.

When Japan invaded Indonesia in 1942, many Dutch men were arrested and placed in internment camps. Nyai and their children were often left without protection.

After Japan's defeat and Indonesia's independence in 1945, the circumstances of the nyai and their children changed drastically. Many nyai were abandoned by their Dutch partners who returned to Europe.

These nyai often had to fend for themselves in difficult conditions.

Children born from relationships between Dutch men and native nyai were known as Indo-Europeans. Their fates were mixed. Some faced discrimination and struggled to adapt to a new culture.

However, many eventually succeeded, forming an Indo community in the Netherlands. They established themselves and became part of Dutch society.

The narratives of the nyai constitute a significant yet often overlooked chapter of Indonesia's colonial history. They represent a marginalised and scattered segment of the population who endured profound suffering.



Romusha forced labourers. Indigenous girls coerced into becoming entertainers for Japanese soldiers. Women made concubines of Dutch masters and separated from their children. Their life stories are explored and expressed through essay poetry.

The collection of essay poems in this book serves as a photo album, reflecting on the bitter memories of the era surrounding Indonesia's independence in 1945. This is part of our growth as a nation during a very difficult time.

But what is essay poetry? It is a form of poetry that blends narrative and essayistic elements into a single work. Essay poetry not only conveys emotions and feelings but also presents historical and social facts that underpin the poem's narrative.

These are the fundamental elements that constitute essay poetry:

- *First:*

The fusion of fact and fiction. Essay poetry intertwines fictional narrative elements with real historical or social facts.

- *Second:*

The inclusion of footnotes. Essay poems are equipped with footnotes, which serve as the foundation of the poem. The actual story, fictionalised within the essay poem, is represented in the footnotes.

- *Third:*

A strong narrative. Essay poetry contains a clear and compelling story, akin to an essay, short story, or novel. However, the narrative is presented in poetic form, emphasising the beauty of language and rhythm.



In this book, I, Denny JA, introduce a new variant of essay poetry, specifically designed for a shorter format. This version, when read aloud on stage or on YouTube, requires only about five minutes.

Despite its brevity, this poem retains all the essential elements of traditional essay poetry. It is simply a condensed variant.

Essay poetry community meetings are becoming regular events. There is a National Essay Poetry Community Festival and an ASEAN Essay Poetry Festival, both of which occur annually.

These gatherings often include meetings of activists for humanitarian

causes, religious diversity, and human rights, typically commencing with a poetry reading.

I envision these community gatherings being enriched by the inclusion of poetry. Hearing essay poetry allows us to appreciate not only its aesthetic beauty but also a piece of history or a fictionalised true story.

I have chronicled significant events from Indonesian history in three books of essay poetry.

- The first book, **"In the Name of Love"** (2012), introduces this new genre of poetry. It documents various forms of discrimination that persist even as Indonesia transitions into an era of reform.
- The second book, **"Screams Following Liberation"** (2022), records the bloody primordial conflicts that erupted in Indonesia shortly after the reformation. These include the Islam vs. Christian conflict in Maluku, the Madurese vs. Dayak ethnic conflict in Sampit, anti-Chinese riots in Jakarta, clashes between Balinese and indigenous people in South Lampung, and the expulsion of the Ahmadiyah community in NTB.
- The third book, **"The Remnants of the Independence Era"** (2024), recounts the suffering of Romusha workers, native girls forced to become entertainers for Japanese soldiers, and Indonesian women used as concubines, or Nyai, for Dutch masters.

The primary distinction between these three books lies in their length. The essay poetry in **"In the Name of Love"** (2012), performed by Putu Wijaya, Sutardji Calzoum Bachri, Ina Febrianti, Niniek L Karim, Sudjiwo Tedjo, and Fatin Hamama, takes approximately 30 to 40 minutes to read.

The essay poetry in **"Screams Following Liberation"** (2020), performed by a team of Balinese artists in various animated videos, has a duration of approximately 15 minutes.

In contrast, the essay poem **"The remnants of the Independence Era"** (2024) takes about 5-7 minutes to read, making it well-suited for stage performances.

Historical narratives and significant events that evoke strong emotions—

whether sorrow, tears, or joy—are more memorable and impactful when conveyed through the medium of poetry.

Jakarta, June 10th, 2024

NOTES:

(1) Bung Karno's remorse concerning the Romusha conscription was extensively reported in numerous media outlets, including:

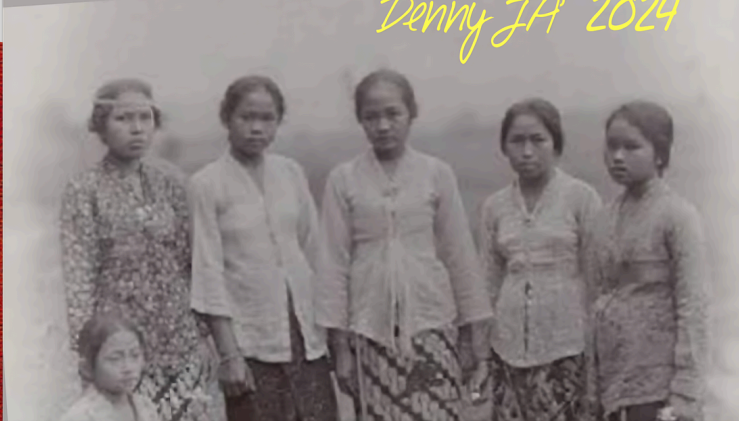


<https://shorturl.at/AFFrz>

Do Not Name Me Comfort Girl

NARRATIVES FROM
THE JAPANESE OCCUPATION ERA
(1943-1945)

Denny JF 2024



THE REMNANTS OF THE INDEPENDENCE ERA (1)

Do Not Name Me Comfort Girl

During the Japanese occupation of Indonesia from 1943 to 1945, countless Indonesian women were coerced into serving as "comfort girls" for the Japanese military. In their later years, these women sought an official apology and reparations from Japan.

*"I'm not ready to die yet,
before meeting Hasan."*

She repeated this mantra over and over again.
Her voice was hoarse, her breathing was labored.

A sorrowful black eagle flew in her eyes.
Her body smelled of dirt.
The sick old woman,
named Rahma. **(1)**

Zainal, her adopted son,
since last week,
sat by her side in vigil,
sitting at the edge of the bed.

In December 2007, at seventy-nine years,
Rahma passed away.
Zainal was entrusted with a black and white photo
which had turned yellow.
In the photo, a teenage couple can be seen,
with the old Yogyakarta station in the background:
Rahma and Hasan.

From the photo, Zainal searched for Hasan.
He uncovered Rahma's life story.
Zainal wept.
More than he expected.
Rahma had lived, carrying open wounds.



Inside that wound,
a sea of tears swelled,
puss festering within.

At fifteen,
Hasan took Rahma to the station.
"I'm happy, I finally became a singer in Kalimantan,"
said Rahma, cheerful and innocent.

In 1942, Japanese invaders
lured many young women,
to work and create.

But, oh, it was a lie.
Rahma was held captive in a small room,
a tiny space, just 7.5 meters.
Every day, she served 10-15 Japanese soldiers,
forced to work as a sex slave.

She was tortured,
ate so little,
slept even less.
There was no escape.

Many times, Rahma wished for death.
"Oh God, please take my life."
One thing kept her going:
Hasan's love.
At the station, he whispered,
*"Rahma, let's get married,
as soon as you come home from Kalimantan."*

For three long years, Rahma was an entertainer,
against her will.
Then, the Japanese left,
Independence for Indonesia.
Unlike Mardiyem,
another Japanese army comfort girl,
Rahma kept her story hidden.

She moved to Sumatra,
leaving behind Kalimantan,
the place of her torment.

She left Yogyakarta, her birthplace, forlorn,
Long before Rahma's final breath in 2007,
she had buried herself.

Rahma sought a new life,
But guilt towards Hasan gnawed at her heart.
She searched for him,
Yet Hasan was nowhere to be found.

Her love for Hasan,
Brought suffering.
Her love for Hasan,
Kept her hope alive.

But Hasan remained a ghost,
Never seen again.
Lost to the winds,
Vanished somewhere.

May 3, 2024

NOTES

(1) Rahma's tale was inspired by her account of Mardiyem, a woman who was forced to become a sex slave during the Japanese occupation period of 1943-1945.



<https://shorturl.at/qaRMP>

Rara's Perpetual Quest for Sari
Denny JA 2024



THE REMNANTS OF THE INDEPENDENCE ERA (2)

Rara's Perpetual Quest for Sari

During the Japanese occupation of Indonesia from 1943 to 1945, thousands of young Indonesian women were coerced into servitude as "comfort women" for Japanese soldiers. Sari was among these unfortunate individuals.

Rara stood there, stunned,
In the daylight, she saw fireflies,
Their lights dancing in her hotel room.

She was no longer young.
In 2001,
Rara was 81 years old.
Yet, she forced herself to The Hague, Netherlands,
To hear the international court's decision firsthand.

Rara cried,
As the gavel came down on war crimes.
December 4, 2001,
Emperor Hirohito was found guilty.
He must answer for 200,000 women,
Enslaved by Japanese soldiers,
During the Second World War.

These women hailed from Korea, China,
Including Indonesia.
Among the 200,000 was Sari,
Rara's beloved sister.

For over 40 years, Rara searched for Sari.
Since Indonesia's independence in 1945,
Sari had vanished.

In 1942,
That was the last year
Rara saw Sari.



At that time, Sari had just lost her husband,
Gone from illness due to toil and strain.

*"I have to work, Rara.
I leave my daughter, Sukma, in your care.
He is just two, but he'll grow,
I need funds for her future."*

Sari to Kalimantan went,
To the Telawang area.
The village head allowed it,
Said Japanese soldiers needed a cook.
The pay was high.
Sari could save for Sukma's school.

We allowed it.
Especially since she went with Mardiyem,
Her nimble, trusted friend.

Sari wept, embracing Sukma.
A final, poignant hug.
Her tears were not ordinary.
They smelled of death's flowers.

In 1945, Indonesia gained independence.
The Japanese were gone.
Mardiyem returned,
But Sari never came home.

Through sobs, Mardiyem spoke.
*"We were deceived.
No one cooked.
No one sang.
Sari and all of us,
Forced to become comfort girls."*

*"Each day, 10-15 soldiers to please.
Or else, trampled upon.
Denied food.
Mardiyem showed her damaged toes,
Crushed by Japanese soldiers' boots."*

Sari became pregnant twice,
Twice forced to abort.
Once, she nearly died,
Stricken with venereal disease.

"Is it true that the salary is high?" Rara asked.

*"That's a lie.
Our money was withheld,
Saying we owed more.
For food, drink, and even the bed we slept on.
We suffered, body and mind.
But Sari, she was different,"* Mardiyem said.

*"I'm a survivor. I bear it all.
But Sari had a soft heart,
Always longing for her daughter,
Always in sorrow.
In 1945, the Japanese declared,
We were free to go,
They had lost the war."*

Mardiyem told how she, Sari, and five others,
Went to Banjarmasin,
Three days and nights through the wilderness,
Along rugged paths.
They found shelter in a Dayak house,
Near a fast river.
Sari often sat, lost in thought,
By the rushing waters.

One day, Sari didn't return.
They said she jumped into the river,
But no one knew for sure.
They lost Sari.

Rara was shaken.
From that moment, she searched for Sari,
Everywhere, always.

Rara journeyed to Telawang, Kalimantan,
And to Banjarmasin too,
Always seeking, always yearning.

Rara walked through the wilderness,
Retracing Sari's steps.
She sat by the fast river's edge,
Where Sari once lingered,
But Sari was never found.

In The Hague, Netherlands,
People cheered, triumphant,
An international court had spoken,
Condemning those for their cruel acts.

Yet Rara, amidst the cheers,
Cried bitterly.
From the depths of her heart, she whispered,
"Sari, Sari,"
And in that room,
Fireflies circled around,
Lighting her sorrow.

May 4, 2024

NOTES:

(1) Sari's tale draws inspiration from the true account of an Indonesian woman who valiantly sought justice for a young girl exploited as a comfort woman by Japanese soldiers.



<https://shorturl.at/PuJ5C>

Seeking Grandmother's Eternal Rest

-THE REMNANTS OF THE INDEPENDENCE ERA

Denny JA 2024



THE REMNANTS OF THE INDEPENDENCE ERA (3)

Seeking Grandmother's Eternal Rest

During the Japanese occupation from 1942 to 1945, thousands of young Indonesian women were coerced into serving as comfort women for Japanese soldiers across various locations. Many of them vanished, never to be reunited with their families.

The silence of night broke apart,
A voice soft, slow, ancient, and sad.
*"Scatter flowers with your prayers,
Purify me again,
Bring me peace."*

Over and over, the message echoed.
Bambang woke from sleep,
The wall clock read 2:00 AM.
Doors, windows, ceilings,
Tiles, chairs, and lamps,
All swayed, reciting the same dhikr:
"Purify me, bring me peace."

This week,
Bambang dreamt the same dream twice.
A woman appeared,
Carrying that message too.

"Is this grandma?"
Bambang was stunned,
The hairs on his neck stood tall.
A week ago,
His father asked him to talk.



*"Bambang, your father, now over eighty years,
I don't wish to die,
Holding this secret.
You should know about your grandmother."*

For long, Bambang had wondered,
Who was the woman in the photo?
A yellowed black and white portrait,
Hanging in Mom and Dad's room.
Father would only say briefly:
"In time, you'll know."

Finally, Dad spoke:
*"That's your grandmother's photo.
In 1942, I was just two years old.
Your grandmother went to Kalimantan,
She was twenty-three then."*

*"She left with a group,
All young girls.
Grandma was a singer,
Promised a job singing
In entertainment venues in Kalimantan.
But it turned out to be a brothel.
All the young Indonesian girls were given new names, Japanese names.
Your grandmother was called Sakura."*

*"There, she was forced to serve the Japanese army,
Around 10-15 soldiers entered her room each day.
If she refused to serve,
She was tortured,
Hit, kicked,
Trampled on, not fed."*

*"She fell sick within a month,
And died.
Her body dumped in the field,
Left to rot alongside many romusha workers.
But her friends protested,
Refusing to work that day."*

*"Unless allowed to bury Grandma,
Properly,
They would not work."*

*"Request denied,
Grandma's friends were tortured,
Forced to keep working,
But they refused,
Until allowed to bury her,
At the field's end, under a tree."*

*"In 1970,
When you were six years old,
Dad journeyed there,
Searching for grandmother's grave,
But he never found her resting place."*

Bambang was stunned by this tale,
His head heavy,
A thousand needles piercing his heart,
No wonder this story haunted his dreams.

He delved into the news,
About the Comfort Women, Jugun Ianfu,
Japanese army comfort girls in the Second World War era.

Documents surfaced,
Revealing the policy of the Japanese army,
In occupied lands,
For every seventy soldiers,
One comfort girl was required.

In some areas, around 30-500 comfort girls were needed,
Bambang was shocked,
A world unknown to him,
He had grown up in peacetime.

That night,
Bambang felt his grandmother's call,
He had to act.

He sought permission from his parents,
Next week, he would journey to Telawang, Kalimantan,
Determined.

On the nearest land in the area,
He would kneel and pray.
Then he'd sprinkle flowers,
Upon that sacred ground,
Bambang would send Alfatihah to Grandma,
Whom he never knew.

He would offer prayers for a time,
Hoping it never returns.
That night, Bambang went to sleep with a plan set firm.
A fragrant scent crept into his room,
The sweet aroma of frangipani flowers.

May 5, 2024

NOTES

(1) Official documents revealed that during the Second World War, the Japanese military mandated a ratio wherein one comfort girl was required to serve seventy soldiers.



<https://shorturl.at/VzJOB>

*For fifty years,
I Kept the Secret Sealed*

-THE REMNANTS OF THE INDEPENDENCE ERA

Denny JA 2024



THE REMNANTS OF THE INDEPENDENCE ERA (4)

For fifty years, I Kept the Secret Sealed

During the Japanese occupation from 1942 to 1945, thousands of young Indonesian women were coerced into becoming comfort women for Japanese soldiers in various locations. Many of them vanished, never to be reunited with their families.

Anie's hands were trembling,
Mother handed her a manuscript wrapped in plastic.
*"Read this on the plane,
I want you to be the first to know."*
Anie was set to fly,
out of town.
"What's wrong, Mom?"
she asked in her heart.

For a long time, she saw clouds in her mother's eyes.
From the start, Anie had sensed,
A mystery behind Mother's frequent sorrow.
*"Good grief! Sorry, Mother!
Oh Lord. Whoa, whoa, whoa."*
Anie repeated over and over.
Tears spilled on the page.
Anie's body shook,
like dozens of owls from the past,
flying noisily through the plane, back and forth, back and forth.

Anie covered her ears,
she just wanted to cry.
Her mother had written,
*"I dare to speak,
after I watched TV.
Three Korean girls testify at the UN,
They were forced to become comfort girls for Japanese soldiers."*

Mother must also testify,
After fifty years, this story held tight.
*"At first, they promised only work,
To bring entertainment to life.
At seventeen, in that small room,
Mother faced Japanese soldiers' lust."*

*"In one day,
Five to ten soldiers raped Mother.
Mother always fought.
But slapped, hit, trampled with boots,
Mother's trauma lasted long.
Names of flowers replaced their own,
Mother came to hate blooms she once knew."*

*"When the Japanese left,
Mother sought solace, to become a nun.
But the head nurse found her past,
Mother was rejected, nowhere to run.
Every night, she panicked, aghast,
Soldiers haunted her dreams, a cruel stun.
For a while, she couldn't sleep in bed,
Tortured, she wished for death instead."*

*"But then, a former British soldier came,
Filled her heart with a warmer light.
He is your father, but sometimes,
Mother's sorrow grew in the night.
For your father never truly knew
The depths of what I'd been through.
Five years, I wrestled within,
Should this secret die with me?
Finally, resolve found my pen.
I'd write a book, truth to uncover."*

Anie's mother is named Sonya, true. **(1)**
Since her book's release, she's spoken far,
Earned human rights awards, a guiding star.
Anie strengthened Mother's heart, her scar.
But Father, he was different, marred.
Angry at the truth, he couldn't stay.
Father left, his whereabouts now gray.

Mother said,
"This is a risk I had to bear."
Anie was stunned,
How could this be fair?
For fifty years, Mother kept her secret tight,
But there was something she could not fight.

Since long ago,
When Anie looked into Mother's eyes,
Deeply, softly,
She heard the howling of birds,
Sad, sorrowful cries,
Long wailing, crushed by heavy stones,
A melody of aching tones.

Now, that bird flies free,
Testifying to the vast sky,
Her story released, no longer shy.

Jakarta, May 6 2024

NOTES

(1) This narrative draws inspiration from the life experiences of Jan Ruff O'Herne.



<https://shorturl.at/ZwXS9>

She Bore the Wound to Her Dying Breath

-THE REMNANTS OF THE INDEPENDENCE ERA

Denny JA 2024



She Bore the Wound to Her Dying Breath

During the Japanese occupation from 1942 to 1945, thousands of young Indonesian women were coerced into serving as comfort girls for the Japanese army. Some of these victims bore these scars until their death.

*"Too much touching drama.
Too deep the hidden wounds."*
Thus Shinta shifted her pen.
Not a scientific tome was born,
But a novel,
A historical fiction, forlorn.

The novel complete,
Between its pages,
Shinta seemed to see,
Tears flowing from the tale.

A sad, long sound, like a wounded deer,
Echoing, hauntingly clear.

In 2007, Shinta read,
News on her cellphone.
*"Sakinah, a girl who was forced
to serve Japanese soldiers,
Has died at seventy-six,"* it said.

Shinta came to the house,
Interviewing those near and dear,
Researching documents and news,
Unveiling stories long held in fear.

At thirteen, in 1943, Sakinah was deceived,
Persuaded to work in a Japanese factory,
But placed instead, cruelly misled,
In a brothel far away, in Kalimantan's misery.



She was hit, slapped, stepped on,
To force her to serve.

In a day, 10-15 Japanese soldiers
Entered her room.
Two guards stood watch, day and night,
Over the factory.
Many times, Sakinah tried to run away,
But she was caught, tortured again.
She was freed when Japan lost the war.
She fled to Bali,
With a new identity,
New friends,
A husband.

Her husband died first, ten years before.
That brought her deep sorrow.
He loved her deeply,
But he never knew
Who Sakinah truly was.

He never knew,
Hundreds of Japanese soldiers had raped her.
Sakinah felt such guilt.
Since her husband died,
Sakinah changed.

She read the news.
Comfort girls from Korea spoke at the UN,
Demanding Japan's apology.
From that moment, Sakinah became an activist.
She met many Indonesian women still alive,
Who, like her, were forced to be comfort girls.
They too demanded Japan's apology,
And compensation.

Sakinah traveled often, speaking, bearing witness,
Her eyes opened wide.
She found there were many,
Two hundred thousand women, comfort girls for Japan
In the Second World War.
From China, Korea, Taiwan,
The Philippines, and Indonesia.

Shinta read the document,
Japanese politician Major Osaka, Tōru Hashimoto,
Defended himself with cold words:

*"Instead of Japanese soldiers raping the public,
it is better to provide a brothel.
That's part of Japanese army discipline."*

Shinta also read an apology
From the Japanese government,
Via Minister Yōhei Kōno.
Japan gave compensation of 300 million rupiah each
To 280 comfort girls in the Philippines, Taiwan, South Korea.
Also compensation of billions of rupiah
for entertainer girls from Indonesia.

But the Indonesian government used this aid
For the construction of retirement homes.
Sakinah never received direct compensation.

In her old age,
Sakinah was often delirious,
Whispering her husband's name.
"Wayan, Wayan, I'm sorry."
On her last day,
To those who visited,
She spoke only of her husband.

Sakinah's emotional wounds from being forced
To be an entertainer girl were still raw.
But there was a deeper pain.
Until her husband died,
Sakinah never dared to tell him
That she was once forced to become a comfort girl for Japanese soldiers.
That hundreds of Japanese soldiers raped her, for three years.
Shinta wrote with a pen on the first page of the novel:

"For Sakinah."
From the end of the letter Sakinah,
Tears flowed.

NOTES

1. This fictional narrative draws inspiration from the life story of Mardiyem, an Indonesian comfort woman, and the movement in South Korea demanding an apology from Japan.

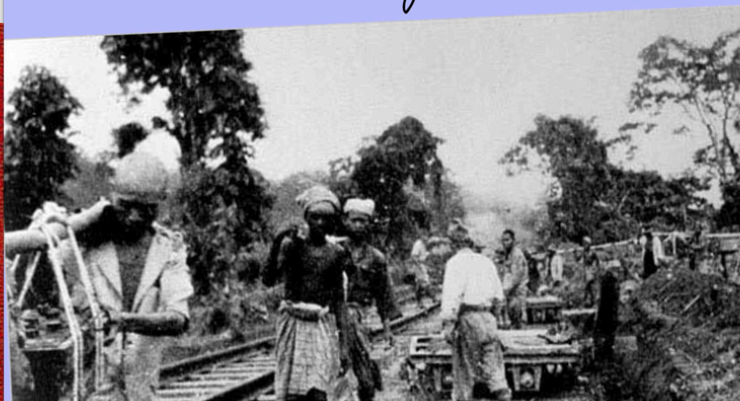


<https://shorturl.at/pwtoo>

Samin Lies Dead along the Anyer-Panarukan Trail

-THE REMNANTS OF THE INDEPENDENCE ERA

Denny JH 2024



Samin Lies Dead along the Anyer-Panarukan Trail

During the Dutch colonial period in Indonesia, under Governor-General Daendels' administration from 1808 to 1811, the construction of a highway spanning 1,000 kilometers from Anyer to Panarukan commenced.

This project, marked by brutal forced labor, resulted in the deaths of approximately 12,000 Indonesian workers.

Samin was among those who perished.

From the Anyer-Panarukan highway, the car pulled to a halt.

Yudi stepped out,

Carrying five plastic flowers of varied shapes,

And five bottles of rose water.

Maya, his beloved, assisted.

After a solemn prayer, Yudi scattered the flowers,

And poured the rose water onto the earth.

The atmosphere was hushed.

A gentle breeze whispered,

Carrying the tears of thousands from a distant past.

The hairs on Maya's neck stood tall,

As if she heard the mournful cries

Of thousands of dying birds rising from the ground.

Yudi spoke softly,

"Samin is my great-grandfather, nine generations past.

I never knew,

And my family long remained in the dark.

Where did great-grandfather Samin perish?

His body lay abandoned,

Left to decay."

In 1808,

Great-grandfather Samin was just twenty-five,

With two sons already in his life.



Together with four close friends from Banten's shores,
They were sent to Java, to toil in the Dutch war.
The village head spoke with a hopeful air,
*"Do your duty well, wealth will be your share.
The Dutch will build a road so grand,
Your earnings will secure your family's hand."*

But Yudi sighed, *"Reality was cruel,"*
The Dutch demanded swift labor, the hours were brutal.
Great-grandfather Samin labored under the blazing sun,
Burned by its relentless rays.

Not infrequently, they shivered from the cold,
Drenched by relentless rain.
But they had to keep working.
Sometimes, they ate just once a day.
The water they drank was scarce and dirty.

They labored 12 hours a day,
Rest was a distant dream.
If their work slowed down,
The foreman whipped them, struck their backs.
Screams of pain echoed frequently,
Amidst the clatter of crowbars and hoes.
Samin's great-grandfather had a sturdy frame
When he first began.
Within five months,
His body grew thin, like a skull.

Village friends, many fell to malaria.
Some succumbed to starvation.

*"My great-grandfather Samin, at night,
Left his tent.
He couldn't bear it anymore.
He longed to go home, quietly missing his child."*

But his strength waned.
He grew weary on the road,
And lay down at the edge of the Anyer - Panarukan road.
Dead.
Alone.

His body lay rotting,
Alone.
The family learned two months hence.

*"Did your great-grandfather receive no pay?" Maya asked.
"I cannot say," Yudi replied.
"They say Daendels gave wages through each regent's hand,
But those funds never reached the laborers' hand."*

*"I've read the history of this road,
My heart is torn," Yudi softly intoned.*

*I and many others felt the benefits of this path,
Especially in ancient times.
Because this way,
Farmers' crops and harvests traveled easier.
Fifty post offices stood along the way.
Communication sped along faster.*

*But twelve thousand people perished,
Forced laborers on this road.
A genocide, masked as development.*

The day dimmed into evening.
Yudi gazed at the road,
From end to end,
As if seeing again,
Thousands of men working, day and night, whipped and shoved.
The sound of hoes and groans
Mingling together.

Their bodies exhaled the scent of the flower of death.
From the ground,
A sound seemed to emerge,
Ancient, melancholic:

*"Do not forget us.
We gave twelve thousand lives.
We suffered and died,
Lying on this road." (1)*

Yudi returned, deeply moved,
To send Al-Fatihah, his heart behooved.
*"Great-grandfather Samin,
May my prayers find their way to you."*

Jakarta, May 9 2024

NOTES

(1) Approximately 12,000 Indonesian laborers perished under deplorable working conditions during the Dutch colonial period, specifically in the era of Daendels, from 1808 to 1811.



<https://shorturl.at/AsQ56>

Wahidin and the Death Rail

-THE REMNANTS OF THE INDEPENDENCE ERA

Denny JA 2024



Wahidin and the Death Rail

From 1942 to 1945, Japan subjected the Indonesian populace to brutal forced labor for the construction of a 220-kilometer railway, stretching from West Sumatra to Riau. This grueling endeavor claimed the lives of over 100,000 laborers, who perished in abject misery. Joko, one of the few surviving workers, recounts his harrowing experience.

January 1999, Joko was 81 years old,
His body was emaciated,
But his memory was still sharp.
Around 25 students majoring in history, together with lecturers,
Visited him.
They wanted to hear the romusha story from the perpetrator directly.

*"We worked in a wild place,
In the vast wilderness, past the rushing river,
Breaking through hard hills,
Into the swamps and rocks." (1)*

*"A friend of mine died from being eaten by lizards.
Some died when they were attacked by lions.
More people died from malaria mosquitoes."*

*"Their bodies were left to rot on the riverbank,
Or on the edge of the railroad tracks."*

Maya, a student who was present there,
Saw tears dripping down Joko's cheeks.
The tears were dark, because of the dark memories of the past.

From Mr Joko's mouth,
She saw what looked like hundreds of bats, from an ancient cave.
Emerging with tales of the brave,
And the enslaved.

*"I'm from Java,
Sent here to West Sumatra, in April 1943.
My entourage was more than 10 thousand souls,
I was just 15 years old.
Wahidin led me here,
He said, 'we must aid Japan.
This railway is crucial for progress,
For transporting wood,
coal,
because war costs gold.'*

Later Japan would grant Indonesia freedom,
Japan was our elder sibling.
But that sibling was cruel.
We were fed sometimes, once a day,
Just a pile of rice with salt.

Those Japanese,
watching us toil.
We were beaten, shoved.
We had to be swift, they said,
The railroad must be built with haste.
In just three months,
Wahidin and I were skeletons,
Bones visible, like shadows.

But Wahidin always gave hope,
This railroad,
it is ours,
Japan will depart.
Just be patient,
Just have faith.

(The students listened intently,
The wind whispered on the veranda of the old house,
carrying long-buried secrets of the past)

*"My task was to set dynamite on rocky hills, by the riverbanks,
But what broke me,
I was ordered by Japan to clean the bodies of my friends,
lying lifeless on the ground."*

Japan forbade us from burying the dead,
Said it was a waste of time,
But I heard whispers,
Japanese soldiers dug mass graves,
The stench of corpses too strong,
Disrupting their labor.

When Wahidin passed,
I found courage.
In the quiet evening,
My friends and I buried him.
We prayed fervently,
Placed a grave marker.
But the floods came,
And the grave vanished.

"Why did Wahidin die?"
a student inquired.

Joko explained: Wahidin was frail.
He had beriberi, dysentery,
Bitten by malaria mosquitoes.
*"Wahidin's body was weak,
But his mind was sharp,
Yearned for Indonesia's freedom.
Wahidin was our beacon,
Always gave us hope."*

Mr. Joko continued:
*"That railroad track, it's no longer there.
The bridge crumbled.
Residents plundered the iron rails,
And the wood.
All gone, looted."*

"I'm even sadder,"
Mr. Joko sighed.
*"Wahidin died in vain.
The railroad he cherished,
It's gone."*

Maya gazed into the distance,
from end to end.
No traces remained of the deadly train tracks.
Yet Maya's resolve,
the sorrowful tales of countless forced laborers,
did not vanish without a trace.

Maya invited her fellow students to sow flowers,
While praying,
that such forced labor would never return.
Maya herself sowed flowers in the rushing river,
For the workers who perished there,
eaten by crocodiles,
eaten by lizards.

Jakarta, May 10, 2024

NOTES

(1) The narrative of this Romusha laborer draws inspiration from an array of historical records. Among these are various news accounts:

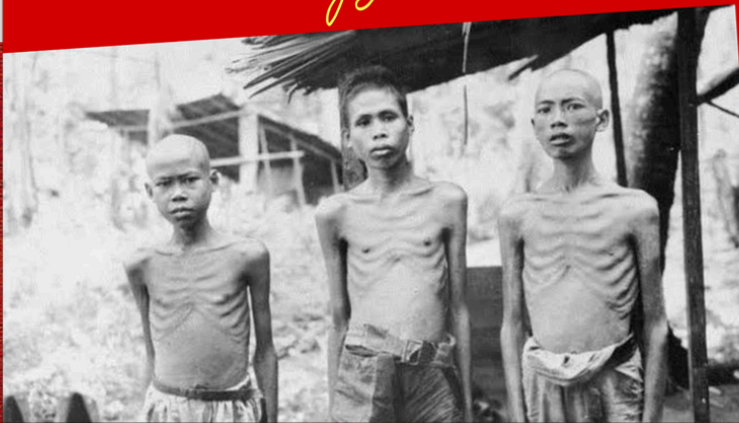


<https://shorturl.at/iz4Ub>

In Search of Grandfather Amidst Kalimantan's Forests

-THE REMNANTS OF THE INDEPENDENCE ERA

Denny JA 2024



THE REMNANTS OF THE INDEPENDENCE ERA (8)

In Search of Grandfather Amidst Kalimantan's Forests

When Japan capitulated in 1945, hundreds of Indonesian forced laborers in Balikpapan sought refuge and concealed themselves within the forest. Dulah was among them.

It's already 2:00 in the morning,
On the veranda's quiet stage,
Bayu sat in thoughtful mourning,
How to honor his mother's will.

The night wind blew
slow.
In the tree leaves,
clinging to the mystery of the past,
present but unreachable.
That's what his mother said,
before taking her last breath.

*"Please, son.
I will not find peace,
until you search for your grandfather.
Seek him in the forests of Kalimantan."*

Last week,
Mother told him much about grandfather.
How grandpa loved cigars.
In Mother's room,
always hung the painting.
Grandpa painted it, in 1942,
before going to Kalimantan.
Mother was 6 years old then,
very spoiled by grandfather.
That was her last meeting with him.



In 2017, when Mother died,
Bayu was 50 years old,
no longer young.
How could he search for Grandfather in the forests of Kalimantan?
A vast, wild place.
But this was her will,
Mother's request.

A month passed, Bayu learning Grandfather's story,
Grandfather named Dulah,
a forced worker, Romusha, during the Japanese colonial era.
In 1942, he with more than 80,000 Javanese youth,
were sent to Kalimantan.
Some, including Grandfather, went to Balikpapan. **(1)**

Grandfather's first suffering was that ship trip,
across the Java Sea to Kalimantan.
A week of sailing.
Not enough food,
not enough drink.
Many died on the ship.
Their bodies were thrown into the sea,
just like that.
A week at sea was hell.

When he arrived in Balikpapan, Grandfather's body was emaciated.
He arrived in Balikpapan, Oil City, July 1942.
They wore only trousers and clothes made from sacks.
Every morning, Grandfather marched with the others in the field.
They faced the sun,
a symbol of respect for the Japanese emperor, Tenno Heika.

After the ceremony, by truck,
they were taken to the oil refinery.
Everyone had to be disciplined.
Those who violated were beaten many times by Japanese soldiers.
Grandfather lived in a makeshift barracks,
not eating enough,
not drinking enough,
but work had to be agile.
Grandfather was often whipped,
butt-stroked.

With friends,
Grandpa once ran away.
But he was caught,
and beaten almost to death.

July 1, 1945, Japan on the verge of defeat.
No longer any soldiers at the oil refinery.
The workers, including Grandpa,
escaped.
Afraid of capture by allies,
afraid of being seen as Japanese stooges.
Their condition was sickly,
skinny.
Without supplies, they fled,
entering the forest.

They headed to Samarinda, Paser, Tenggarong.
Many died on the road,
attacked by tigers,
bitten by malaria mosquitoes.
Many lived with bodies thin as skulls.

The people who saw them,
called them forest ghosts from Java.

A year after that event,
in 1946, scattered bones were found in Kalimantan's forests.
From the story above,
Bayu continued to ponder,
where should he start looking for Grandpa?

Bayu believed Grandfather was dead.
But where was the grave?
If Grandfather died in the forest,
how to find the bones?

Finally, Bayu went to the forest in Balikpapan.
The area was more than 10,000 hectares.
Bayu only entered the forest a little.
He brought home several orchids that grew there,
also several types of mushrooms.
He planted the plants,
in his yard, in Jakarta.

In the afternoon,
he took his wife and children to pray together,
in front of plants from the forests of Kalimantan.
Prayers for Mother, prayers for Grandfather.
In silence, he whispered a word.

*"Mother, this plant is a symbol of Grandfather's body,
from the forests of Kalimantan.
I have carried out your will.
This is all I could do."*

*"Thank you, Mom, for your love for Grandfather.
Thank you, Grandpa, for your service to the country."*

From that orchid flower,
Bayu seemed to see smoke.
He smelled it, the scent of cigar smoke,
Grandpa's favorite.

With heartfelt voice, Bayu cried:
*"Grandfather, can you feel my efforts,
Reach you, beyond where shadows bide?"*

Jakarta, May 11, 2024

NOTES

(1) The account of the tragedy befalling Indonesian forced laborers (Romusha) in Balikpapan can be explored in the following sources:



<https://shorturl.at/KHIQ2>

In the Name of the Deity of Justice

-THE REMNANTS OF THE INDEPENDENCE ERA

Denny JA 2024



THE REMNANTS OF THE INDEPENDENCE ERA (9)

In the Name of the Deity of Justice

Before August 1945, the Dayak tribe in Kalimantan waged war against the Japanese, who had slaughtered thousands of Romusha laborers. Ampong joined in this resistance.

That morning, on the banks of the Kapuas River,
July 1945, Ampong sat restless.
His gaze lingered on the mandau, again and again,
-- a type of long machete,
of the Dayak tribe.
There were traces of blood on the mandau,
traces of the Japanese soldiers he killed.

But Pang Suma, the leader of the Dayak tribe,
had been shot and died.
Ampong's soul was in turmoil.
He felt the wind blowing with a fishy smell,
thousands of Romusha workers who died languishing.

From thickets and bushes,
he felt the spirits of dozens of Dayak tribe elders,
from hundreds of years ago,
float into the air, transforming into a giant shadow,
never ceasing to praise him.

Ampong's mind drifted back several years.
Father had bequeathed this mandau to him with a message:
Use this hereditary heirloom wisely.

Dad got it from Grandfather.
Grandfather got it from Great-Grandfather.
*"You also have to pass this on to your future children.
That's tradition."*

Ampong was actually non-violent,
A teacher from India had influenced him deeply.
But the Japanese soldiers had gone too far.
The chief had spoken,
Japan had killed a thousand
people in Mandor,
slaughtered two hundred forty
on the Durian River,
and killed a hundred in Ketapang.

Ampong remembered two months ago,
Five people with unsteady steps emerged from the forest,
Their bodies like skeletons.
They were Romusha workers who fled,
All from Java.
The Dayak tribe accommodated them.

They told tales of hundreds of Romusha workers from Java,
languishing to death.
They were tortured,
whipped, and butted,
for agile work at the oil refinery.
Even though they ate less,
drank less.

Forced workers slept in dirty barracks,
infested with malaria mosquitoes.
Eighty thousand Javanese people forced to work in Kalimantan.
The peak of Ampong's anger
came when his girlfriend cried.

The foreman of a Japanese lumber company,
named Osaki, wanted to marry her.
If not, her father would be killed.
Ampong complained to Pang Suma, the leader of the Dayak tribe.
Osaki was also killed. **(1)**

Pang Suma also burned down a Japanese lumber factory.
Pang Suma was now sought by the Japanese army to be killed.

From March to June 1945,
the Dayak war against
Japan was on fire.

Pang Suma's rallying cry,
"Injustice must be fought, never defy."

The war raged, especially in Sanggau district.
With simple weapons,
Initially, Pang Suma won.
But in the end, Pang Suma was shot and died.

Ampong still remembered,
He accompanied Pang Suma when he breathed his last breath.
Pang Suma did him a favor.
That was Pang Suma's last message:
*"We might lose,
But the justice we defend, never loses."*

Ampong cried,
He participated in burying Pang Suma's body.
Ampong felt guilty,
Was he part of the cause of Pang Suma
fighting the Japanese army?

Seventy-two years later, in 2017,
Dehen sat on the edge of the Kapuas River.
Dehen was Ampong's eldest grandson.

At Dehen's side, the mandau lay.
This was the same mandau, which Ampong, his grandfather,
used to fight and kill Japanese soldiers.

Dehen glanced at the mandau's gleam,
*"I live in a different era, a different dream.
No longer will I wield a mandau in strife,"*
A decision to end the cycle of violent life.

A decision was made.
Dehen wanted to break the chain of violence.
Dehen immediately threw the mandau into the Kapuas River.
*"Let your mandau be buried with the violence of the past,
into the Kapuas River."*

When Dehen swung the mandau,
he froze in awe,
A fleeting glance at the blade,
Revealed his grandfather, Ampong's face.
A voice echoed softly,
"Do not abandon me."

Dehen was shaken.
He saw the mandau many times.
Dehen pondered long and hard.
The mandau was put away.
He took it home.
To one day pass it to his lineage.

From the swamps, from the bushes,
Dehen seemed to see the spirits of hundreds of Dayak elders,
from hundreds of years ago,
transformed into a giant shadow,
praising him,
thanking him.

Jakarta, May 12, 2024

NOTES

(1) The resistance of the Kalimantan people under Pang Suma is well-documented in numerous historical records. Among these is an account in the news:



<https://shorturl.at/FQ5hW>

Homeward Bound in Search of Memories

-THE REMNANTS OF THE INDEPENDENCE ERA

Denny JA 2024



THE REMNANTS OF THE INDEPENDENCE ERA (10)

Homeward Bound in Search of Memories

Between 1942 and 1945, Japan conscripted approximately 500,000 Indonesian forced laborers, dispatching them to foreign lands such as Singapore, Thailand, and Myanmar. Following Indonesia's independence, a mere 70,000 returned. Hundreds of thousands perished in abject misery.

"No sir, don't.

He is still alive."

Bambang grabbed the soldier's leg.

He hoped Sono's body wouldn't be thrown into the hole.

"Damaru!"

A soldier shouted in Japanese,

words Bambang couldn't understand.

What he felt was a hard boot kick on his chest.

Bambang cried.

He saw Sono's face,

still alive.

Sono's hands reached out,

pleading for help.

But two Japanese soldiers,

cold and unfeeling, threw Sono's body

into a deep hole.

Sono was mass buried,

just like that,

with other Romusha workers.

Bambang heard,

rather than healing the sick,

Japan chose to bring in new Romusha workers.

What should Bambang tell Sono's family?

He couldn't bear the truth.

Sono was buried alive.



Bambang looked at the sky,
Clouds formed a giant face,
Fierce eyes, Sharp fangs.
The cloud preyed,
Crushed it,
Leaving no trace.

Bambang felt his body was still alive,
But his soul had died.
He imagined Dini's face,
His hometown lover,
The woman he cherished.
Dini, forcibly wed to a wealthy man,
Was this the fear
he feared going home?
Bambang asked, over and over.

In 1995, Bambang at seventy-four,
On a bus back to Banjarnegara, Central Java
His home once more.

*"Yes, Lord,
Fifty-two years have passed
since I last came home.
Is this the place I once knew?
Indonesia, no longer recognized."*

In 1943,
With tens of thousands of forced laborers,
Bambang heeded the village head's call to work.

*"Japan is our older brother,
Let's work together,
Japan will help us gain independence,"*

Bambang never expected
the distance he'd tread.
Crammed into trains with thousands,
For days they traveled,
Barely fed,
With thirst never quelled.

The train was sealed tight, no air to spare,
Days dragged on in suffocating despair.
Breath was scarce,
the stench profound,
Hunger gnawed,
sickness all around.
Hundreds of Romusha lay cold and dead,
Their bodies cast aside without a care,

Bambang was sent to Thailand,
He built a railroad, from Thailand to Myanmar,
Four hundred fifteen kilometers long. **(1)**

When Japan lost the war,
he feared to go home.
In Thailand, he married, divorced, marriages didn't last.
Children born in fleeting unions,
Yet Dini, his beloved, never left his heart's communion.

"I want to be with Mas Bambang,"
Dini said many times,
While crying,
Hugging him.
That was their last meeting.

1995, Fifty-two years later,
Bambang set foot back in his hometown,
Banjarnegara.
He heard the news,
Dini had died seven years ago.

That solemn afternoon,
he visited her grave,
Removed his ring,
Placed it gently in her resting place,
Tears flowed freely down his face.

With a voice soft and low,
He whispered his sorrow,
let his emotions flow.

*"Your ring,
I've worn it always, Dini,
As I promised you,"* he whispered softly.

At the grave, Bambang burst into tears,
His tears flowed,
Becoming an ocean,
In their depth, he drowned, lost in emotion.

Bambang gazed up at the sky,
Where clouds took shape,
faces magnified.
Fierce eyes,
Sharp, ferocious fangs,
The cloud consumed him.

His body remained alive, earthbound,
Yet his soul felt lifeless.
A spirit departed long ago.

Jakarta, May 14, 2024

NOTES

(1) The tale of Romusha laborers from Java, sent across the seas:

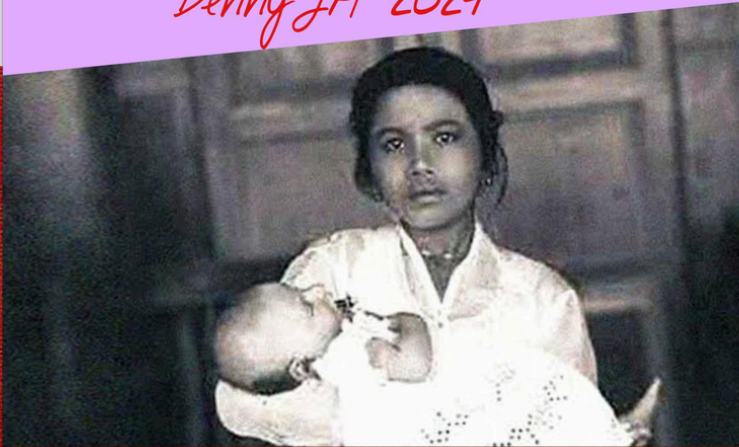


<https://shorturl.at/GWNrP>

A Dutch Girl's Quest to Find Her Grandmother in Cimahi

-THE REMNANTS OF THE INDEPENDENCE ERA

Denny JA 2024



A Dutch Girl's Quest to Find Her Grandmother in Cimahi

During the Dutch colonization of Indonesia from 1819 to 1942, many indigenous women became servants and unofficial wives, known as Nyai. However, Nyai held no legal rights over the children they bore.

The building had changed so much.
Long ago, sixty years past, in 1940,
there stood only bamboo food stalls.
And a love story.
An unusual love.

In 2000, a Dutch girl named Fagal,
stood gazing at the building in Cimahi, West Java.
She compared the structure to an old
now yellowed,
black and white photo,
Far different.
Yet the aura of the past lingered.

The wind carried the spirit of 1940.
A Sundanese woman named Elis sold food,
while a Dutch man sipped coffee nearby.
Then they lived together.
Maarten was born.

Maarten was Fagal's father.
But where was Elis now?
If alive, Elis would have been 80.
Fagal had come searching,
seeking her grandmother.

Maarten was only two years old
when the Japanese arrived in 1942.
Grandfather had taken Maarten back to the Netherlands.



*"I will return here again,
if the Japanese leave."*

Grandfather's promise, whispered to Elis.

Elis cried, clutching Maarten tight.

Grandfather wept,
holding Elis with might.

In the Netherlands, grandfather already had a wife.

Elis, though beloved by grandfather, could not join him.

"Bring my son back.

Don't forget to bring my son here."

Elis' tears filled her eyes.

Two men she loved
would soon disappear.

Bits and pieces of information were gathered by Fagal.

Everything slowly formed a complete canvas.

A month ago, in Amsterdam,

Fagal visited Oma Martha.

Grandma Martha, weak and fading,
awaited death's arrival.

"I wronged your father.

Until his death,

he never knew.

I reveled in that.

He always thought I was his biological mother."

Fagal was stunned,

those words like bombs,

exploding in the pit of her stomach.

*"When your grandfather brought your father here, from Indonesia,
he was only two years old.*

*When your grandfather died in an accident,
he was three.*

He never knew the truth."

"I raised your father with love.

I let him believe I was his real mother.

I reveled in it,

because I had no children of my own."

When your father died,
wilting under the grip of cancer,
I wanted to tell him the truth.
But his face was so sad.
I couldn't bear it.
*"I am guilty,
I was guilty,"* Grandma Martha cried, wailing in regret.

Fagal cried too.
Grandma Martha hugged her.
*"I don't want to take this secret with me to my grave.
You, Fagal, must find your grandmother.
This photo is the only one your grandfather gave me."*

Fagal's tears grew heavier.
She had always considered Grandma Martha her true grandmother.
But now, she discovered she had a real grandmother,
an Indonesian woman.
That photo was all she had.
Handwritten, Cimahi 1940, and the name of the street.
Just a photo of a food stall,
and a woman's face,
now blurred with time.

A week passed in Cimahi, marked by failure.
She gathered information.
From a historian.
From local residents.
From books.
From newspaper archives.
From hearsay.
Fagal also learned the term: Nyai.
A native woman,
initially a household servant to a Dutchman.
Then she became an unofficial wife,
a mistress,
or a concubine.

Nyai's duty,
to serve her Dutch master.
To bear children.

But Nyai had no rights over the children she bore.
The Dutch master could take the child at any time.
Dutch law did not protect Nyai.
Dutch society saw Nyai as an unequal citizen.
Different religion.
Different education.
Different social status.
Different class.

But that day,
Fagal heard a different story.
Her grandfather truly loved Elis.
This was a rare tale.
Grandpa was just afraid of being killed by the Japanese.
He fled to the Netherlands.
Grandpa intended to return to Cimahi,
but he died in Holland,
not long before Indonesia became independent.

Fagal understood then,
why that food stall,
captured in Grandpa's photograph.
This was where he met Elis.
In that shop, a love story began.
A complicated love.

One thing made Fagal sad.
Grandma Elis had disappeared somewhere.
There were rumors.
Elis was kidnapped by the Japanese,
taken to work in Kalimantan.

Fagal looked back at the building.
She saw it with different eyes,
her inner eye.
Stunned, Fagal gazed again and again.
Sunshine streamed,
delivering two butterflies from the past,
to fly there.

Fagal felt,
the two butterflies represented
her grandfather and grandmother

returning to Cimahi,
to that building,
to thank her.

Jakarta, May 16, 2024

NOTES

(1) Inspired by numerous accounts of indigenous women who became Nyai, one such narrative is encapsulated in this news:



<https://shorturl.at/OTeMc>

Nyai Dedeh's Pursuit of Fireflies

-THE REMNANTS OF THE INDEPENDENCE ERA

Denny JA 2024



THE REMNANTS OF THE INDEPENDENCE ERA (12)

Nyai Dedeh's Pursuit of Fireflies

During the Dutch colonial era prior to 1942, numerous indigenous girls served Dutch masters, simultaneously fulfilling roles as unofficial wives, concubines, and mistresses, known as Nyai. Their primary duty was to serve their Dutch lords. However, some Nyai evolved to empower themselves, transcending their initial roles.

Bogor, 1935.

As evening approached, Dedeh and Prabu walked the path,
sneaking through the garden, not wanting to be seen.
They arrived at the Kyai's house,
Prabu's Koran teacher.

Dedeh wept.

At 16 years old.

Her father asked her to work,
to become a servant of the Dutch master,
as well as a mistress,
an unmarried wife.

Her father, a batik trader,
was in debt.

The Dutch man offered help,
with one condition:
Dedeh must become his mistress.

"Help me, Kyai.

Marry me to Prabu now.

I want to leave home."

Dedeh's tears streamed down her face.

In the sky, the moon wept too.

The sound of crickets roared,
bearing hidden wounds.



Kiai spoke,
*"Young Lady, you still have your father.
Even if I wanted to, I couldn't marry you.
It wouldn't be valid religiously.
It's useless.
Your father must marry you off, as he is still healthy."*

*"Listen to Kiai's words:
Don't be like grass,
always being stepped on.
Be a tree.
Face the rich Dutchman,
don't lose your wits." (1)*

Kiai's words felt like a mantra,
etched in memory.
Dedeh kept crying.
Prabu fell silent,
gazing at his lover,
helpless.

Outside Kiai's house,
in the garden,
Dedeh and Prabu
embraced, sharing tears.
They were stunned,
as fireflies danced around them,
casting beams of light.

*"I will wait for you," Prabu promised.
"Always.
I swear before the fireflies,
my love will never die."*

Dedeh laughed through her tears.
They cried again,
knowing separation was near.
Dedeh would soon become the Dutch master's mistress.
They hugged,
one last embrace.

Dedeh whispered,
*"My love will continue to burn.
I promise, before the fireflies."*

Times changed.
Dedeh became the Dutch master's mistress.
They moved to Batavia.
Dedeh had children.
One child.
Two children.
She always remembered Kiai's wise refrain.
Don't be grass,
if you don't want to be stepped on.

Dedeh persuaded the Dutch master.
She wanted to help with the business.
The children grew up.
Dedeh learned to read.
Very diligently.
Learned to count.
Very diligently.
Dedeh ran the business.
Very diligently.

When it was quiet,
Dedeh often thought of Prabu.
*"Where are you now, my darling?
You promised to wait for me.
Always."*

In 1942,
Japan came.
The Dutch were defeated.
The Dutch master fled back to his country,
taking Dedeh's two children.
She was left behind.
But this was a different Dedeh.
The Dutchman's business became hers.

Dedeh went to Bogor,
searching for Prabu.
Seven years had passed,
since they last saw each other.
She heard the news,
Prabu worked
as a Romusha.

He was sent by the Japanese army to Riau,
to build a railroad,
no one knew until when.

At dusk,
Dedeh walked to Kiai's garden.
She wanted to see the fireflies again,
her last memory with Prabu.
But the fireflies never returned.
Prabu's fate remained unknown.

Dedeh revived her father's business,
a batik enterprise.
She gave it a new brand,
Batik Prabu.
She often created batik motifs,
firefly motif batik.
*"If I can't unite with you in the real world,
we are united in this batik cloth."*

She devoted herself to batik with all her soul.
The firefly motif,
she wrote on the cloth,
for Prabu,
lost somewhere.

In 2000,
Batik Prabu reached Yenni's hands.
As a historical researcher,
Yenni sought the story behind the batik.
When Yenni studied the batik,
and the love story it held,
the fireflies on the batik seemed to come alive,
swarming around Yenni,
glowing.

Wow! Yenni was stunned.
"These fireflies are alive,"
circling around,
conveying a message,

the story of a concubine, a nyai,
who helplessly gave her body,
but held fast to her love.
True love.

Jakarta, May 18, 2024

NOTES

(1) Typically, indigenous girls who became unofficial wives, concubines, or Nyai for Dutch masters were rendered helpless, often withering in old age. However, there were also Nyai who remarkably rose above their circumstances:



<https://shorturl.at/Timm6>

Nyai Asih's Heartbreaking Arrival in the Netherlands

-THE REMNANTS OF THE INDEPENDENCE ERA

Denny JA 2024



Nyai Asih's Heartbreaking Arrival in the Netherlands

During the Dutch colonial era prior to 1942, numerous indigenous girls were compelled into servitude, becoming concubines and unofficial wives to Dutch masters. When Japan triumphed over the Dutch, many Dutch lords retreated to their homeland. Typically, these concubines, known as Nyai, were abandoned. However, there were instances where a Nyai was taken to the Netherlands.

In 1956, at the Zorgvlied cemetery in Amsterdam,
Netherlands,
Nyai Asih pondered.
She stayed there for hours.
A month had passed since Mr. Dutch, Arthur, died.

Asih visited every day.
But that time, her visit was different.
She whispered to the grave,
"Master Arthur, this is my last visit.
Forgive me if I ever wronged you.
I have forgiven your mistakes."

Asih cried,
holding back tears,
yet thousands of needles pierced her stomach.
The tears kept spilling,
bringing sorrow, wounds, suffering, loneliness, pain.
She looked at the grave,
the resting place of the man she had served for 26 years.
The wind carried her to the past, to a time far away.

Cimahi, 1930.
Asih was only 16 years old.
She had run away from home.



She went against her father's decree,
For three days, Asih stayed at her grandmother's house.
But Asih couldn't bear it.
She heard that her mother was sick,
and her father was sinking deeper into debt.
So Asih went home.

Her father sold her to a Dutch master, named Arthur.
The debt was considered paid.
Asih became a helper,
as well as a mistress,
a wife who never married,
serving the Dutch lord,
morning, afternoon, and evening.

To her surprise,
this Dutch master was kind.
He was a KNIL soldier,
but also a writer.

When Japan came,
Mr. Arthur returned to the Netherlands.
Unlike other Nyai,
Asih was brought along by Arthur.

In the Netherlands, Nyai Asih lived in a house.
Sometimes Arthur would come to spend the night.
It was known,
Arthur was a Catholic.
He already had a wife,
and children.

Arthur no longer got along with his wife,
for a long time.
Because of religion,
he couldn't divorce her.

Arthur did love her.
It truly felt like it.
But Asih felt lonely.
It truly felt like it.

Arthur's wife and children were hostile.
He felt their animosity deeply.

Asih herself had no children.
Arthur's extended family looked down on her.
Neighbors there,
saw her as an inlander,
a lower class, uncultured,
worthless.

Asih grew increasingly sad,
especially after Arthur died.
Arthur's son decided,
*"This house is for sale.
You have to move.
It doesn't matter where."*

In that year, 1956,
Nyai Asih was no longer young,
42 years old.
She had nothing.
Asih returned to Cimahi, West Java.
Her sadness deepened.
Neighbors and her own family
considered her tainted.
Because she wasn't married,
they saw her as adulterous,
with the invaders,
with infidels.

In Cimahi,
just as in Amsterdam,
it was the same.
Asih was rejected,
shunned,
seen as a germ, bringing bad luck.

That afternoon, at her father's grave,
Asih cried,
and protested.
*"Father,
I'm struggling now.
Why, why..."*

*Why did Father have the heart to sell me?
Help me, Father."*

The wind in the cemetery,
like the sound of a flute,
sang a song,
the story of a helpless woman,
with inner wounds,
broken at the root,
longing for death.

The frangipani tree by the grave,
swayed in the wind,
its leaves and twigs rustling.
Through the frangipani tree,
Asih felt her father's presence.
An apology.
A feeling.
Regret.
A feeling.

She couldn't fathom,
how she was cast aside.
Through the whispers of the frangipani tree,
her father wept.
She felt it.

At her father's grave,
and her mother's too,
she gave thanks and said goodbye.
She had to leave Cimahi.
Not knowing where.
But to a place where no one knew her.
Asih would change her name,
change her identity,
pretend,
become a different woman.

Jakarta, May 20, 2024

NOTES

(1) Not all Nyai, the mistresses entwined with Dutch masters, were left behind. There were some who were taken to the Netherlands, leaving their native land behind:



<https://shorturl.at/zuRS9>

Dutch Gentleman Uncovering His Past in Surakarta

-THE REMNANTS OF THE INDEPENDENCE ERA

Denny JA 2024



Dutch Gentleman Uncovering His Past in Surakarta

Today, hundreds of thousands of Dutch individuals trace their lineage to Indonesian ancestry. Their grandmothers or great-grandmothers were indigenous girls who served as both maids and concubines, unofficial wives to Dutch masters. When Japan occupied Indonesia in 1942, these children were taken by their Dutch fathers to the Netherlands, where they established permanent residence.

In 2010, in Amsterdam, Netherlands,
Ruben's hand shook as he held the key.
His father had said:
"Three days after my funeral,
open the safety box.
Don't open it beforehand."

What was in the safety box?
Ruben felt it.
Not treasure,
not gold,
not money,
but something from the past.

His father died at the age of 75.
Ruben was 45 at the time.
For a long time, Ruben pondered.
Why was Dad often moody?
Dad seemed weary, burdened by a secret.

Ruben once asked:
"Dad, what's wrong?
Why are you often sad?"
Dad just smiled.



But in Father's eyes,
a wounded eagle lied,
lonely and alone,
hiding, closing himself off.

In that box,
there was a diary.
There were old photos, yellowed with time.
There was a hat made of cloth,
which Ruben recognized as a blangkon.

Ruben opened the diary:
*"I'm sorry, my son.
You receive this story after my death.
Grandma Camlo is not your real grandmother.
She did raise me,
but your real grandmother,
my biological mother, was named Maimunah.
She was from Surakarta, Indonesia.
Your grandfather didn't bring her to Holland.
My father was separated from my grandmother in 1942.
I was only 7 years old."*

"Oh my, oh my!"
Is this the secret, Dad?
Was that the heavy stone on your heart?"

Ruben was shocked.
A bomb exploded in his chest.
He never expected it.
Ruben looked at the photo,
black and white, already yellowed.
A building photo,
labeled: Cantinestraat, Surakarta, 1940.
In front of it, a Dutch man,
an Indonesian native girl,
a little boy.

Written in the diary:
*"That's a photo of your grandfather, grandmother,
and me when I was 5 years old.
That's a blangkon,
Grandma's only gift,
that I kept."*

Ruben cried.

"Dad, why didn't you tell me this earlier?"

The pain of secrets brought by death.

Ruben recalled being six, tender and young,

Father beside him, songs softly sung.

"That's an Indonesian song," Father would say,

Melodies from a land far away.

Ruben in 2010,

Thirty-nine years had flown,

He sang the old melody,

The lyrics now known:

"Nina bobo, oh Nina Bobo,

If you don't sleep, the mosquitoes will bite."

"Oh," Ruben whispered with a sigh,

"Father, this song came from your mother's lullaby.

When you were in Indonesia,

cradled and caressed,

Grandmother's love,

putting you to rest."

That same year, Ruben went to Surakarta, Indonesia.

He wanted to trace the past.

Cantinestraat had changed.

Now it was the Kliwon Market area.

The building in the photo had transformed.

Now it was called Gedung Djoeang 45.

"This is where Grandfather, Grandmother, and Father stood"

Like in that photo.

Ruben wanted to feel the lingering aura of the past.

In vain.

For three days, Ruben searched for information.

Did anyone know Grandma Maimunah's family?

In vain.

Ruben visited the old cemetery.

Was there anyone named Maimunah? In vain.

In the traditional market's vibrant span,

He saw the blangkon

"It's just like the one Dad kept."

Ruben bought the blangkon.

Since then, he wore it,
wherever he went.

His past revealed, but only vaguely.

Clouds still hid the sky.

There were no traces left.

Except for the blangkon he wore.

Before leaving Surakarta,

Ruben went once more to Kliwon Market.

The wind seemed to bring

grandfather, grandmother, and father,
like in that photo.

Ruben cried,

whispering:

"Forgive me, Father, for I could not trace,

Grandmother's resting place,

her sacred space."

Jakarta, May 22, 2024

NOTES

(1) Approximately 500,000 Dutch citizens today possess Indonesian heritage:



<https://shorturl.at/7xx75>

Mother from Ciawi Seeking Her Dutch Child

-THE REMNANTS OF THE INDEPENDENCE ERA

Denny JA 2024



Mother from Ciawi Seeking Her Dutch Child

Prior to 1942, during the Dutch colonial era, numerous indigenous women served as housemaids and concubines, mistresses, or unofficial wives to Dutch men. They bore children, who were typically taken by their fathers to the Netherlands when the Japanese occupied Indonesia. In numerous instances, these women, as they aged, yearned for their children until their dying days.

*"I won't be old enough.
Help me, Joko, grant me this wish.
Just once, just now, let me see,
The face of my son,
Fifty-two years have passed, who was taken from me."*

*"Elmo, Elmo,
Come near, my child,
Come here, let me hold you awhile."*

These words,
Aunt Inah repeated over and over again.
Bogor, 1994.
Aunt Inah's body was weak,
at 76 years old.
For two weeks,
she just lay in her room.

Four people,
sat in that room, keeping her company.
They recited the Koran,
reading over and over again the holy verses.

Then suddenly, Aunt Inah's voice rang clear,
A desperate cry, filled with fear.



*"Don't shoot, don't shoot,
This is my son.
Don't, sir."*

Aunt Inah seemed to fly into the past.
Three Japanese soldiers strangled Elmo,
her son, the Dutch sinyo.

Those reciting the Koran were stunned,
Eyes wide, breaths bated, voices hushed.
"What ails Aunt Inah?" they wondered,
Joko gently assured,
"Keep your hearts steady, let's continue our prayer."

Aunt Inah, a living mystery,
Who was she?
Nobody knew.
From where did she journey?
Nobody knew.
Why did she often speak of the Netherlands?
Nobody knew.
Neighbors only heard faint whispers.

Aunt Inah was from Cimahi.
But no family, ever came to visit.
For twenty years,
Aunt Inah had lived in Bogor.
She bought that house,
and opened a shop in front.

Aunt Inah didn't socialize,
an introvert.
She only sometimes went to the market.

It was also faintly heard,
that Joko was her adopted son.

When the recitation finished,
neighbors dispersed.
Joko solemnly prayed.
He held Aunt Inah's hand,
inviting her to recite God's name together.

Joko recited Surah Al Fatihah, over and over again,
blending with Aunt Inah's increasingly faint breaths.
Joko looked at Aunt Inah,
as if seeing an open wound, wisps of anguish,
missing something that never arrived, helpless.

In 1936, in Cimahi,
Aunt Inah was only 18 years old.
Her father sold her to a Dutch KNIL soldier.
Aunt Inah's family was in debt.
Aunt Inah rebelled.

*"I do not want this fate,
I have a love, a future mate."*

Aunt Inah ran away from the Dutch soldier's house.
But her father and mother were taken hostage.
That was the agreement when Aunt Inah was sold.
Morning, afternoon, evening, non-stop,
Aunt Inah served the Dutch master.

She became pregnant.
Elmo was born.
Aunt Inah raised Elmo,
breastfed him, rocked him to sleep.
Only Elmo brought her solace.
She gave her life for Elmo,
a mother's love for her child.

In 1942, Japan came, the Dutch were defeated.
One night, the Dutch master's house
was raided by the Japanese.
The Dutch master was not at home.
Elmo's face looked Dutch.
A gun was pointed at Elmo's face.
"Where's your father?" asked the Japanese soldier.
Elmo cried in fear.
Aunt Inah screamed hysterically.

That was the moment when Elmo was taken away,
To the Netherlands with his father that day.

"It's not safe for us here," the Dutch master declared,
The man she had served, her heart ensnared.
Aunt Inah pleaded to be taken along,
But her cries were unheard, her plea felt wrong.
She kissed the master's feet in desperation,
Pleading to remain in their constellation.
Ignored.
That was the last she saw of her son, Elmo adored.

Elmo was five, his eyes full of tears,
Mr. Dutch only offered,
*"If you miss your child, write here,
To this address in The Hague,
in the Netherlands dear." (1)*

*"This house and business,
They're yours to keep,
But my child, Elmo, comes with me."*
Elmo cried too, his small heart breaking,
But he was taken, his world forsaken.
The sun set on Aunt Inah's aching.

Every week she penned a letter,
No reply.
She wrote hundreds of letters.
No reply.
A year passed.
No reply.

In 1967, Aunt Inah was accompanied by an activist,
traveling to the Netherlands, searching for Elmo.
Turns out it was a fake address.
There was no such place.

"No wonder my letters went unanswered,"
Aunt Inah wept in silence.
*"Too cruel, you, Mr. Ernest.
He is my son too."*

Returning to Cimahi,
Aunt Inah embraced her suffering once more,
Seen as society's refuse,
A concubine to a Dutch infidel, never an official muse.
Adultery whispered with disdain,
Only Joko, her adopted son, felt her pain.

That house where she once lived,
She sold along with memories of Elmo,
Aunt Inah moved to Bogor,
Needing a new horizon, an escape, something more.
She sought a place where no one knew her name,
To bury her past, to quell her shame.

But wherever she roamed,
Elmo's shadow, her son, clung to her soul,
Elmo's photo was always there, in her wallet.
"Elmo, Elmo."
That was the last word Aunt Inah said.
The bolster pillow in her arms,
as Aunt Inah died.

In Joko's eyes,
The bolster pillow in her arms transformed,
Becoming Elmo, the Dutch sinyo, reborn,
The son she yearned for,
forever adorned.

Jakarta, May 28, 2024

NOTES

(1) Many Indo-Dutch descendants are beginning to uncover the truth that their great-grandmother was a native Indonesian girl, kept as a concubine by their great-grandfather:



<https://shorturl.at/CwFwQ>

WRITER'S BIOGRAPHY

Denny J.A



Denny JA, born on January 4, 1963, in Palembang, South Sumatra, Indonesia.

His essay poem "Fang Yin's Handkerchief," in its English rendition, emerged as the best-selling book on Amazon in late July 2015.

Denny JA was honored with the 2020 ASEAN Humanitarian and Diplomacy Literature Award by the Malaysian Language and Literature Agency. He also received the 2021 Lifetime Achievement Award from the Indonesian Writers Guild (Satupena) for his four decades of dedication and innovation as a writer.

TIME Magazine recognized Denny JA in 2015 as one of the 30 most influential people on the Internet, placing him alongside prominent figures such as US President Barack Obama, Argentinian President Christina Fernandez de Kirchner, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi, and celebrities like Shakira, Taylor Swift, and Justin Bieber.

This accolade highlights Denny's extraordinary role in leveraging social media to influence and shape public opinion and surveys leading up to the 2014 Indonesian presidential election.

The Indonesian Survey Circle (LSI Denny JA), under his leadership, has successfully influenced five consecutive Indonesian presidential elections. This remarkable achievement earned accolades from MURI (Museum of World Records-Indonesia) and LEPRID (World Indonesian Achievement Institute). LSI Denny JA also conducts nationwide political education events, and in doing so, Denny JA set a Guinness World Record for the largest political education event ever held (2018).

In 2014, Twitter awarded him the Golden Tweet No. 2 Worldwide, which was also No. 1 in Indonesia for that year.

That same year, he was selected by a team of eight distinguished poets, critics, and academics for inclusion in a special publication by the HB Jassin Foundation, recognizing him as one of the 33 most influential literary figures in modern Indonesian history.

Denny JA began his academic career as the Executive Director of Jayabaya University in Jakarta (2000-2003). He was also a prominent presenter for political programs on Metro TV and Delta FM Radio during the pivotal Reformation Era (2002-2004) and served as a long-term columnist for nine national newspapers (1986-2005).

Denny JA founded the Indonesian Public Opinion Survey Institute (2003), the Indonesian Survey Circle (LSI Denny JA, 2005), the Public Opinion Research Association (AROPI, 2007), and the Indonesian Political Consultants Association (AKPI, 2009).

Through these four organizations, Denny JA pioneered a new tradition of political consultation and public opinion surveys in Indonesia.

Denny JA's educational background is as follows:

- Bachelor Degree in Legal Studies, University of Indonesia, 1989
- Master of Public Administration (MPA), University of Pittsburgh, United States, 1994
- PhD in Comparative Politics and Business, Ohio University, United States, 2001

Regarded as a reformer of Indonesian poetry alongside Chairil Anwar and Sutardji Calzoum Bachri, Denny JA has introduced distinct poetic traditions. The Essay Poetry movement he initiated has grown into an ASEAN community, with the 3rd ASEAN Essay Poetry Festival held in 2024.



*The anthology of essay poems within
this book serves as a photographic
album, revisiting the poignant
memories of the era surrounding
Indonesia's independence in 1945.*

*This collection is an integral part of
Indonesia maturation, chronicling the
nation's journey through exceptionally
challenging times.*

