

CHAPTER ONE

GEOGRAPHICAL AND THEORETICAL CONTEXT

Introduction

This thesis has been undertaken with a number of objectives in mind. In the first place, it aims to assist in the development of a ‘map’ of aspects of contemporary Indonesian language poetry and associational life related to that poetry from the province of West Java, particularly in the period after 1998, when President Soeharto relinquished power as president of the Republic of Indonesia.¹ While there have been numerous studies undertaken of aspects of the development of modern Indonesian literature, relatively few have focussed on the regional setting of the modern Indonesian literature story. Those that have considered regional developments have tended to focus on literature in the regional languages themselves.²

Studies of the development of Indonesian as a national language of unity have paid some attention to the relationship of *Bahasa Indonesia* to the various regional languages of the archipelago. By and large, however, studies of the development of modern literature in Indonesia have not looked at comparable developments in regional literature in the national language.³ Nor have they generally looked at the interplay

¹ The idea or concept of ‘mapping’ poetry or literary developments in Indonesia is taken from references made by Harry Aveling in H. Aveling (ed. and trans.) *Secrets Need Words: Indonesian Poetry 1966-1998*. Athens/USA: Center for International Studies, Ohio University, 2001. p. xiii.

² See e.g. the account of the development of the Javanese language novel by G. Quinn: *The Novel in Javanese; Aspects of its social and literary character*. Leiden: KITLV Press, 1992. [Verhandelingen, 148]. See also Tom van den Berge, ‘Van Kennis tot Kunst: Soendanese Poezie in de Koloniale Tijd’, Ph. D. thesis, Leiden University, 1993.

³ For a study of the development of the Indonesian language, see James Sneddon, *The Indonesian Language: Its history and role in modern society*. Sydney: UNSW, 2003. See also E. Ulrich Kratz, “Criticism and scholarship: The study and teaching of Indonesian literature in a non-Indonesian context” in

between literary writing in *Bahasa Indonesia* and that in the regional languages.⁴ Derks, whose analyses will be mentioned in some detail, has focused most attention on Central and East Java.⁵ No research on aspects of contemporary Indonesian language poetry from West Java has been undertaken from an academic perspective. This thesis sets out to fill this gap, providing an insight into aspects of Indonesian language literature in its West Java regional setting, and also within the developing national Indonesian literary tradition.

Any researcher is bound by the limitations set by time in the carrying out and documenting of that research. In this case, it is proposed to address primarily the nature of developments in themes and styles in contemporary Indonesian language poetry from West Java, with particular reference to poetry from Bandung, the provincial capital and from Tasikmalaya, a sub-regional centre, south west of the provincial capital. But while primary attention will be given to the poetry itself, it also seems important to give some attention to the nature of the associational life that exists in West Java around the writing of Indonesian language poetry.⁶ Activities that encase or surround production of creative work may be as helpful in assisting us to grasp the nature and characteristics of the writing in any historical period as the works themselves. The means of production and distribution of literary works is also a vital aspect in helping to define the relationship of

J.J. Ras and S. O. Robson (eds.) *Variation, Transformation and Meaning: Studies on Indonesian literatures in honour of A. Teeuw*. Leiden: KITLV Press, 1991. [Verhandelingen 144].

⁴ Hendrik Maier, "'We are playing relatives"; Riau, the cradle of reality and hybridity', *Bijdragen tot de Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde* 153: 672-98.

⁵ Will Derks, 'Sastra Pedalaman: Local and regional literary centres in Indonesia' in Keith Foulcher and Tony Day (eds.), *Clearing a space: Postcolonial readings of modern Indonesian literature*. Leiden: KITLV Press, 2002. [Verhandelingen 202]. pp. 325-348.

⁶ The term 'associational' in this context is used to describe the various public domain activities, such as meetings, festivals, conferences and seminars, community functions, organizational activities and interaction amongst poets, regarding their poetry, as distinct from publications of poetry in their own right.

the literature in question to its readership. Newspapers and newsletters, printed books and electronic transfers of literatures, festivals and conferences also aid us in understanding just how the text and context of the regional literary story relate to each other.

For the purposes of this research project, 1998 offers a useful starting point for examination of these questions. This is partly for reasons of seeking to maintain a sensible limitation on the range of material to be considered. The year 1998 was the end point for Harry Aveling's description of the new canon of Indonesian poetry from the Soeharto period. Just as in 1966, Indonesian literature was on the verge of a new generation coming into being-the motto being 'the literature of reform' (sastra reformasi). Indeed, Aveling referred to those poems he had chosen to complete his anthology under the general heading of 'Sastra Reformasi'.⁷ The thesis will examine the extent to which there has been change or continuity in the themes and styles adopted by Indonesian language poets from West Java through the period of political change.

A second objective of this thesis is to try to understand just how regional poets play a role in the development of national literary traditions in modern Indonesia. There are the writings of Ajip Rosidi⁸ and the work of non-Indonesian researchers such as Will Derks and Henk Maier referred to above. It is hoped that my research findings will add to

⁷ Aveling, op. cit. (2001), pp. 334-336. The title for that section of his anthology alluded to the particular June 1998 edition of the literary magazine, *Horison*, which had been dedicated to 'Reformasi'. The June 1998 edition had carried two leading articles – one by Agus R. Sarjono, and the other by Rendra. Both articles called for greater openness in society, restoration of rights of citizens to participate fully in their society and the rule of law. Aveling provides a summary of the *Horison* June 1998 articles by Agus. R. Sarjono and Rendra. There were also forty poems in the *Horison* June 1998 edition on the then-current situation in Indonesia. Aveling selected three of these (two by Taufiq Ismail and one by Ikranegara) to end his selection of anthology covering the period 1966-1998 during which President Soeharto was in power. These poems were 'hard-edged' poems, replete with commentary on the challenges facing Indonesia at that crucial moment in its history.

⁸ See, for example, Ajip Rosidi, *Sastra dan Budaya: Kedaerahan dalam Keindonesiaan*, (Jakarta: PT Dunia Pustaka, 1995).

this body of knowledge about the way in which region-based poetry in the national language finds its place within the national Indonesian literary tradition. One limitation on the current study, though, will be that it primarily uses Indonesian language primary sources and English language secondary sources, and also does not claim to cover the nature of contemporary Sundanese language poetry.⁹

Definitional issues; the problem of West Java

It is appropriate in this introductory chapter to address a number of key definitional issues, especially regarding West Java itself. The key administrative unit in Indonesia below the national level is the province. In broad terms, the definition adopted of 'West Java' in the thesis is co-terminous with the administrative boundaries for the province of this name within Indonesia.¹⁰ But even these have changed over time, as will shortly be outlined.

In terms of geographical characteristics, prior to the recent creation of the new province of Banten, the province of West Java was divided into three areas.¹¹ The first is the north coastal lowland plain, which stretches from Serang, west of Jakarta, to Cirebon, near the border of Central Java. The main agro-ecosystem of the northern plain is

⁹ Background information on modern Sundanese language poetry has been primarily drawn from two main book sources: Ajip Rosidi (editor-in-chief, and others), *Ensiklopedi Sunda: Alam, Manusia dan Budaya*. (Jakarta: Pustaka Jaya, 2000); *Modern Sundanese Poetry: Voices from West Java*, with selections and introduction by Ajip Rosidi, and translations into English by Wendy Mukherjee. (Jakarta: Pustaka Jaya, 2001). Internet-based sources are mainly from the literary reporting and coverage in Bandung paper *Pikiran Rakyat* (www.pikiran-rakyat.com/cetak) over the period 2001 to mid-2006.

¹⁰ Nina H. Lubis, in the article, '19 Agustus 1945, Hari Jadi Jawa Barat', *Pikiran Rakyat*, 6 January 2004 at www.pikiran-rakyat.com/cetak/0104/06/0805.htm. suggests a province is defined by three essential elements: its inhabitants ('penduduk'), its geographical area ('wilayah geografis dengan batas-batas yang jelas') and its 'administrative structure' ('pemerintahan'). Lubis also suggests that there is also usually a need for 'specific regional characteristics' that help to identify the province ('ciri-ciri khas daerah yang menjadi identitas daerah tersebut').

¹¹ This section of the Introduction follows the account given by Harry Aveling in his introduction to the English language versions of Ramadhan KH, *Priangan si Jelita/ Songs of Praise to Sunda, West Java/ Priangan la Jolie/Priangan, Herrliches Land*. (Magelang: Indonesiatara, 2003), pp. 36-37.

irrigated rice-growing. Parts of the area have also been used for plantation cultivation, producing coffee, tea, rubber and quinine. The second area is a high mountainous area, rising from south of Jakarta, and running east to west throughout Java. Here the irrigated rice lands of the coast give way to terraced rice lands, plantations and forest reserves. The third area consists of the large highland plateaus centred on the cities of Bogor, Sukabumi, Cianjur, Bandung, Garut and Tasikmalaya.

In administrative terms, and accepting that much of the legal basis for administrative law in modern Indonesia is derived from the Dutch East Indies period, the province named West Java was first proclaimed by the Dutch East Indies Government in State Regulation No.378 dated 14 August 1925, which became operative on 1 January 1926.¹² Indeed, of the provinces created in Java at that time, West Java was the first.¹³ At that time, West Java province comprised five residencies: Banten, Batavia, Buitenzorg, Priangan and Cirebon, which were broken down further into 18 autonomous 'kabupaten': Serang, Pandeglang, Lebak, Batavia, Meester Cornelis, Karawang, Buitenzorg, Sukabumi, Cianjur, Bandung, Sumedang, Garut, Tasikmalaya, Ciamis, Cirebon, Indramayu, Majalengka and Kuningan. Apart from these areas there were also six autonomous town areas or *stadtsgemeente*: Batavia, Meester Cornelis, Buitenzorg, Sukabumi and Cirebon.¹⁴

¹² Irwan Natsir, 'Jawa Barat Dibentuk Sejak Kolonial Belanda', *Pikiran Rakyat*, 6 January 2004 at www.pikiran-rakyat.com/cetak/0104/06/0806.htm.

¹³ *ibid.* The provincial headquarters initially, however, was based in Batavia, in the building that has now become Museum Fatahillah.

¹⁴ *ibid.* In the article, Natsir refers to Sundanese historian, Edi S. Ekadjati's comment that the colonial authorities had, upon the urging of *Pagoejoeban Pasoenden*, a Sundanese cultural association established in Batavia in 1913, also permitted the province to be known as *Provinsi Pasundan*.

This situation continued until the Second World War. Japanese administrative arrangements in 1942-45 did not survive the war, but just after the declaration of Indonesian national sovereignty on 17 August 1945, along with seven other autonomous provinces, the existence of West Java province was declared by the Interim Committee for Indonesian Independence on 19 August 1945.¹⁵

These arrangements remained in force until the changes occasioned by the passing of Law No 22 in 1999, which set out regional autonomy principles.¹⁶ In accordance with succeeding law No 23 of 2000 signed by then President Abdurahman Wahid on 17 October 2000, Banten became the 30th province of Indonesia, having its own system of government like other provinces. The new province of Banten now encompasses the Kabupaten of Serang, Lebak, Pandeglang, Tangerang, and includes the cities of Tangerang and Cilegon.¹⁷

Since the creation of Banten province, West Java Province has encompassed sixteen Kabupaten and six Autonomous city areas. Taking account of the splitting off of

¹⁵ *ibid.* The Committee, headed by Oto Iskandardinata, had proposed the formation of eight provincial areas and two special areas, Yogyakarta and Solo. Soetardjo Kartohadikoesoemo, by decision of the President of the fledgling republic, was installed as the first Governor of West Java of the Republic. In December 1945 the capital of the province was transferred to Bandung, but with Dutch NICA attacks and the virtual partitioning of Bandung in 1945, the Governor never took up residence; second Governor Datuk Djamin leaving Bandung during the Bandung *Lautan Api* period that lasted from February to 15 March 1946.

¹⁶ Following the passing of Law No. 22 of 1999 and subsequent legislative and administrative provisions (www.jabar.go.id/detail.php?data=peraturan accessed on 17 February 2004) there have been changes in regards to the definition of West Java for administrative purposes under 'otonomi daerah' wherein authority is ceded to the 'autonomous areas' to 'carry out policies and deal with the interests of their local society according to their own guidelines based on the aspirations of the society in accordance with the provisions of the regulatory provisions (*ibid.*).

¹⁷ As the province's www site (www.banten.go.id/profil-banten.htm) (accessed on 17 February 2004) indicates: "Selama masa Orde Baru keinginan (membentuk provinsi baru dari Jawa Barat) belum bisa direalisasikan. Orde Reformasi perjuangan masyarakat Banten semakin gigih karena mulai terasa semilirnya angin demokrasi dan isu tentang otonomi daerah. Dasar pemikiran dibentuknya Provinsi Banten adalah pesatnya perkembangan dan kemajuan Provinsi Jawa Barat". The total number of inhabitants in 2001 in Provinsi Banten was estimated at 8, 258, 000 (www.banten.go.id accessed on 17 February 2004).

Banten Province, the 1999 National Census figures indicate that the revised area of West Java province had 34, 555.622 inhabitants, estimated to have grown by 2000 to 35, 5000, 611 persons.¹⁸ The largest city, Bandung, in 2004 is estimated to have around 4 million inhabitants, a rise from 2.1 million 15 years ago.¹⁹

The question of ethnic identification in West Java is both simple and complex. It is relatively simple, given the fact that by far the numerically largest ethnic group within the West Java province is the Sundanese. Persons of Sundanese origin often link ethnic identification to a concept of land through the concept of '*tatar Sunda*' or 'Sundanese homeland'.²⁰ However, this does not fully allow for the separate identifications of Cirebon and Betawi-identifying persons who may consider themselves have some some cultural characteristics which set them apart from the dominant Sundanese majority.²¹

But the other aspect of the ethnic identification issue that requires attention is the extent to which a gradual multicultural ethnic identity in West Java has replaced -- or should at least be seen as co-existing with -- a Sundanese cultural sense of identification. The major demographic changes in the Jakarta capital region over the past twenty years

¹⁸ See www.jabar.go.id/detail.php?data=sjb accessed on 17 February 2004. Article titled: 'Sekilas Jawa Barat'.

¹⁹ *Pikiran Rakyat* (www.pikiran-rakyat.com/petapotensi.php?id=23) accessed on 8 February 2004 in the internet version. Article titled: 'Kota Bandung, Kota Kafe dan Kota Outlet'.

²⁰ The *Ensiklopedia Sunda* outlines a definition of 'Sunda' which includes the following (in translation): "The name of an area/wilayah (tanah, tatar) which according to local sources covered the western part of Java and whose eastern limits were at first and right up to the end of the 16th century the current day Kali Pemali, but which later became limited on the western side to the Cilosari river. Portuguese explorer Tome Pires however had its eastern limits as Cimanuk river. Those inhabiting tatar Sunda were known as Sundanese, being culturally and linguistically different to a degree from the Javanese. The use of the name Sunda to refer to the land, area and inhabitants of the area seems proven to date back to the eighth century as shown by the stone inscriptions found around Bogor. It also seems to have referred to the kingdom (Sunda) from the eighth to the sixteenth (1579) centuries". See Ajip Rosidi (editor-in-chief, and others), *Ensiklopedi Sunda: Alam, Manusia dan Budaya*. (Jakarta: Pustaka Jaya, 2000) p. 618.

²¹ The relationship of the cultures of Cirebon and the Betawi to that of 'Sunda' is somewhat contentious. The *Ensiklopedi Sunda* defines its coverage of the world (alam), people (manusia) and culture (budaya) of Sunda, as also including reference to 'the world, people and cultures of Cirebon and of Betawi'.

have also impacted upon West Java. Indeed, while the Sundanese are still the dominant ethnic group in the province, West Java's population's ethnic mix in the larger cities such as Bandung is perhaps more diverse in ethnic background as a result of in-migration.

Especially in Bandung, the provincial capital, which is a national centre of tertiary education, there has been considerable short and long-term in-migration from other provinces. Some of these in-migrants have been over-represented in the artistic and literary circles that have formed in Bandung. There is also the issue of whether writers based in Depok should primarily be regarded as 'West Javanese writers'. Even though living in an area technically part of West Java province, such writers tend to be focused on and involved in developments directly in the capital, Jakarta, rather than in other areas of West Java.

Indonesian national literature before and after 1998

Just as definitions of the 'geographical space' within which this thesis will explore the questions of the nature of regional poetry have necessitated attention, so too is it important to outline some of the background details of the development of the modern Indonesian literary tradition, and in particular, the question of the intersection of political change in 1998 with developments in Indonesian literature.

Harry Aveling suggests in *Secrets Need Words* that the tradition of modern Indonesian literature is conveniently dated from the 1920s.²² He believes that through most of this time, critics have been fairly well agreed on who counted as major authors

²² Aveling, op.cit. (2001), p. xii. Aveling's perspective is that of an Indonesianist with a close focus on Indonesian literature over thirty years. See also discussion on this point in Ian Campbell, 'Some developments in Indonesian literature since 1998' in *Rima/Review of Indonesian and Malaysian Affairs*, Vol.36, No 2, 2002 pp. 37- 45.

and what their significant works were. He also maintains that this was also the case after 1966, the year of the ascension to power of Soeharto following the failed 1965 coup, “when a distinct new group of writers came into prominence and steadily developed their craft throughout the seventies”.²³ After an initial focus on the social and political issues raised by the change of government, they soon began to explore the world of nature, the difficulties of personal relationships and a wide range of personal experience.²⁴

By the beginning of the 80s the development of literature in general, and poetry in particular, he suggests, had become increasingly obscure ‘in both senses of the word’.²⁵ Aveling refers to Maier’s comment that the Soeharto period had been one which had totally blunted the creative and generative role of literature, especially prose writings. However, Aveling’s overall purpose was to show that “despite the repressive nature of much of the Soeharto administration’s apparatus, there had not been a failure of Indonesian poetry during the New Order period but rather great diversity and richness”.²⁶

It is not my intention to cover Aveling’s account in detail. Suffice to say that in dealing with the period 1966-1998, he sees a clear distinction between the ‘Generation of 1966’ and what he calls the ‘Post-Indonesian Generation’, who were born after the Republic had come into being and who knew no other society than one in which Indonesian was the national language. Thus in addressing the Indonesian poetry of the Soeharto period 1966-98 he divides his work into two key sections: the Generation of 1966, and secondly, the ‘Post-Indonesian’ Generation. The latter category of poets

²³ Aveling, op.cit. (2001).

²⁴ *ibid.*

²⁵ *ibid.*

²⁶ *ibid.* pp. xii-xiii.

includes writers who were born into an independent state whose president had been Soeharto for much of their life.²⁷

1998 was the end point for Aveling's description of the new canon of Indonesian poetry from the Soeharto period. It seemed that, just as in 1966, Indonesian literature was on the verge of a new literary generation coming into being, as was widely recognised to have occurred after 1966 -- the motto now being 'sastra reformasi'. In a 2002 article, I took up some of the threads where Aveling left off, describing some of the important tendencies that had developed in Indonesian literature since 1998 or been strengthened since that time.²⁸ But '*sastra reformasi*' has not developed as a narrow *new* stream in Indonesian literature, aimed solely at describing political objectives, as might have been expected from a reading of poems like Taufiq Ismail's from 1998. Rather, it has broadened out considerably due to the incorporation of global influences, especially in the areas of writing by women and the explorations regarding cyber-literature.²⁹

In 2000, Korrie Layun Rampan published his anthology of Indonesian literature, one of the first anthologies to appear after 1998. He did not make a case for the emergence of a 'new generation' of writers, in the sense of a distinctive new aesthetic, suggesting that the diversity of literary styles shown in Aveling's account was continuing.³⁰ However, it was a wide-ranging anthology of the work of some of the 'new voices' in Indonesian literature and as such will contribute to the acceptance of the works of those authors as important contributions to the modern Indonesian literary tradition.

²⁷ *ibid.* p. 225.

²⁸ Campbell, *op.cit.* pp. 35-80.

²⁹ *ibid.* pp. 66-68.

³⁰ Korrie Layun Rampan (ed.) *Angkatan 2000 Dalam Sastra Indonesia*. (Jakarta: Penerbit PT Grasindo, 2000). See also my comments in Campbell, *op.cit.* pp.37- 45.

Developments since 1998 have not shown as pronounced a change in aesthetic style as occurred with the 'Generation of 66'.

As these anthologies illustrate, there was no distinct shift from the literary styles in Indonesian literature before 1998 and those that followed immediately afterwards.³¹ In other words, the correspondence between political change and literary changes in the latter case has not been dramatic. Literary changes, where they have occurred, have not been directly tied to political themes, but rather to the broader social and technological changes that have been occurring. But one of the distinctive new trends to emerge since 1998 -- which was recognized and highlighted by Rampan -- has been the dominant role of female authors in setting some new directions in Indonesian literature. One could say that there has never been another period in the history of Indonesian literature when women writers have played such an important role in setting new trends. Here one thinks of the new prose works of Ayu Utami and Dee Lestari, and the poetry of Dorothea Rosa Herliany.³²

Paradoxically, these advances in women's writing have shown up the tensions -- that always existed, but were dormant -- between concepts of freedom of expression (kebebasan) and the perpetuation of exploitation and abuse (kekerasan).³³ The aim has been to weave between the two. Interestingly, some of these writers, such as Ayu Utami and Dorothea Rosa Herliany, started from the premise of 'using the current greater freedom' -- to say what they liked and break taboos about descriptions of sexuality. But

³¹ Campbell, *ibid.* pp. 66-68.

³² As the promoters of one of the seminars on Dee Lestari's book put it, the issue was rather 'Generasi Digital -- Nasionalis atau globalis?', Campbell, *ibid.* p.46

³³ *ibid.* p. 50.

increasingly they had found their works being characterised as ‘gender-specific’. This has led to some restating or redefining of their position in terms of being (simply) part of a broader humanity (kemanusiaan).³⁴

Cyber-literature in the Indonesian case started to flourish in the 1990s but the newer developments in Indonesian literary forms appear to have been increasingly been tied to experimentation in visual communication in fields more closely aligned with art movements in general, rather than be limited to a single form of cyber evolution.³⁵ But despite this, the dominant fields of production for poetry have still been through the mass media, in West Java’s case through newspapers such as *Pikiran Rakyat* in both cyber and print form and in printed book form, such as single author publications or as in many of the examples from Tasikmalaya and Bandung indicate, in printed anthology form.

Some younger digital generation writers have opted for a major focus on the internet, but the key ‘senior’ writers, and the dominant locus of the Indonesian literary canon, as with most national literatures, remains at the intersection of the printed book or newspaper/internet forms. There is, though, some truth in the view that ‘senior’ writers mostly do not use the internet to publicise works and that the intersection of print and book forms is where the quality issues are fought out.³⁶

Regional perspectives on Indonesian national literature

This thesis proceeds from the proposition that while key aspects of the national-level tradition of modern Indonesian literature may be relatively well established, much

³⁴ *ibid.* pp. 48-49.

³⁵ *ibid.* pp. 62-66.

³⁶ *ibid.* pp. 65-66.

less attention has been paid by scholars to its regional aspects, certainly in so far as the development of Indonesian language poetry in the regions is concerned. Some of the reasons for this are understandable. As Indonesian is a relatively young national literature, it is to be expected that scholars will pay most attention to the most identifiable aspects of this new literature, particularly in respect of debates in Jakarta about changing literary trends. Other reasons also stem from the relative newness of the Indonesian state as a sovereign nation. The nation, since its early years, has been subject to various separatist movements. Also, in the 1950s, a significant part of its population was still to adopt Indonesian as a language of everyday usage.

Perhaps no Indonesian writer has been as influential in setting out his ideas on the relationship between the development of a modern national Indonesian literature and the role of the regional perspectives as has Ajip Rosidi. Much of Rosidi's thinking on the matter is set out in his collection of essays titled *Sastra dan Budaya: Kedaerahan dalam Keindonesiaan* published in 1995 and including essays over the period 1964 to 1990.³⁷ Much more is evident in the monumental work, *Ensiklopedi Sunda: Alam, Manusia dan Budaya (termasuk Budaya Cirebon dan Betawi)* edited by Rosidi and others and published in 2000 by Pustaka Jaya. This work, which was published in 2000, under Rosidi's general editorship, is an attempt to set down through the medium of the modern book form, the nature of Sundanese culture, people and their world.

Briefly, Rosidi's starting points are definitions of Indonesian literature and regional culture, as set out in the Clauses 32 and 36 of the Explanatory Provisions of the Indonesian Constitution. Considerations of the connections between 'national culture'

³⁷ Ajip Rosidi, op.cit. (1995).

and ‘traditional regional culture’ (kebudayaan daerah tradisional) in Clause 32 in the Explanatory Provisions were to see them as ‘original and old culture’ (‘kebudayaan lama dan asli’). Thus, the Explanatory Provisions state at this point as follows: “Original and old culture has a place as supreme examples of culture in regions throughout Indonesia, including (its place) as culture of the nation”.³⁸

As Rosidi says, national culture was what was being stressed, not regional culture, which “often was seen as simply a reference point or as a source for developing and enriching the national culture”. But Rosidi stresses that the Youth Pledge (Sumpah Pemuda) had spoken of developing a language of unity (‘menunjung bahasa persatuan’) rather than of developing its ‘national language’ (‘bahasa ke-‘bangsa’-annya’).³⁹ Clause 36 of the Explanatory Provisions to the Constitution simply stated that “The Official Language of State is Indonesian (“Bahasa Negara ialah Bahasa Indonesia”). However, “in regions which have their own languages which are well maintained and fostered by the society, such languages shall also be respected and fostered by the State”.⁴⁰

Rosidi states that what can be referred to as Indonesian literature (sastra Indonesia) are the literary works which were written in the Indonesian language and came into being as a result of the meeting with Western culture. What the ‘West did’ was to provide some new ideas especially about forms of literary expression that had not been present in the literature of the preceding cultures -- especially the essay, short story, free verse poetry, the sonnet form and the novel. Indeed, this new literature did not possess an

³⁸ “Kebudayaan lama dan asli terdapat sebagai puncak-puncak kebudayaan di daerah-daerah di seluruh Indonesia, terhitung sebagai kebudayaan bangsa,” *ibid*, p.126.

³⁹ *ibid*. p.126.

⁴⁰ “Di daerah-daerah yang mempunyai bahasa sendiri, yang dipelihara oleh rakyatnya dengan baik...bahasa-bahasa itu akan dihormati dan dipelihara juga oleh Negara,” *ibid*, p. 324.

old tradition (tradisi kuno) and because it primarily came into being in written form, it did not possess an oral tradition (tradisi lisan) either.

Rosidi goes on to define 'regional literature' (sastera daerah) as literary works that come into being in the regional languages which exist throughout the whole of the area of Indonesia, either in oral form or in written form, be it in Roman script or in the characters of that region's alphabet, such as 'huruf Jawi' (Arabic script). He points out that amongst these regional literatures there are some with written literary traditions of over a thousand years. Yet among these regional literatures, besides the continuation of traditional forms of literature, there were also literatures that have received the influence of 'the West' and taken on newer literary forms such as the novel, drama, short story, free verse and criticism.⁴¹

Thus, unlike, Alisjahbana who suggested that regional influences were outdated in the cultural sense and would be expected to die out because they had no place in the definition of the developing literature of the new state, Rosidi took the view that the regional language literature could be fostered along with adherence to the view that Indonesian was the language of national unity.⁴²

⁴¹ *ibid.* p. 314.

⁴² *ibid.* p. 327. Rosidi puts himself at odds with Takdir Alisjahbana's 1991 statements that since the Sumpah Pemuda had stated that there was only one national language, there was no real possibility of 'fostering regional languages'. He also draws attention to how in the 1930s intellectuals such as Alisjahbana had sought to distinguish, indeed to place a distance between, 'kebudayaan nasional' and 'kebudayaan daerah' with the underlying premise being that 'daerah' equates with 'kuno' and something that should be replaced. Also, unlike Alisjahbana and other Sumatra-origin writers whose linguistic roots are derived from Malay or other languages that formed the basis of Indonesian, Rosidi as a Sundanese-speaker growing up in Majalengka, perhaps tends to see greater degrees of *discontinuity* than these writers because, experientially, he had to learn Indonesian as the new language, let alone as a literary language.

But more importantly from the point of view of the current research, even Rosidi in his early post-Independence writings nevertheless highlights the identification of ‘regional’ with *regional language* and *oral traditions*, not the role of the regionally-located writer who uses Indonesian as his or her literary language within the new stream of literary writing in the language of national unity.

In his *Sumber Terpilih Sejarah Sastra Indonesia Abad XX* published in 2000, E. Ulrich Kratz indicates that histories of local and regional responses to the development of a national literature “featured very little in the total panoply of literary writings coming from the newly independent nation”.⁴³ There were Nugroho Notosusanto’s 1954 assessments of the state of Indonesian literature being written from his perspective of Yogyakarta.⁴⁴ But Kratz states, after Hutomo, in his 1990 *Horison* article titled ‘Masalah penulisan sejarah sastra lokal di Indonesia’, that documentation of local literary developments was sparse, even from cities and areas like Medan, Banjarmasin, Makassar, and Bali which have stood out in the history of Indonesian literature in the 20th century.⁴⁵

In the case of Bali, however, this lacuna has been substantially addressed in ongoing work by I Nyoman Darma Putra. In a series of publications, beginning in 1994, Darma Putra has demonstrated that a vigorous tradition of modern literature in Indonesian has been developing in Bali since the colonial period. His work demonstrates the great diversity of styles and themes that have characterised the modern Balinese contribution to Indonesian literature, in the light of changes in Balinese society and

⁴³ E. Ulrich Kratz (ed.), *Sumber Terpilih Sejarah Sastra Indonesia Abad XX* (Jakarta: Kepustakaan Populer Gramedia, with Yayasan Adikarya IKAPI and the Ford Foundation, 2000), p. xxxi.

⁴⁴ *ibid.*

⁴⁵ *ibid.*

against the broader background of national Indonesian political and social life during the 20th century.⁴⁶ In relation to poetry, Darma Putra has shown that Balinese poets writing in Indonesian did not always consider that their own specific regional concerns were *fully* encompassed by poetry being written by other Indonesian poets about the effects of mass tourism in Bali.⁴⁷ He also shows, more specifically, how Balinese poets were exploring their concerns about the loss and decline of traditional Balinese conceptions about the environment under the impact of developments to accommodate mass tourism.⁴⁸

Darma Putra's work on Indonesian literature in Bali has not yet given rise to a body of similar studies of other regionally-based Indonesian literatures. Indeed, Will Derks suggests that studies of Indonesian contemporary literature have consistently overlooked the existence of a positive and vibrant regional and local literary scene which gets scant attention from so-called literary elites based in Jakarta. He draws attention to the birth in 1994 of a Ngawi-based regional literature journal titled *Jurnal Revitalisasi Sastra Pedalaman* (JRSP), with a lead article by Kusprianto Namma, in which the latter decries the "arrogance of Jakarta, the national elite, and the press" which did not show

⁴⁶ I Nyoman Darma Putra, 'Kebangkitan puisi Indonesia modern', in *Basis*, October 1994, pp. 384-396, quoted by Derks, (2002), op.cit., pp. 336-337. In particular, Derks refers to Darma Putra's comments about the important role of Umbu Landu Paranggi in fostering literary life in Denpasar since 1979. A more recent overview of the history of the development of Indonesian literary life in Bali is given by Darma Putra in 'Mencari Bali dalam *Malaikat Biru Kota Hobart*' in Arif B. Prasetyo (ed.) *Malaikat Biru Kota Hobart – Suara dari Bali*, (Jakarta: Dewan Kesenian Jakarta, with Logung Pustaka and Akar Indonesia, 2004), pp. 360-391. Other articles by Darma Putra which also mention aspects of the historical development of Indonesian literature in Bali include: 'Space and Person in Recent Balinese Poetry', in *Review of Indonesian and Malaysian Studies/Rima*, 32, No. 1 (1998), pp. 179-214; and 'Balinese Westerners: Cultural Perceptions in Modern Balinese Writing', in *Asian Studies Review*, 24, No. 1, (2000), pp. 51-69.

⁴⁷ Darma Putra, (1998), p. 181.

⁴⁸ *ibid*, pp. 182-200.

any appreciation at all of the work of regional writers, “who keep up a thundering roar of activity”.⁴⁹

Derks also refers to the statement by Beno Siang Pamungkas, another of the founders of that journal that the literary energies in the regions were ‘flourishing’ and ‘passionate’. The JRSP was to be a means of resisting centralisation of literary efforts and encouraging inter-regional cultural communication, not just relying on the Jakarta-controlled mass media to spread one’s literary work.⁵⁰ For his part Derks considers that there has been relatively unnoticed by foreign researchers these ‘unbroken links’ in a chain of literary life across Indonesia, a chain that until today has largely gone unnoticed or that at best has received only dismissive attention”.⁵¹

Derks goes on to point to what he sees as the dominance of a ‘print oriented’ Western value system that may tend to be ‘dismissive’ of the poetry and short story genres of writing which were flourishing in Indonesia, despite the absence of ‘great novel traditions’.⁵² Following Farida Soemargono, he suggests that if we wish to map the tradition of modern Indonesian literature in general, then we cannot avoid reversing the centralizing vision that has always been practised in Jakarta for the simple reason that such a perspective corresponds better to the variety of Indonesian realities.⁵³ Modern Indonesian literature, he suggests, is a heterogeneous, multi-centred literature and any

⁴⁹ Will Derks, op. cit. (2002), p. 325.

⁵⁰ *ibid.* p. 326.

⁵¹ *ibid.* p. 327.

⁵² *ibid.*, pp. 330-334 and 336-338. Derks mentions other examples of the strength of the regional literary scene. For example, he mentions Soemargono’s account (1997) of the ‘Yogya group’ (1945-60) and Von der Borch’s findings (1987) about the continuing vitality of Central Java local and regional literary traditions. Derks also speculates that often the titles of anthologies of local and regional poetry reflect the feeling of being ‘neglected or dismissed’ by an outside world, ie. Jakarta.

⁵³ *ibid.*, p. 338.

approach or endeavour to understand it cannot afford to neglect this heterogeneity in which Jakarta is just one of the centres that contribute to a larger totality'.⁵⁴

This contention was a development of earlier propositions Derks had advanced in an earlier 2001 journal article.⁵⁵ However, it is still somewhat surprising how little the history of local and regional literature has been the focus of attention of scholars, both Indonesian and non-Indonesian. In part, this has been due to the impressions fostered early in the post-Independence period that the main focus should be on the development of the new national language as a literary language. Particularly for Javanese and Sundanese authors, the emphasis was on exploration of Indonesian, not the fostering of regionalisms. Quinn in his 1992 book on the development of the novel in Javanese makes the point that one reason for the lack of attention to the development of the novel in Javanese may have been the frame of reference used by critics that highlights the Western print-oriented novel as opposed to what he calls the more 'orally oriented traditions of the Javanese novel'.⁵⁶ But he does not generally challenge the assumption that regional literary history means literature in the language *other* than Indonesian.

Despite the caveats and statements by Ulrich Kratz about the paucity of regional recording of the development of Indonesian literature from regional perspectives, Darma Putra has shown that the regional press can be a rich source for literature and literary-

⁵⁴ Derks notes Maier's idea of an 'alam Melayu' or 'Malay world', a continuum in which linguistic, ethnic and religious backgrounds of authors as well as state boundaries are transcended and categories such as centre and periphery 'melt into the air' (Maier, 1994), based on the latter's observations of Riau literary life over the past two hundred years.

⁵⁵ Derks makes the point about the validity of oral traditions, the role of newspapers and the regional literary developments in his article: 'A Literary Mycelium: Some Prolegomena for a Project on Indonesian Literatures in Malay' in *Journal of South East Asian Studies*, 32, (3), October 2001, pp 367-384.

⁵⁶ Derks, op. cit. (2002), pp. 331-332.

related discussions beyond the national capital, Jakarta.⁵⁷ A somewhat similar situation also prevails in Bandung. Indeed, scanning of the publications of the West Java press *Pikiran Rakyat* over the period 2001-2006 makes it clear that there *has* been a lively recording of literary history in West Java, which continues to this day. The fact is that literary researchers who rely solely on the literary works to be found in literary magazines or novels will miss the (often) extraordinary role played by provincial newspapers in mediating between the oral traditions of poetry and the short story and the printed world of the novel within the history of Indonesian modern literature.

The structure of the thesis

Having outlined the geographical and theoretical context of the research, I now wish to set out briefly the structure of this thesis. Chapter Two (and the Appendices) provide base-line data about prominent as well as younger poets writing in Indonesian in West Java today, as well as some of the institutions that foster the development of poetry writing, not just in Bandung, but more specifically, in the key sub-regional centre, Tasikmalaya. It includes discussion about reasons for choices of poets whose work is the focus of more detailed attention.

Particular emphasis is also placed on the way in which literary festivals and gatherings of poets have helped elucidate key themes and approaches to poetry writing. Festivals and conferences such as the *Festival Puisi Internasional Indonesia* (2002), the *Muktamar Penyair Jawa Barat* (2003) and the *Cakrawala Sastra Indonesia* (2004), as well as the provincial press, such as *Pikiran Rakyat*, have all helped define the major

⁵⁷ For example, in Darma Putra, (1998), op. cit., pp. 179-182. In particular, he mentions the role played by *Bali Post*, and journalists associated with that publication, who are also significant literary contributors in their own right.

themes and concerns of the key poets from the province. Such points of discussion have included debate about the appropriateness of localism and environmental themes in provincial poetry writing, the nature of religious poetry being written and the role of social critiques in poetry.

In Chapter Three attention turns to the general way in which successive generations of poets from West Java have described their environment and how local themes permeate much of the poetry writing from the region. As poet Joko Pinurbo has suggested, localism in poetry has been a powerful thematic thread running through a great deal of the poetry written in West Java since independence and the adoption of the national language.⁵⁸ Examples are given in Chapter Three of the way this can be seen in the Indonesian language poetry of West Java.

In Chapters Four and Five I turn to the poetry of two of the most prominent Indonesian language poets from West Java, Nenden Lilis Aisyah. and Acep Zamzam Noor, to show how in differing ways their poetry moves beyond the local and regional into an exploration of universal themes. Yet each of these nationally recognised poets, one female and one male, are part of local and regional-based literary organizations that assist and foster the work of poets generally. As such, these local and region-wide networks help sustain the creative outputs of these individual poets.

In the Conclusion the many threads of this research will be drawn together to suggest that the Indonesian language poetry of these contemporary poets from West Java

⁵⁸ Joko Pinurbo, 'Priangan si Jelita dan Perpuisian Jawa Barat', unpublished paper presented to the *Muktamar Penyair Jawa Barat*, 29-30 March 2003, p.1. Also, his comments: "Bagi saya pribadi, adalah mengagumkan bahwa dialektika alam-sosial-religius tetap berlangsung dengan intens dalam puisi-puisi para penyair Jawa Barat."

can be seen as regional manifestations of a national literature, rather than as entirely regional and local in focus.

CHAPTER TWO

POETS, ASSOCIATIONS AND LITERARY FESTIVALS: THE LOCAL AND REGIONAL SETTING

As noted in Chapter One, poetry writing in West Java is supported by literary associations, institutions and festivals. Along with mass media these literary associations have had a major role in presenting Indonesian language poetry to the broader society of West Java. Often this occurs through festivals and forums sponsored by such associations. The festivals and forums play a role in determining which poets and which works become part of a ‘canon’ of Indonesian language poetry from West Java, and more broadly of Indonesian literary history. But the issues and controversies that arise on such occasions are also important in helping us to understand the context in which the poets themselves are placed and the supportive networks they construct.

The Poets

In this thesis, I am giving particular attention to the significant contributions of two poets, Nenden Lilis A and Acep Zamzam Noor. I will also be discussing the work of Soni Farid Maulana and Juniarso Ridwan, primarily in relation to their poetry about locality and environmental change in the Bandung valley, albeit along with work by other Bandung-based poets. All four of these poets have been dominant from the mid 1990s in the publication of poetry and active in literary associational activities in West Java. Along with Cecep Syamsul Hari, they all participated in or had their work published in anthologies associated with three key literary festivals or gatherings in West Java or Jakarta which featured Indonesian language poetry from West Java during the years 2002

to 2004. These festivals or forums were: the section of the *Festival Puisi Internasional Indonesia* in 2002 held in Bandung, the *Muktamar Penyair Jawa Barat* held in Tasikmalaya in 2003 and the *Cakrawala Sastra Indonesia* held in Jakarta in 2004. No other poets from West Java writing in Indonesian were involved in all three key events, either as direct participants or having poetry published in the anthologies produced for these respective events.

Juniarso Ridwan is the founding and current chairperson of the Bandung literary association, Forum Sastra Bandung (FSB). The Forum was established in 1992 and it has taken a leading role in aspects of Bandung literary life in recent years. It publishes various collections of poetry from time to time, sponsors discussions and was a key player in arranging the Bandung-leg of the 2002 *Festival Puisi Internasional Indonesia* held in Bandung in April 2002.⁵⁹ Juniarso, born in 1955, is a graduate of ITB, Bandung, in the field of geo-science, but he became interested in literary activities through his participation in campus groups such as Grup Apresiasi Sastra (GAS) and Studi Teater Mahasiswa (Stema). His first poetry collection was published in 1976. Originally much of his poetry was in the form of commentary on globalisation and the nature of youth culture, but in recent years he has been focussed on issues concerning environmental degradation and reflections on the nature of city life. In 2004 he was appointed as Head of the City Planning Office, in the Bandung City administration.⁶⁰

⁵⁹ FSB's primary focus is on fostering Indonesian language literature, rather than any specific focus on poetry in Sundanese, although many of members would also be fluent in Sundanese. As a Forum-type institution, it has perhaps less involvement in sponsoring literary competitions as a means of directly supporting younger poets than a Yayasan-type structure.

⁶⁰ More biographical details of the poets mentioned here are set out in Appendix A.

Another key literary figure in contemporary Indonesian language poetry from West Java is Soni Farid Maulana. Although he had started writing poetry in his school years, his first publications of poetry were in the 1980s in the youth literary segment known as *Pertemuan Kecil*, then under the stewardship of poet K. M. Saini, in the Bandung paper, *Pikiran Rakyat*. A recurring theme in his poetry is the way in which environmental degradation is not just a physical manifestation but a symbol of moral and religious decay and reflective of the social problems of the day. It must also be said that his role as immediate past literary editor with Bandung mass media publication *Pikiran Rakyat*, along with that of fellow journalists, including Ahda Imran, have been important in assisting the spreading of information about developments in Indonesian language poetry within West Java itself. Examples of the work of both these poets are set out in Chapter Three of the thesis.

Nenden Lilis Aisyah participated in or had poetry published in the anthologies associated with each of the festival or forum ‘choice points’ that I have enumerated so far – the *Festival Puisi Internasional Indonesia* of 2002, the *Muktamar* in Tasikmalaya of 2003, and in the anthology associated with the *Cakrawala Sastra Indonesia* forum of 2004, in some cases as the *only* female poet from West Java chosen. This is some indication of her standing amongst fellow-poets. Her work is covered in detail at Chapter Four.

Another poet whose work is also rich in multiple layers of meaning is Tasikmalaya-born Acep Zamzam Noor. Like Soni Farid Maulana, his contribution to poetry in West Java is many faceted. In part, it is his mastery of Indonesian language as

a language of poetry that has given him such pre-eminent position in the field of poetry from West Java, and indeed, in the mainstream canon of contemporary Indonesian poetry.⁶¹ But quite apart from his categorisation as a primarily religious poet, there are other aspects of Acep's cultural contributions that have hitherto not been remarked upon by overseas researchers. In general, little attention has been paid to his contributions as leader of the various literary associations in and around Tasikmalaya. Indeed, his role in fostering new poets' work through inclusion in anthologies and his work at the associational level, are crucial in explaining some of Tasikmalaya's leadership roles in the creation of new Indonesian language poetry from West Java. Acep's Indonesian language poetry is discussed in Chapter Five of the thesis.

Other poets, whose work is not discussed in detail in this thesis, are also significant contributors to the vibrancy that now characterizes the production of Indonesian language poetry from West Java. Perhaps the most prominent of these is Cecep Syamsul Hari, whose work was also featured in literary festivals and forums involving poets from West Java in 2002-2004.⁶² Also important is Cirebon-based Ahmad Syubbanuddin Alwy, prolifically published in Jakarta and West Java mass media, as well as being the head of Cirebon's local Arts Council. Alwy, although surprisingly not included in the *Festival Puisi Internasional Indonesia* in 2002, had poetry included in both the 2003 *Muktamar Penyair Jawa Barat* and the 2004 *Cakrawala Sastra Indonesia*.

⁶¹ As will be discussed in Chapter Five of the thesis, Harry Aveling included three poems by Acep Zamzam Noor in his 2001 anthology, *Secrets Need Words: Indonesian Poetry, 1966-1998*.

⁶² Four poems by Cecep Syamsul Hari were selected by Aveling in his 2001 anthology, *Secrets Need Words*. However, Aveling did not include any poems by Nenden Lilis, Juniarso Ridwan or Soni Farid Maulana in his anthology. Korrie Layun Rampan selected poems by all these poets in his wider-ranging *Angkatan 2000* anthology, as well as poems by Alwy.

The same applied to poet, Ahda Imran, whose works were included in the 2003 and 2004 events only.

Those West Javanese poets whose work has not been included in the various national festivals or forums in 2002 to 2004 have often had work published in anthologies produced by various literary associations in Bandung, Tasikmalaya or other West Java cities. Indeed, as will be shown in Chapter Three, their contribution is significant in developing motifs that characterize contemporary Indonesian language poetry from West Java.

In the remainder of this chapter I shall focus in more detail upon the nature of the festivals and literary gatherings in 2002-2004 which I have regarded as having key roles in shaping and defining contemporary Indonesian language poetry from West Java. I shall also give an insight into the activities in recent years of a remarkable Tasikmalaya-based literary association, whose activities have gone a long way to showing that subregional centres can play, as Derks has intimated, a key role in the national map of poetry throughout the archipelago, not just in relation to West Java alone.

The *Festival Puisi Internasional Indonesia 2002* in Bandung

The 2002 *Festival Puisi Internasional Indonesia* will come to be seen as an important benchmark in the development of post-1998 Indonesian literature. It illustrated a fascinating interplay of local, national and international influences, which in the festival's Bandung leg drew attention to the need to reconcile international aspirations with local involvement. The first public discussions about the festival seem to have been

in Soni Farid Maulana's article in *Pikiran Rakyat* of 30 January 2002.⁶³ The proposed International Poetry Festival was intended to demonstrate that 'Indonesia' was not brutal and uncivilised.⁶⁴ Soni Farid Maulana acknowledged that the inspiration for the Festival was Rendra's, although it seems that Agus R. Sarjono, who had also attended the Rotterdam International Poetry Festivals, and the newer Bremen Literary Festival, could also see the need for a poetry festival involving both international and Indonesian poets to be held outside Jakarta.⁶⁵

For Bandung readers of *Pikiran Rakyat* Rendra mentioned the importance of the opportunity for Bandung to reestablish its role from 1955 as the Asia-Africa city of peace, while Maulana stressed the role of poets and their social responsibility in seeking to restore the image of Indonesia. He stated that poets had a redemptive role in post-New Order Indonesia, not to be parasites but to take an active social role in restoring the good name of Indonesia. Poets had a responsibility to use their cultural skills for the sake of the nation. In this way the 'other face' of Indonesia would be presented to international poets of high calibre, and Indonesia would benefit from having poets from overseas participate.

The Bandung leg of the whole Festival was always going to be the most interesting for a number of reasons. In the months before the Festival there had been

⁶³ Soni Farid Maulana, 'Menyambut Festival Puisi Internasional Indonesia – Karya Sastra dan Harga Diri Bangsa,' *Pikiran Rakyat*, 30 January 2002.

⁶⁴ 'babar dan brutal', this recurring phrase was used by both Soni Farid Maulana and Rendra in suggesting the image of Indonesia the Festival would seek to counter-act.

⁶⁵ The background lead-up to the Festival is set out in other *Pikiran Rakyat* articles, apart from that of 30 Januari 2002. The articles are: 'Puisi Internasional Indonesia – Penyair Seamus Heaney Hadir di Bandung?' 14 February 2002; Soni Farid Maulana, 'Puisi Indonesia dalam Pergaulan Internasional', 28 March 2002; Martin Mooi, 'Festival Puisi Internasional Indonesia dan Saya', 28 March 2002; Ahda Imran, 'Bandung dan Puisi Internasional Indonesia', 4 April 2002; Juniarso Ridwan, 'Menyambut Festival Puisi Internasional Indonesia–Selamat Datang Para Penyair', 4 April 2002; Agus R. Sarjono, 'Penyair Peserta Puisi Internasional Indonesia (2)', 4 April 2002 and (3), 11 April 2002. Also, article titled: 'Festival Puisi Indonesia di Bandung', 9 April 2002.

considerable criticism by a few of the poets based in Bandung of the *Horison* 'elite'.

There was also a special edition (April 2002) of *Horison* devoted to the Festival, and *Pikiran Rakyat* played a key role in getting news of the Festival out.⁶⁶

Those scheduled to read in Bandung were: Saini KM, Cecep Syamsul Hari, Juniarso Ridwan, Nenden Lilis Aisyah, Acep Zamzam Noor and Agus R. Sarjono, Hamid Jabbar, Sapardi Joko Damono and Afrizal Malna. But the demand from local poets to be involved in the Festival was so great that other events were also organized to ensure that they also could have the opportunity to present their poetry, if not at the main location, the Gelanggang Generasi Muda (GGM) in Bandung, at least at one of the many art venues around Bandung. At one of these venues, the Sundanese language poet Godi Suwarna succeeded, in Rendra's words, in stealing everyone's attention and a decision was made by Rendra to include him and his Sundanese language poem "Grand Prix" on the last night of the main program, to great acclaim from the audience.⁶⁷ Closing reflections by some of the Festival organizers regarding how well the Festival had achieved its aims were interesting. Their aims of a high quality festival of international

⁶⁶ See earlier references to the role Soni Farid Maulana played in energetically publicizing the Festival through his columns in *Pikiran Rakyat*. Interestingly, publicity about the Festival through Jakarta-based *Cybersastra.net* only occurred relatively late – ie 4 April 2002, in its 'Agenda sastra' section, and then hyper-linked to *Pikiran Rakyat* articles. Apart from the *PR* articles there were also 'Agenda' items about the Festival continuously appearing in *Pikiran Rakyat* in the lead-up period. No other internet press apparently was involved in such extensive publicity about the festival as the Bandung-based paper.

⁶⁷ The Bandung section of the Festival is covered in the following articles: 'Gelar Puisi Internasional Meriah', *Pikiran Rakyat*, 14 April 2002; 'Festival Puisi Internasional Berakhir di Bandung', *Kompas*, 16 April 2002; and Ahda Imran, 'Catatan Tersisa Setelah PII – Terimakasih Publik Bandung!' *Pikiran Rakyat*, 18 April 2002. (This article referred to the decision-making process that, reportedly, led to Godi's inclusion in the program that eventuated). Other *Pikiran Rakyat* articles primarily profiling the foreign poets were: Dr S. Bahlke, 'Pembacaan Puisi Martin Jankowski di Goethe-Institut Bandung-lahir di Negeri yang tak ada', *Pikiran Rakyat*, 25 April 2002 and Wawan S Husin, 'Hagar Peeters: Puisi Adalah Kehidupan Saya', *Pikiran Rakyat*, 25 April 2002.

standards ran up against the desire of many poets to participate in such a prestigious event.⁶⁸

This tension between local perceptions of what an international poetry festival should be and the desire by its organisers to have a festival of international standard was certainly evident in the case of the 2002 Festival. The comments in articles in *Pikiran Rakyat* by Ahda Imran and Agus R. Sarjono were interesting. Ahda Imran outlined the various levels of assistance the Festival organisers had received in his article, ‘Terima kasih publik Bandung’, and suggested that as the last city in the Festival, Bandung learnt from the issues that had arisen in other cities. But the core issue was the question of whether what was meant as the ‘other face’ of Indonesia and the strategy of going to the regions to present it meant that ‘local’, in the West Javanese case, was ‘Sundanese’.⁶⁹ Thus the irony is not lost that one of the main outcomes of the *Festival Puisi International Indonesia* in Bandung was to lift the profile of the Sundanese language poet, Godi Suwarna, and to confirm the place of the regional language in the pantheon of poetry that must be considered when local face meets international gaze.

A critical article titled ‘Desentralisasi Sastra dan Seni Budaya’ by Halim HD in *Pikiran Rakyat* regarding ‘Jakarta elites’ and their centralizing tendencies over Indonesian culture provoked a thoughtful response from Agus R. Sarjono on 25 April 2002 titled: ‘Jaringan Konflik atau Jaringan Silaturahmi Budaya’, in which he rejected

⁶⁸ Rendra’s comments, in his closing speech in Bandung, reveal the frustration he was probably feeling: “Dalam kesempatan itu, Rendra menyoroti anggapan beberapa pihak bahwa ajang FPII tidak mengakomodasi keberadaan penyair-penyair lokal. ‘Ada anggapan bahwa kami, panitia, telah mengabaikan penyair – penyair setempat dan menempatkan mereka hanya sebagai penonton. Eh, ini festival kelas internasional, iho, bukan perayaan tujuh belasan, bukan arisan. Kalau semua teriak ingin ikut, padahal karyanya enggak jelas, apa bedanya pergelaran ini dengan ajang amitiran”, *Kompas*, 16 April 2002.

⁶⁹ Halim HD, *Pikiran Rakyat*, 18 April 2002

the ideas that ‘Jakarta’ can be said to be the only literary centre and outlined again the proposition that it was simplistic to suggest this.⁷⁰

Sanggar Sastra Tasik (SST); a case study of literary associational life in West Java

However Bandung is not the only centre of associational literary activity in West Java, as I shall now show. Increasingly, Tasikmalaya has also come to the fore, with its Sanggar Sastra Tasikmalaya (SST) playing a key role, along with other cultural and literary associations. This literary association was informally established on 28 October 1996.⁷¹ The chairperson, Acep Zamzam Noor and Co-ordinator, Saeful Badar have stated that the SST “has had since its inception a commitment to popularize within society literature, especially poetry, given that there is a tendency for people in ordinary society to keep it at arms’ length”.⁷² The SST came into full legal being as a Yayasan (charitable association or institution) on 29 October 1999, with Acep Zamzam Noor, Eriyandi Budiman and Saeful Badar as co-sponsors.⁷³ Soni Farid Maulana, as a (former) literary editor of the *Pikiran Rakyat*, has also acknowledged the SST’s important role in fostering literature, especially poetry, in Tasikmalaya.⁷⁴ Yet even before 1996, efforts had been

⁷⁰ The interesting *Pikiran Rakyat* articles are: Halim HD, ‘Desentralisasi Sastra dan Seni Budaya’, 18 April 2002 and Agus R. Sarjono, in reply, on 25 April 2002, ‘Tanggapan atas tulisan Halim HD – Jaringan Konflik atau Jaringan Silaturahmi Budaya’. Other critical articles, although not exclusively about the Bandung leg of the festival, were: Max Arifin, ‘Catatan Tersisa dari Festival Puisi Internasional 2002 – Surat untuk Abang D. Zawawi Imran’, *Jawa Pos*, 5 May 2002 and Raya Dewi, ‘Festival Puisi (Biasa) Internasional Indonesia 2002’, *Media Indonesia*, 5 May 2002.

⁷¹ Acep Zamzam Noor and Saeful Badar, 2 August 1999, Unpublished Notes titled ‘Sekilas Tentang Eksistensi Sanggar Sastra Tasik (SST)’, forwarded to me in 2003 by Acep Zamzam Noor.

⁷² *ibid.* p.1. The terms used were: “memasyarakatkan sastra – khususnya puisi – di tengah-tengah masyarakat yang memang cenderung ‘berjarak’ dengan sastra”.

⁷³ See “Pendirian Yayasan “Sanggar Sastra Tasik (SST)”, dated 29 October 1998, the registration papers for the SST completed by Notary Heri Hendriyani, SH. A copy of these papers was forwarded to me in 2003 by Acep Zamzam Noor.

⁷⁴ Soni Farid Maulana’s comments in an article titled: ‘Puisi dan Sanggar Sastra Tasik’ in *Khazanah of Pikiran Rakyat* of 24 October 2002 include the following: “Harus diakui dengan jujur, tumbuh dan berkembangnya kehidupan sastra di Tasikmalaya, khususnya puisi – tidak lepas dari lahirnya Sanggar Sastra Tasik (SST) – yang antara lain dimotori oleh penyair Acep Zamzam Noor, Saeful Badar dan Nunu

made, as a precursor to the informal establishment of the SST, to enable literary workers to be involved in weekly radio broadcasts fostering literary appreciation. Radio Siaran Pemerintah Daerah (RSPD) Tasikmalaya provided time for a program first called “Puisi dan Lagu”, subsequently “Cakrawala Sastra Kita (CS Kita)”. In November 1997 the SST published its first anthology of poetry, titled *Nafas Gunung*, in conjunction with Bandung publishing house, Biduk. The book was an anthology of poetry sent to the SST via the radio program.⁷⁵

In 1998 the SST responded with a number of activities to the changing events surrounding the decision by President Soeharto to resign. On 15 July 1998 it held a literary event called “Malam Puisi Reformasi” which included poetry readings by Acep Zamzam Noor, Saeful Badar, Godi Suwarna (from Ciamis), and Soni Farid Maulana, the late Beni R. Budiman, and Adha Imran (all from Forum Sastra Bandung).⁷⁶ This was followed up on 29 August 1998 with a program titled “Malam Puisi Islami dan Renungan Reformasi.” Both events illustrate the close links between the SST and the Bandung-based members of the FSB. On 16 September 1998 the SST celebrated the official opening of the new premises of the Gedung Kesenian Tasikmalaya with a program “Gelar Sastra”, highlighting the importance of the availability of premises through the GKT for the activities of the SST and other cultural groups in Tasikmalaya.

Nazarudin Azhar. Adanya kenyataan semacam ini merupakan sebuah perkembangan yang cukup mengejutkan bila kita membandingkan hal tersebut dengan tahun-tahun sebelumnya, yakni antara awal dan akhir tahun 1980-an dan awal dan akhir tahun 1990-an hingga sekarang ini.” Accessed on 24 October 2002 at: <http://pikiran-rakyat.com/cetak/1002/24/khazanah/lain04.htm>.

⁷⁵ See Acep Zamzam Noor and Saeful Badar, *op. cit.*, (1999), p. 1.

⁷⁶ The Forum Sastra Bandung anthology, *Tangan Besi*, was also launched. Details of the event are set out in Acep Zamzam Noor and Saeful Badar, *ibid.* p. 4.

In 1999 SST offered a program that it called “Pesta Sastra Tasikmalaya 1999”. Its National Poetry Writing Competition (Lomba Cipta Puisi Nasional) attracted more than 200 entries from throughout Indonesia.⁷⁷ The resulting anthology *Datang dari Masa Depan* contained 37 poems by 37 of the poets who entered the competition, although the judging committee decided no poem in the competition had merited 1st or 2nd prizes, with Aslan Abadin, from Sulawesi Selatan, being awarded 3rd prize, with his poem “Prometheus” being included in the anthology.⁷⁸ In the introductory section, the editors from SST had stated their continuing belief in the role of the association to foster and spread throughout society appreciation of literature.⁷⁹

Other activities in the Pesta Sastra Tasikmalaya 1999 program included an open poetry reading competition held on 13-14 November 1999, a meeting of poets on the theme of literature and politics, a book market from 13 to 15 November 1999, as well as an associated Art exhibition.⁸⁰ The pattern of literary activities that had been established since 1996 by SST continued throughout 2000-2001. In 2001 the Gedung Kesenian Tasikmalaya itself published an anthology, *Orasi Kue Serabi*, with Jojo Nuryanto, a lecturer at Universitas Siliwangi, as editor.⁸¹ This wide-ranging anthology of poetry by primarily Tasikmalaya-based poets included a satirical poem titled “Ada banyak cara” by Acep Zamzam Noor, which is full of critique and satirical comment about politics and

⁷⁷ Toto Sudarto Bachtiar, Karno Kartadibrata, Hikmat Gumelar and Acep Zamzam Noor (eds.), *Datang Dari Masa Depa: 37 Penyair Indonesia*, 2000, Sanggar Sastra Tasikmalaya. See ‘Pengantar Penerbit’, p. 1 of the publication.

⁷⁸ *ibid.*

⁷⁹ *ibid.*

⁸⁰ See *Puitika* editions Nos 2 and 3, of September-October 1999 and November-December 1999.

⁸¹ Drs. Jojo Nuryanto, M. Hum. (ed.). *Orasi Kue Serabi* (Tasikmalaya: Gedung Kesenian Tasikmalaya, 2001).

public life.⁸² The anthology's title is taken from a poem written in 1998 by Amang S. Hidayat, "Orasi Kue Serabi". The poem reflects on the collision of the global and local in Indonesia, initially using imagery of changing food tastes.⁸³

The year 2003 was one of extraordinary productivity for the SST. Two poetry anthologies were produced; the first titled *Poligami*⁸⁴ and the second, *Muktamar: antologi puisi penyair jabar*⁸⁵, was produced by the SST in conjunction with the 2003 meeting of West Java poets to be discussed shortly. *Poligami* is a 'showcasing' of poetry from the Tasikmalaya area whilst the *Muktamar* volume contains poetry in Indonesian by poets from throughout West Java.

In his introductory notes for *Poligami* Acep Zamzam Noor sets out some of the reasons for the anthology's title. He suggests that while the twenty poets whose work was selected for the anthology are "very serious and not just fooling around with poetry", they have a variety of backgrounds, but all have, "other work, other businesses, other tasks and training besides poetry."⁸⁶ He goes on to suggest that their activities are not just "in mono but stereo" and that they are all "polygamous".⁸⁷ And if the title of the book makes

⁸² *ibid.*, pp.1- 4. The poem consists of 38 rhyming couplets, commencing with: "Ada banyak cara untuk menyengsarakan rakyat, Salah satunya menjadi konglomerat." It is mentioned in some more detail in Chapter Five of the thesis.

⁸³ The poem commences as follows:

"Saudara-saudara sekalian, saya mohon maaf bila saya tak mengerti arti demokrasi di tengah arus demonstrasi, sebab menu keseharian kami kue serabi, pisang goreng, bala-bala dan tak dijamin mengandung banyak protein dan vitamin seperti hamburger made in California, fried chicken ala Texas menu kesukaan kaum intelektual." The poem continues in this satirical fashion to sketch out the woes of the nation.

⁸⁴ Acep Zamzam Noor (ed.), *Poligami*, (Bandung: SST and Keluarga Nusa Mandiri, 2003).

⁸⁵ Acep Zamzam Noor, Ahda Imran and Saeful Badar (eds), *Muktamar: antologi puisi penyair Jawa Barat* (Bandung: SST and Forum Kajian Sastra Jawa Barat (FKSJB), 2003).

⁸⁶ *ibid.* p.3.

⁸⁷ *ibid.*

veiled criticisms of Tasikmalaya-based officials and political representatives, he goes on to say, so be it.⁸⁸

The *Muktamar Penyair Jawa Barat*; definitions from 2003

It was the Tasikmalaya *Muktamar* of March 2003 and its accompanying anthology that has helped cement Tasikmalaya's reputation as a 'Kota Puisi'.⁸⁹ Taking place at the Gedung Dakwah Islamiyah (GDI) located in Tasikmalaya over the period 29-30 March 2003, the *Muktamar* was a gathering or conference of most of West Java's foremost poets. The event was a joint endeavour of the Sanggar Sastra Tasik (SST) and the Forum Kajian Sastra Jawa Barat, held with the support of the West Java provincial administration. As Soni Farid Maulana wrote in *Pikiran Rakyat* of 3 April 2003 the program did not just involve poetry readings and discussions on literary matters, but also included the framing of responses to national and international issues, including unfolding events in Iraq.⁹⁰

As part of the process, the organising committee, chaired by Acep Zamzam Noor, produced an anthology of poetry of all poets who had accepted the invitation to attend. The anthology itself was edited by Acep, and two other Tasikmalaya-based writers, Ahda

⁸⁸ This terminology is interesting. On the one hand, it takes a somewhat contentious aspect of Islamic law and applies the term to the fact of the poets having other primary interests of occupations, suggesting that this is both fact and a possible source of creative strength. Yet on the other hand it is a social critique of aspects of Indonesian society, politics and administration wherein officials or politicians, as Acep Zamzam Noor suggests, may have other sources of income apart from those directly derived from their official salary or employment. He often uses terms that are derived from a strictly religious context and invests them with 'new meanings' in the cultural sphere, as can be seen in his use of the concept of 'muktamar'.

⁸⁹ In an article titled 'Tasik Kota Puisi' in *Khazanah* of *Pikiran Rakyat* on 10 May 2001 Acep Zamzam Noor noted Tasikmalaya's reputation as a city of 'dangdut' but also suggested that it should be known as 'the city of poetry', given the activities being fostered by the SST and other groups. Accessed on 10 May 2001 at: www.pikiran-rakyat.com/khazanah/10052001/topik8.htm.

⁹⁰ Soni Farid Maulana, Editorial, *Khazanah* segment of *Pikiran Rakyat*, 3 April 2003.

Imran and Saeful Badar. The work, *MUKTAMAR: antologi puisi penyair jabar*,⁹¹ includes a cover illustration of one of Acep Zamzam Noor's paintings.⁹²

In his editor's comments, Acep explains the heavy burden borne by the editorial committee. Even trying to encapsulate a creative region in synchronized relationship with the administrative region of West Java province is fraught with difficulties, he conceded.⁹³ There is also the question of ethnic identity. So many of the poets whose work was included as West Java poets were not, of Sundanese (or Cirebon) ethnic background, even though they were residing in West Java and may have even been born or grown to adulthood in the province. There is also the issue of prominent poets of Sundanese background who are living outside West Java. And then there was the very serious question of poets writing in Sundanese – should they not be included? And even having come to some operational decisions on these matters, the question remained as to whether there is any sense in which the works of West Javanese poets is specifically focussed or reflective of West Java's problems and characteristics.⁹⁴ Acep and the other editors concluded that there is no easy answer. While there is poetry 'with local colour',

⁹¹ There was some controversy about the choice of name, *Muktamar*. The term is an Arabic-derived word which means 'conference, gathering, meeting'. But the term is often seen in Indonesia as having specific associations with NU conferences, called Muktamar. This was particularly the case in Tasikmalaya given that Acep's father was identified with NU, with large NU Muktamar being held in the Singaparna pesentren, near Tasikmalaya, in the 1990s. Some participants in the poets 2002 Muktamar were initially reported as concerned about this association, but these issues seemed to die down as the event got under way.

⁹² Acep is a painter of note, as well as a poet, having studied art at Bandung. The painting shows an abstract of a man, with a head held in one hand and the other hand outstretched offering a cup/bowl. The symbolism seems to be that of a gathering where others are invited to share the fruits or gain succour.

⁹³ "Wilayah kreatif yang alamiah dihadapkan pada wilayah administrasi yang tak alamiah seperti halnya Jawa Barat.", in Acep Zamzam Noor, Ahda Imran and Saeful Badar, op.cit. p. 1. These comments and the following comments by Acep and the other members of the SST organizing committee are in 'Catatan Editor' of the publication.

⁹⁴ "Apakah mereka yang disebut penyair Jawa Barat dalam antologi ini karya-karyanya merupakan representasi dari persoalan-persoalan Jawa Barat secara spesifik?" *ibid.* p. 2.

ultimately what counts is that the poetry is chosen based on its own strengths as poetry, without paying any specific attention to theme or location.⁹⁵

The editors also recognised that an anthology, even if it contained two to four poems by 30 poets from a wide variety of locations in West Java, could not hope to fully represent the poetry of the region. Choices made by the editorial team were an attempt to produce a representative sample of the overall style of writing of contemporary poets from West Java writing in Indonesian.⁹⁶

There was also a balance between poets described as ‘well-known’ and those even younger. Those in the first group, most of whom were in their early 40s, were Juniarso Ridwan, Soni Farid Maulana, Ahmad Syabbanuddin Alwy, Diah Hadaning, Diro Aritonang, Cecep Syamsul Hari and Deden Abdul Aziz. The second group included poets such as Eriyanti Nurmala Dewi, Taty Haryati, Erwan Juhara, Nandang Darana, Dedy Koral and Syilfi Purnama Sari. The striking aspect of the names is perhaps the relative youthfulness of all the poets. No one was older than 50 years!⁹⁷ And then the editors mentioned names that might be relatively ‘unknown’, including some of the newer poets from Tasikmalaya, and other areas outside Bandung.⁹⁸ Acep acknowledged that there is

⁹⁵ This is important to note as it indicates the choice was not whether poetry produced had ‘local colour’/‘lokalitas’ but whether it was considered ‘strong poetry’.

⁹⁶ Acep and the other editors indicate the choice was based on various criteria: “antara lain, pada pencapaian puitik dalam karya mereka, keragaman bentuk pengucapan di antara mereka, kesetiaan dan dedikasi mereka sebagai penyair dan penggiat sastra, serta yang bisa dianggap mewakili daerah atau komunitas tertentu.” *op.cit.* p.2.

⁹⁷ Information taken from the bio-data of the poets included in the anthology. pp. 131–140. Also see pp. 2–3. The editors also decided not to include any of their own poetry. Consequently, no poems by Acep Zamzam Noor, Ahda Imran or Saeful Badar were included.. There were at least five female poets whose works were included: Eriyanti Nurmala Dewi, Nenden Lilis A, Ratna Ayu Budhiarto, Nina Minarelli, and Taty Haryati. A full listing of the poets is at Appendix B of the thesis.

⁹⁸ “Sebagai editor kami dituntut tidak hanya memilih nama-nama yang dikenal atau mapan, tapi juga berusaha menghadirkan potensi-potensi baru. Kami menyadari kepenyairan di Jawa Barat tidak hanya berlangsung di kota-kota besar atau di kampus-kampus terkenal, tapi juga di kota-kota kecil, di kampung-

of course a subjective element to the anthology. However, what does emerge is a version of the poetry map of West Java as seen from the perspective of the SST. There will be other ‘maps’ and that’s fine, they acknowledge.⁹⁹

The *Muktamar* also included a number of discussion papers by poets or literary commentators both domiciled in West Java and in other regions.¹⁰⁰ Three papers delivered at that gathering specifically focused on the question of how does (or should) the theme of localism enter into consideration of poetry from West Java. These papers were presented by Hawe Setiawan, Joko Pinurbo and Beni Setia. In particular, Joko Pinurbo’s paper, titled ‘Priangan si Jelita dan Perpuisian Jawa Barat’, considered the writer/poet Ramadhan KH and his poem “Priangan si Jelita”. But it also posited the view that local themes that Ramadhan used were still the overwhelmingly dominant aesthetic in poetry being written by poets from West Java.

This is not to say that locality and related concepts are the *only* thematic aspect of poetry from West Java.¹⁰¹ Yet, as Joko Pinurbo has suggested, localism in poetry has been a powerful thematic thread running through a great deal of the poetry written in West Java since the independence and the adoption of the national language.¹⁰²

kampung terpencil, bahkan di pesantren-pesantren di pedalaman. Kepenyairan di Jawa Barat tidak hanya berkulat di koran atau majalah yang ada rubrik sastranya, tapi juga di buletin, manuskrip, fotocopy atau siaran radio.” op.cit. p. 3.

⁹⁹ op.cit. p. 3.

¹⁰⁰ I am grateful to Acep Zamzam Noor of Singaparna, Tasikmalaya for the provision of papers from the *Muktamar*, information about the Sanggar Sastra Tasikmalaya (SST) and the publication *Muktamar: antologi puisi penyair jabar*, (Bandung: Percetakan Keluarga Nusa Mandiri, 2003) edited by himself, Ahda Imran and Saeful Badar.

¹⁰¹ Soni Farid Maulana has commented that it would be incorrect to see the issue of localism in West Java poetry as the only issue facing or related to contemporary poetry from West Java and this point is acknowledged. (Personal communication, Soni Farid Maulana, 12 August 2003).

¹⁰² Joko Pinurbo, ‘Priangan si Jelita dan Perpuisian Jawa Barat’, unpublished paper presented to the *Muktamar Penyair Jawa Barat*, 29-30 March 2003, p.1.

In his paper entitled 'Penyair, Dusun dan Tubuhnya', Hawe Setiawan considered under the general rubric of the theme of localism in poetry the examples of the life and writing of Ramadhan KH, Ajip Rosidi, Zawawi Imron, Afrizal Malna and Joko Pinurbo. In the cases of the first two 'senior' poets from West Java, Setiawan shows that there is a general correlation between an emphasis on local themes in much of their poetry and their being from West Java.¹⁰³ Beni Setia's contribution, a paper titled 'Terserak antara Kenangan dan Kerinduan', explored the various themes of the poems contained in the anthology. Setia concluded that there has been a trend for poets to use as themes 'reminiscences' and history.¹⁰⁴

Cakrawala Sastra Indonesia; choices in 2004

The last festival that has provided further direction in helping to map aspects of contemporary Indonesian language poetry from West Java was the *Cakrawala Sastra Indonesia* sponsored in 2004 by the Dewan Kesenian Jakarta (DKJ) under the leadership of the formerly Bandung based poet, Agus R. Sarjono. The program of the *Cakrawala* was held at the Taman Ismail Marzuki complex in Jakarta over the period 14 to 17 September 2004. In an article in *Pikiran Rakyat* Sarjono acknowledged that there has been less attention than desirable given to literary developments outside Jakarta.¹⁰⁵ Often

¹⁰³ In the case of Zawawi Imron, much of his poetry is suffused with the culture and social life in South Sulawesi, even though the poet was born in Madura. In Afrizal Malna's case, the poet describes himself, being born in Jakarta, as being without any specific 'cultural roots' and the inheritor of all 'warisan budaya' in the Indonesian pantheon of backgrounds. For Pinurbo, the 'lokalitas' of his own 'body' is the starting point for some of his best-known poetry, with no direct reference to regional or local origins whatsoever. Hawe Setiawan, 'Penyair, Dusun dan Tubuhnya', unpublished paper presented to the *Muktamar Penyair Jawa Barat*, 29-30 March 2003.

¹⁰⁴ Beni Setia, 'Terserak antara Kenangan dan Kerinduan', unpublished paper presented to the *Muktamar Penyair Jawa Barat*, 29-30 March 2003, p.8.

¹⁰⁵ Agus R. Sarjono, 'Digelar DKJ dari 14-17 September 2004 di TIM, Jakarta Cakrawala Sastra Indonesia', *Pikiran Rakyat*, 5 September 2004. (Accessed on 5 September at www.pikiran-rakyat.com/cetak/0904/khazanah/lain02.htm).

faculties of literature in institutions of higher education only studied works of the ‘canon’, which are ‘safer’ than considering works that have received less attention than they deserved.¹⁰⁶ The previous year the DKJ had undertaken a program of activities around the theme of *Sastra Kota*. Now it was time, he said, to focus on literature from the regions of Indonesia.¹⁰⁷ He also stressed the fact that the DKJ believed that the oral features of modern Indonesian literary life should be converted into the printed form.

Thus the holding of the forum was also accompanied by the production of seven anthologies.¹⁰⁸ While West Sumatra and Riau were chosen on the basis of the strength of their short story traditions, the other provinces chosen, including West Java, featured poetry.

In so far as choices of which poets (or short-story writers, in the case of Riau and West Sumatra) to include in the *Cakrawala* forum was concerned, Sarjono explained that the DKJ chose seven ‘curators’ (or editors) to undertake the selection of the poets to be included, with Acep Zamzam Noor being chosen as curator for the program and anthology of West Java poets. Each editor was then given the task of selecting poets or short story writers who were active, creative and influential in their respective areas. The

¹⁰⁶ Agus R. Sarjono, in Acep Zamzam Noor (ed.), *Cakrawala Sastra Indonesia: Nafas Gunung: Suara dari Jawa Barat* (Jakarta: Dewan Kesenian Jakarta, with Logung Pustaka and Akar Indonesia, 2004) p. v.

¹⁰⁷ Sarjono, ‘Digelar DKJ dari 14-17 September 2004 di TIM, Jakarta Cakrawala Sastra Indonesia’, op.cit. Inter alia, he wrote: “Cakrawala Sastra Indonesia” yang digelar oleh Dewan Kesenian Jakarta pada 14-17 September 2004 di TIM, Jakarta dalam perspektif ini, merupakan kelanjutan program sebelumnya dengan skala yang lebih besar dan luas untuk menghadirkan dan memetakan gelegat mutakhir dalam kehidupan sastra di berbagai daerah di Indonesia. Semua ini dimulai dengan pemetaan atas daerah-daerah yang sejak lama dikenal memiliki tradisi kukuh dalam melahirkan para sastrawan Indonesia: Jawa Barat, Yogyakarta, Jawa Timur, Bali, Sulawesi Selatan, Sumatra Barat, dan Riau. Tujuh jendela ke cakrawala telah dibuka.”

¹⁰⁸ Sarjono, in Acep Zamzam Noor, (ed.), op. cit. (2004), p. vii. Inter alia, he wrote: “DKJ beranggapan bahwa kelisanan (orality) dalam kehidupan sastra modern Indonesia harus segera beralih menuju keberaksaraan (literacy). Oleh sebab itu, berbagai kegiatan sastra yang diselenggarakan DKJ sedapat mungkin berbasis pada keberaksaraan. Sebagaimana acara “Sastra Kota” (2003) melahirkan 4 (empat) buah buku ... maka Cakrawala Sastra Indonesia juga membasiskan diri pada tradisi keberaksaraan dengan menerbitkan sebuah buku bagi setiap daerah, sehingga berjumlah 7 (tujuh) buah buku sekaligus.”

DKJ and editors also agreed, in view of the realistic limitations on numbers of poets whose work could be included, that age would be a factor.

Those poets who were considered ‘senior’ or who had been over-exposed and ‘mapped’ before by previous generations were not to be included.¹⁰⁹ The result for the West Java segment of the *Cakrawala Sastra Indonesia* program and its associated anthology was the selection of the following poets and their works: Acep Zamzam Noor, Ahmad Syubbanuddin Alwy, Ahda Imran, Cecep Syamsul Hari, Nenden Lilis A., Juniarso Ridwan and Soni Farid Maulana.¹¹⁰ The anthology produced was titled *Nafas Gunung*, after the title of one of the included poems by Acep Zamzam Noor.

But just had been the case with the *Muktamar*, the role of literary critiques was also important. Mohamad Wan Anwar’s critical comments in the discussion at the *Cakrawala* focussed attention on the differing roles of poetry from West Java that had a greater focus on ‘self-expression’ (aku-lirik) and that which was more ‘reality-based’, often with social or current commentary.¹¹¹

Conclusion

While there are various approaches that can be taken to the task of mapping aspects of contemporary poetry from West Java, the approach set out in this chapter allows us to see just what choices have been made by poets’ associations and organizations in the province, while at the same time, acknowledging the roles played by Jakarta-based organizations. It places particular emphasis on the way in which literary

¹⁰⁹ *ibid.* p. viii.

¹¹⁰ Sarjono, ‘Digelar DKJ dari 14-17 September di TIM, Jakarta Cakrawala Sastra Indonesia’, *op.cit.*

¹¹¹ Mohamad Wan Anwar, 2004, in Acep Zamzam Noor, (ed.) *op. cit.* (2004), p. 287.

festivals have helped elucidate key themes and approaches to poetry writing in West Java. Festivals and forums such as the *Festival Puisi Internasional Indonesia* (2002), the *Muktamar Penyair Jawa Barat* (2003) and the *Cakrawala Sastra Indonesia* (2004) have all helped define the major themes and concerns of key poets from the province.

These festivals and forums have also helped to 'select' the poets, mostly in their late thirties and early forties, who may be said to represent in many ways the current generation of West Java Indonesian language poets. Others, often younger, are able to be considered in relation to specific poems that illustrate some general trends in poetry themes from the province, even if they have not been as successful in achieving publication of their works.

Of course, it can be maintained that there are other centres in West Java where poets are writing. But in the period during which I have followed intensively the publications and activities listed in *Pikiran Rakyat*, literary activities in these centres and poets from these cities these are the ones that have seemed most active. It is acknowledged, however, that reliance is placed on published sources, rather than solely on literary activities that are only oral in nature and do not receive the attention of the provincial press or key associations.

CHAPTER THREE

LOCALISM AND ENVIRONMENTAL THEMES: SOME KEY

THREADS IN CONTEMPORARY INDONESIAN LANGUAGE

POETRY FROM WEST JAVA

Introduction

As Joko Pinurbo has suggested, localism engendering a sense of place and a sense of belonging to a place has been a powerful thematic thread running through a great deal of the poetry written in contemporary West Java.¹¹² Indeed, as I have mentioned in the previous chapter, just how far localism should influence the writing of poetry was a major theme in discussions at the *Muktamar* of West Java poets held at Tasikmalaya in March 2003. As regional poets writing about the changes in their world, West Java's poets face the kinds of challenges suggested by Joko Pinurbo at the Tasikmalaya

Muktamar when he wrote:

“...in the geographical sense, the position of West Java is certainly strategic as well as crucial. It borders and directly faces the octopus of ‘development’ that appears out of Jakarta. There is no doubt that the tension and fears that arise between the harshness of global ‘development’ and a romantic idealism to safeguard and foster a local refuge from it has become an interesting and challenging source of creative tension for West Java poets and this is something that often comes to the fore in their works. From the point of view of the creative struggle, a situation such as this has to be considered as both providential but also somewhat perilous for West Java poets. It demands both wisdom of thought and feeling. It requires an aesthetic astuteness.”¹¹³

¹¹² Joko Pinurbo, op.cit, (2003), p.1. Joko Pinurbo, although now a prominent Indonesian poet in his own right, was actually born in Pelabuhan Ratu, Sukabumi in 1962, but he grew up and still resides in Yogyakarta.

¹¹³ “...posisi Jawa Barat secara geografis memang strategis sekaligus krusial. Ia berbatasan dan berhadapan langsung dengan gurita “pembangunan” yang muncul dari Jakarta. Ketegangan dan kegamangan berada di antara kekerasan “pembangunan” bernuansa global dan cita-cita romantik untuk menjaga suaka lokal tidak pelak lagi telah menjadi lahan kreatif yang menarik dan menantang bagi para penyair Jawa Barat dan itulah yang banyak mengemuka dalam karya-karya mereka. Dari segi pergulatan kreatif situasi semacam ini boleh dianggap sebagai “keberuntungan” sekaligus “kerawanan” bagi para penyair Jawa Barat. Situasi yang

A poet may commence by introducing ideas and reflections about a place or geographical locality to which he or she has some particular attachment and move on to explore other wider themes. One such wider theme that has gained prominence in recent years in poetry starts with local themes but moves almost immediately to a consideration of the 'world-in-that-locality'. Often such poetry from Bandung in the 1990s dealt with broader environmental themes. The sense of attachment to the locality – once the hallmark of earlier poetry from the region -- is lost, being replaced by a more ambiguous and ambivalent stance. Thus there are a number of approaches taken by West Java's poets that demonstrate different responses to 'locality', including poetry that takes as its sub-theme the environmental degradation of the locality.

Such tensions come to the fore in much of the poetry being written by Bandung-based poets in recent times when they have described the environmental and social changes affecting the Bandung valley area of Priangan. Here the tensions between past and present conceptions of the natural and man-made 'world' of the Priangan highlands are played out. Indeed, it is this last element that has become such a potent theme in contemporary poetry, wherein the way in which the physical landscape have been altered becomes symptomatic, in the poet's eyes at least, of changes to the moral landscape of the environment.

Thus these poems about locality usually start with the appearance of only describing the natural characteristics of a region. But then the poet may interweave the

menuntut kearifan pikiran dan perasaan. Situasi yang menuntut kecerdikan estetik.”¹¹³ Joko Pinurbo, *ibid.* p. 3.

interaction or human impact of social life upon the natural environment. In turn, as Pinurbo has suggested, this may lead to some form of moralising, whether in religious terms, or as a moral didactic message, concerning the way of life that should be followed, universalised to all men and women of the age. In other words what has happened in the West Java case in recent years is that while poets may have commenced with a particular focus on the sense of attachment to place, the problems of the locality start to gradually become the dominant characteristic of such poetry. This means that it is no longer possible to easily discern the straightforward positive sense of attachment to locality that characterised poetry being written fifty years earlier in West Java.

As regionally based poets writing within the mainstream of contemporary Indonesian poetry, poets from West Java have been successful in putting in creative form their ideas about the environment (*alam*), and the interactions between humankind (*manusia*) and the environment. They have a consciousness of the specific interactions between ‘*manusia*’ and ‘*alam*’ that appear in different ways in their poetry. This may be partly derived from ideas about the ‘*alam*’ in West Java -- and specifically the Bandung high plains area – which stress what has been lost from the environment and assumes that what was there before was beautiful and to be valued in its primordial state. No other Indonesian city or region perhaps, apart from Bali, and certainly not Jakarta itself, has had built up around it such a core of ideas that contributes in such a marked way to this sense of loss.¹¹⁴

¹¹⁴ As has been mentioned in Chapter 1, I Nyoman Darma Putra has explored some of the ways in which Balinese poets have also taken as one of their themes their sense of loss of features of the physical and social environment in Bali flowing from the advent of mass tourism. See Darma Putra, (1998), *op. cit.* pp. 179-214.

Other dilemmas relate to how the balance between city and country is played out in the exploration of locality. Is locality simply ‘code’ for exposition of the virtues of the pastoral life against the backdrop of the failings of the city? Perhaps too, when the poet moves beyond the natural world, and starts to describe the failings on the negative side of the ledger, there is an implicit or explicit political message – that the powers that be have shown themselves incapable of maintaining a moral order or civil society in which true human values are upheld.

Thus the perspective of regional poets writing within a national language tradition suggests that there is much to explore when one considers localism in the case of contemporary poetry from West Java. The sense of responsibility the regional poets often bear -- the idea that they are upholders of a cultural tradition -- can also sometimes become a burden and something of a ‘two-edged sword’ that allows the poet no flexibility to criticise any negative aspects of the values inherent in the culture itself.

The idea of localism often also has a sense of being opposite to what is global, in that it may accentuate the idea of what is unique about a locality. In geographical and cultural terms, the place being described may have a uniqueness that appears to be in opposition to the currents of cultural uniformity stemming from the capital. Indeed, the term is invested with meaning suggesting that the very uniqueness of the culture of the local should be protected from the forces of globalisation.¹¹⁵

¹¹⁵ It is noted by some commentators, eg. Melani Budianta, that globalisation may have itself indirectly led to a heightened sense of the ‘local’ as a reaction or by-product. See Melani Budianta, ‘In the margin of the capital: From ‘Tjerita Boedjang Bingoeng’ to ‘Si Doel anak sekolahan’’, in Keith Foulcher and Tony Day, (eds.) *Clearing a space: Postcolonial readings of modern Indonesian literature*, (Leiden: KITLV Press, 2003), pp. 237-272.

“Priangan si Jelita” and its continuing influence on poetry from West Java

Poetry writing does not take place in a vacuum, and often poets, consciously or unconsciously, derive inspiration from earlier works. Joko Pinurbo, in his 2003 paper titled ‘Priangan si Jelita dan Perpuisian Jawa Barat’ considered the writer/poet Ramadhan KH and his long poem “Priangan si Jelita” (Priangan the beautiful) written in 1956.¹¹⁶ It is to this poem that I will now turn, in order to delineate its characteristics and the nature of its continuing influence upon some of the contemporary poets of West Java.

In the years preceding his writing of the poem, Ramadhan had spent a number of years in Europe.¹¹⁷ Indeed, Ajip Rosidi wrote in his 1958 introduction to the first edition of “Priangan si Jelita”, that he (Rosidi) saw some of the motivation in Ramadhan’s writings about his homeland as having been strengthened by being away in Europe.¹¹⁸

He suggests that perhaps Ramadhan had previously not been fully conscious of the meaning of the beauty of the Priangan environment, with its greenness and fertile valleys (“keindahan alam Priangan yang hijau, lembah-lembah yang subur”) in which he had grown up.¹¹⁹ It was the beauty of the natural region that poets of Sundanese origin, like Ramadhan and to some extent Ajip Rosidi himself, had started to consider

¹¹⁶ Ramadhan KH, *Priangan Sidjelita: Kumpulan Sandjak 1956* (Djakarta: P.N.Balai Pustaka, 1956) was the title and spelling under which the collection was first published.

¹¹⁷ If we cast our attention back 55 or so years we will note that when Ramadhan KH wrote “Priangan si Jelita” the heady days of Sukarnoism were also in full flight. At the international level, Bandung had been host in 1954 to the first Africa-Asia Conference of Non-Aligned nations. Bandung, as capital of the former Dutch East Indies province of West Java, had been famous as the scene of the ‘Lautan Api’ scorched earth tactics of the Republicans in 1946 as they retreated in the face of the Dutch returning forces.

¹¹⁸ The Rosidi introduction from the 1958 original publication is also included in the 2003 edition, with only changes in spelling to reflect current usage.

¹¹⁹ Ajip Rosidi, Introductory section, in Ramadhan KH, op. cit. (2003), p. ix.

thematically as they experimented with the use of Indonesian as a new literary language in the 1950s. Unlike their Sumatran counterparts, the Sundanese and Javanese poets and writers were faced with the daunting task of seemingly having to abandon their fluency in their native tongue of Sundanese (or Javanese) in favour of the use of Indonesian, a language most of them had probably never used in literary form.

Yet the period was one of great upheaval in West Java. By the early 1950s the revolts against nationalist control by the Dar'ul Islam movement had turned the area into a place of violent struggle amongst Indonesians themselves with competing visions for the future. This then was the paradox of the Priangan area of West Java that Ramadhan KH was to take as his theme in "Priangan si Jelita" – a land of great beauty, but one where violent struggle had altered the daily lives of the people.¹²⁰

Part One of "Priangan si Jelita", titled 'Tanah kelahiran', sets the poem firmly in the location of the mountains of Burangrang and Tangkubanprahu, and the surrounding pine covered hills.¹²¹ There is a 'polished jewel' quality of the opening poem in the book, and indeed as Aveling sees it, the whole series of twenty-one linked poems are 'a resplendent green necklace'.¹²² Also, as Aveling describes the scene, the natural beauty is the setting for human activity. But the sense of innocence lulled by the beauty of the natural surroundings is broken in poems four and five of the series. It is the time of the

¹²⁰ See Aveling's Introductory section to his English translation of the poem, in Ramadhan KH, *ibid.* (2003), pp. 35-46.

¹²¹ This part of the poem in Indonesian is at Ramadhan KH, *ibid.* pp.5-11.

¹²² Aveling is also probably referring to the line: "Jamrut di pucuk-pucuk/Jamrut di hati gadis menurun" (Emeralds in the treetops/Emeralds in the girls' hearts). He also sees the influence here of "Ramadhan's attraction to the poetry of Lorca and his love of the Spanish mountain landscape, the vitality of traditional Sundanese peasant life and the human drive for love in a time of war". (Aveling, in Ramadhan KH, *ibid.* p. 36).

revolt. “The music so sweetly present in the first poem now carries melodies of mourning for the living and for the dead”.¹²³

Much of the strength of the poem – particularly in this first section – is derived from the rhythms of the classical Sundanese poetry tradition of *dangding kinanti*. There are also possibly the rhythms derived from the form of popular song form such as *keroncong*. Ramadhan also uses his Indonesian language, especially verb forms, to good effect, as in the lines “Berbelit membiru jalan/ke Gede dan Pangrango/lewat musim penghujan.”¹²⁴ The whole passage gives the reader the sense of the winding nature of the roads through the highlands and movement through the land. Colour and the changing light of day are also emphasised.¹²⁵

In Part Two of the long poem we can detect the sorrow of the poet about the changes wrought upon his land by violent conflict, ie. the TNI/DI period. The sorrow of the poet is evident:

*Kemboja putih di senja hari,
Rama-rama hitam jatuh di pangkuan janda muda
Kemerahan di ufuk barat
Membawa menyusur dari pantai ke pantai....
.... “Tengok dataran tanah priangan, Gadisku manis”.
Dan si dara tiada bisa berkata,
Pacar gugur tiada menemu kuburannya.
Dan si dara hanya bisa meraba,
Membelitkan kalung kenangannya.*

¹²³From Aveling’s Introductory section to his English translation of the poem, in Ramadhan KH, *ibid.* pp. 39-41.

¹²⁴ “Turning a deeper blue/ the road winds to Gede and Pangrango/when the rainy season has come and gone”. Translation based on Aveling’s version (2003), in Ramadhan KH, *ibid.* (2003). p.54.

¹²⁵ These passages are evidence of the considerable influence of Lorca’s poetry on Ramadhan when he was writing “Priangan si Jelita” Ramadhan spent time in Spain in the early 1950s and is the translator into Indonesian of two of Lorca’s plays and his poetry collection, *Romancero Gitano*.

Frangipanni white in the dusk,
Black butterflies in the young widow's lap.
Redness in the western horizon,
Passing from beach to beach...

...“How beautiful are the plains of Sunda, my love.”
And she can say nothing,
Her lover fallen, his grave unknown,
She can only fondle and grope
The necklace of lost memories.¹²⁶

Part Three of the poem, ‘Pembakaran’, ends in didactic fashion with the recognition that the responsibility for growth and maturity through the hardships and tragedies of life rests with the people of West Java (and of Indonesia generally). Ramadhan writes: “Yang lain tak ada/Kau dan aku hanya” (There is none other/Only us).¹²⁷ There is transformation through fire. And the poet's role? “Penyair/kayu pertama/di tumpukan pembakaran” (The poet/is the first wood/consumed by the fire).¹²⁸ What are we to make of this? I suggest that Ramadhan is saying that poets should be involved in the struggles of the people, and not remain aloof or uninvolved whatever the personal costs may be. There is a sense of place. Yet the poem moves beyond (mere) description of the world to a statement about the qualities needed by regional man/woman to survive. This is a poem that in many ways set the benchmark as to how poetry about the poet's locality of birth should portray a region.

Thus the picture of the Priangan highlands that Ramadhan had described in this long poem published in 1956 was one of natural beauty of the environment and social

¹²⁶ Translation based on Aveling's version (2003), in Ramadhan KH, op.cit. (2003), p. 64.

¹²⁷ Aveling's version (2003) of the lines from the original poem by Ramadhan, in Ramadhan KH, ibid. p. 71.

¹²⁸ Aveling's version (2003) of the lines from the original poem by Ramadhan, in Ramadhan KH, ibid. p. 73.

order interrupted by the conflict of civil war and the need for the new generation of poets to become involved in the struggles of their new nation. Yet by 2003, when the Tasikmalaya *Muktamar* was held, much had altered in both the environmental landscape of the West Java highlands as well as the social and political landscape of the region. New themes in poetry writing were beginning to emerge, even if it seemed that the dominant theme of Ramadhan's depiction of the beauty of West Java's environment still resonated through the Bandung literary world. Certainly Joko Pinurbo used the occasion to focus on "Priangan si Jelita" and what he saw as its continuing influence over poets from West Java. In his paper he wrote that: "it is said that if we really want to sense the beauty of West Java, (read: Priangan) then first we must bow down and surrender to 'Priangan the beautiful' and plead: give us everlasting beauty..."¹²⁹

He went on to say that it was not just the beauty of environment that might command attention. Rather, for many West Javanese the environment (or alam) had a symbolic function representing the social and spiritual values of community well being and religious order that should be sought and upheld.¹³⁰ Possibly Joko Pinurbo has read the Ramadhan poem only expecting to find beauty and a pastoral style of poetry but realised belatedly that there is far more asked of the poet than simply praise for the locality. In essence, we have a long poem that starts with the appearance of solely being a poem of tribute to the physical characteristics of the regional environment. Yet the poem

¹²⁹ "Orang bilang, jika ingin mencium kecantikan Jawa Barat (baca: Priangan), kita mesti berlutut dulu di hadapan Priangan si Jelita seraya memohon: beri kami keindahan yang tak selesai-selesai..." Joko Pinurbo, op. cit., (2003), p.1.

¹³⁰ Joko Pinurbo writes that it is not just that "persona alam yang aduhai" is the focus but that Indonesians (of West Javanese backgrounds) seemingly should: "meninabobokan dengan kedalaman ruh, spirit hidup, yang membalut dan menaunginya: kedamaian (dalam keperihan), kebersahajaan (dalam kegundahan), ketakjuban (dalam kecemasan), cinta (dalam luka dan derita), keabadian (dalam ancaman kesementaraan)". Joko Pinurbo, *ibid.*, p.1.

goes on to explore the qualities needed for regional man/woman to survive through the furnace of life, despite the seeming beauty of the natural surroundings, which too often may mask tragedy.

Hawe Setiawan at the *Muktamar* also drew attention to this tradition in poetry from West Java typified by “Priangan si Jelita”.¹³¹ He mentioned the way in which place names from the Priangan highlands and the names from mythological Sundanese stories intrude into and infuse the whole poem, but makes it clear that he feels Ramadhan is also trying to show how the beauty of Priangan has been ravaged through civil strife.¹³²

Priangan si Jelita or Priangan si Derita?

The dominant perception of “Priangan si Jelita” as being solely in praise of the beauty of the Sundanese environment has proven to be a powerful current in contemporary West Javanese poetry, although not perhaps in the ways in which might have been expected. Let us consider the anthology *Bandung dalam Puisi* prepared in 2001 by the Yayasan Jendela Seni Bandung. This anthology edited by Erwan Juhara, Chairman of the Bandung-based Yayasan Jendela Seni Bandung (YJSB) in 2001, encapsulates some of the dilemmas facing the younger generation of West Java poets writing in Indonesian about Bandung.¹³³

¹³¹ “(penyair-penyair) yang menulis secara pastoral, menuangkan kata cinta atau keprihatinan pada dusunnya masing-masing”, Hawe Setiawan, *op.cit.*, p.2.

¹³² *ibid.* p.2. “Kalau kita membaca “Priangan si Jelita” hingga ke bawah pemukaannya, segera timbul kesan bahwa Ramadhan adalah seorang penyair yang sedih di hadapan keelokan Priangan yang telah mengalami kerusakan”.

¹³³ Edwin Juhara, (ed.) *Antologi Puisi: Bandung Dalam Puisi*, (Bandung: Yayasan Jendela Seni Bandung, 2001).

The Yayasan Jendela Seni Bandung (YJSB) has had a particular focus on developing broader appreciation of Indonesian literature amongst young people and especially schools in and around Bandung and other parts of West Java. A key focus of the group is the idea is that the ‘virus’ of the arts (*seni*) should be spread more widely to foster a more humane society in the coming generation. Erwan Juhara, currently a teacher by profession, is typical of the increasing involvement of non-Sundanese-background literary workers and poetry-lovers in literary activities in West Java, which may previously been largely the preserve of Sundanese-origin speakers. However, in practice, there is considerable crossover in membership between the YJSB and the Forum Sastra Bandung (FSP) mentioned above in Chapter Two.

In the Introductory Section to the anthology, Juniarso Ridwan sets the scene with an article titled ‘Membangun Kesadaran Masyarakat Bawah Dengan Sentuhan Apresiasi Seni’ (Building awareness among the grass roots of society through appreciation of the arts). In part he writes:

“At present there is a great gap in the life of our society, most particularly concerning any real awareness of ourselves as civilized beings. The type of development which we have experienced for over three decades, which placed primary importance on the meeting of concrete objectives in life that can be reflected in physical form measured according to statistical tabulations and hazy graphical representation, appears to have led to consequences that are of real cause for concern. The expansion in the number of buildings, houses, factories and the number of inhabitants does not appear to have been accompanied with any raising of the quality of our human resources”.¹³⁴

¹³⁴ “Saat ini terdapat kesenjangan yang demikian menganga sebagai jurang pemisah pada kehidupan masyarakat kita, khususnya menyangkut kesadaran hakiki sebagai manusia beradab. Pembangunan yang kita alami lebih dari tiga dekade, yang mengutamakan pemenuhan hajat hidup yang kasat mata berupa wujud fisik yang terukur menurut hitungan statistik dan dimensi artikulatif, ternyata banyak meninggalkan jejak buram yang mengkhawatirkan. Pertumbuhan gedung-gedung, rumah tinggal, jalan raya, pabrik-pabrik dan jumlah penduduk yang membengkak, ternyata tidak diiringi oleh peningkatan kualitas sumber daya, manusia”. Juniarso Ridwan. ‘Membangun Kesadaran Masyarakat Bawah Dengan Sentuhan Apresiasi Seni’ in *ibid.* p. 1.

The anthology was an assemblage of 46 poems written in Indonesian by poets from various localities in West Java, but primarily from poets residing in Bandung, to mark the anniversary of Bandung's establishment. Interestingly, the medium of the poetry writing competition (Lomba Menulis Puisi HUT Kota Bandung) provided an opportunity for critical comment to be made in poetry for the edification of the city authorities!

Many of the poems that we find in *Bandung dalam Puisi* – an anthology that clearly has as its objective the direct linkage of poetry and locality -- are those that highlight *not* the beauty of Priangan but the degradation of the natural environment of Priangan under the Soeharto government. There is some sense of nostalgia for a place where the natural environment reigns supreme and where the old mythologies about Priangan can reassert themselves over the 'din and crash' of modern urban life. Many of the poets themselves featured in the anthology -- whose average age would be below thirty years -- would never have experienced, in their adult years, the pristine nature of the Priangan environment and the presumed elegance of the 'Parijs van Java'.

Mugi Muryadi Harna's poem "Semalam Bersama Juliaen de Silva" typifies this new Bandung genre of poetry-writing about 'place'. The poem won first prize in the Lomba Menulis Puisi HUT Kota Bandung Tahun 2001 versi Yayasan Jendela Seni Bandung.¹³⁵

¹³⁵ The poem is included in the anthology at p. 5. Mugi Muryadi Harna was born in Sleman-Yogyakarta in 1972 and has had poetry published in Bandung and Yogyakarta.

Semalam Bersama Juliaen de Silva (extract)

*Bersama Juliaen de Silva memasuki kenangan
Dalam mimpi di bawah pohon-pohon rindang
Kunikmati aroma dan aneka warna kembang
Dipeluk angin dingin Pieterspark yang tenang*

*Ia bercerita tentang masa lalu kota Kembang
Melacak jejak Paris van Java yang rupawan
Membongkar lembar-lembar sejarah usang
Tentang Sungai Citarum yang jernih menyegarkan....*

*...Disini narkoba dan shabu-shabu membuat kacau
Anak-anakku kini menggigil sakauw
Danau Situ Hyang diubah menjadi lautan whisky
Dan mereka menyelaminya setiap hari*

*Lalu di antara gedung, bising, dan pengap kota
Kujaring makna dengan batin mengelana
Menghimpun huruf-huruf sesal dan tangis kota
Menjadi larik-larik sajak duka.*

(Bandung, September 2001)

An Evening with Juliaen de Silva

In the company of Juliaen de Silva I was reminiscing
dreamily under the leafy trees, and taking in the aroma
and various colours of the flowers
embraced by the cold breeze of tranquil Pieterspark

He spoke about times past in the city of Flowers
and traced again the beauty of the Paris of Java
and bringing to light again the pages of an outdated
history about the Citarum River, so clear and fresh...

...Here drugs and pills make my children confused
as they shiver from withdrawal symptoms
Lake Situ Hyang has been changed into a sea of whisky
and they dive straight in every day.

And between the buildings, the noise and stuffiness of the city,
I weave meaning together by an inner wandering,
gathering the letters that form the city's sighs and tears,
into the lines of this poem of sorrow.

The poem makes reference to the primordial aspect of the Bandung plains environment, to the mythological meanings and to the Sundanese nomenclature of the localities mentioned. There is an evocation of the idea of Bandung as the ‘Parijs van Java’. Even the mythological story of Tangkuban Prahū is combined with the historical allusions to the 1946 Bandung ‘Lautan Api’ events, but these strands are upturned, as it were, in the references to “Danau Situ Hyang diubah menjadi lautan wisky” (the lake turned into a sea of whisky). The end point of the gently moving poem is the poet’s resolution that he must gather together the letters that are the sighs and tears of the city so they become lines in a poem of sorrow. In other words, the poem gradually moves through stages of initial reflection about the past to a gradual awareness that the only emotion he feels is one of sadness about what has happened to the city.

Far more directly linked with the Ramadhan poem, and from the same anthology, is the poem, by Bogor-born poet, Acep Iwan Saidi, titled “Priangan si Derita (setelah Ramadhan KH)”. Here Acep Iwan Saidi is directly responding to the image of Priangan that he considers Ramadhan has depicted in Part 1 of Priangan si Jelita”. No longer ‘jelita’-- the beautiful but ‘derita’ – the suffering one, the Priangan in the poem is a ‘ragged doll’, no longer virginal and abandoned by her people. The harshness of the visual imagery is accentuated in sentences such as “rambutmu kusut kulitmu keriput”.

His poem begins:

*Inilah nyanyian seorang jalanan
Yang mengamen di persimpangan
Tentang Priangan yang tak lagi perawan
Setelah sekian tahun kau tinggalkan...*

*O, Priangan yang tak lagi jelita
Rambutmu kusut kulitmu keriput*

*Sepanjang kali Citarum
Setumpuk pasir telah jadi jarum...*¹³⁶

This is the song of the street singer who performs
at the intersections; they sing about a Priangan
that is no longer virginal, after so many years being
abandoned...

Oh, Priangan who is no longer the beautiful one,
your hair is unkempt, your face full of wrinkles.
Along the length of the Citarum
what was once a pile of sand is now needles...

Although it was not perhaps Acep Iwan Saidi's intention, I consider that the title encapsulates as well as any phrase just what this style of West Java Indonesian language poetry is trying to express. Such contemporary poetry uses as its starting point the local imagery of Priangan employed by Ramadhan in his poem from the 1950s but it turns it on its head, as if to say: the beauty of the local region no longer exists; it is a myth. The word 'derita' in opposition to the word 'jelita' used by Ramadhan explicitly heralds just what a reversal has taken place in the world of West Javanese Indonesian language poetry in the light of social and environmental changes.

But this theme of reversal of fortune is not just confined to poems compiled and selected for the *Bandung dalam Puisi* anthology. Lampung-born Diro Aritonang's poem, "Welcome Visitor", was featured in the *Khazanah* segment of *Pikiran Rakyat* of 31 July 2003:

Welcome visitor (extract)

*ini Bandung
datanglah berkunjung
di kota penuh sanjung*

¹³⁶ Poem in Erwan Juhara, (ed.) *ibid.* p. 16.

*jangan lagi tanya Parijs van Java
ini kota penuh intrik dan perkara*

*jangan lagi tanya kota berbunga-bunga
ini kota penuh sampah dan hutan lara*

*jangan lagi tanya soal kesejukannya
ini kota penuh beton dan polusi udara...*

(2002)

this is Bandung
come and visit
a city rife with flattery

don't ask about Parijs van Java
this is a city full of intrigue and affairs

don't ask about that city of flowers
it's a city full of rubbish and overgrown weeds

don't ask about the little matter of its refreshing nature
this is a city that's full of concrete and air pollution...

Part of the reason for the poem's success lies in the very directness of language and the juxtaposition of the competing images of Bandung. The possible idealistic images and vignettes of a Bandung of past years is thrown into disarray with the bitingly sarcastic 'one-liners' that follow in each couplet. In this poem the ideas of 'sanjung' (flattery) and 'intrik dan perkara' (intrigue and affairs) are introduced. This is something of a departure for poetry of the 'Priangan si derita' genre where most poets writing in this genre have tended to focus on the issues of general loss of morality on the one hand and aspects of physical environmental degradation, such as urban congestion and pollution, rather than on the nuances of political intrigue and social flattery.

Whether a West Javanese poet of Sundanese origin writing in Indonesian would have been as successful in such sarcastic and direct use of jibe is a point of conjecture.

What is interesting is that the poem “Welcome Visitor” was the only Indonesian language poem featured at the Sundanese literary event held on 27 September 2004 at the Yayasan Pusat Kebudayaan to commemorate the 194th anniversary of the establishment of Bandung. The event was coordinated by Sundanese language writer Uu Rukmana with *Panglawungan Pangaran Sastra Sunda* (PP-SS) and hosted by Sundanese language poet, Etti RS, before an audience of about 150 persons including Bandung Mayor, H. Dada Rosada SH. The poem was read by Sundanese dalang, Asep Sunandar Sunarya. Bandung Mayor Rosada responded by reading a Sundanese language poem by Wahyu Wibisana -- in praise of Kota Kembang, Bandung!¹³⁷

Although much more moralistic in tone than Diro Aritonang’s short satirical verse, the long poem by Soni Farid Maulana called “Variasi Parijs van Java -- *untuk Ramadhan KH*” (my italics) is more directly linked to Ramadhan’s original poem of fifty years ago. It is included in the poet’s *Anak Kabut* collection of 2000.¹³⁸ It is also the title of a more recent collection.¹³⁹ Its clear intent is to highlight the changes that have occurred in West Java in a polemical fashion and it reflects just what a change has occurred in terms of perception about the local environment in West Java. For Soni there is no longer an idyllic paradise of great beauty, the tranquillity of which is solely broken by civil war, but the degradation of the environment and decay in human and social values. As these opening lines indicate, right from the outset Soni is keen to portray a very different Priangan:

¹³⁷ The Bandung paper, *Galamedia*, 28 September 2004 featured a front-page article about the event.

¹³⁸ Soni Farid Maulana, *Anak Kabut*, (Bandung: Penerbit Paragraf, 2002). The poem is at pp. 34-40 of the collection of his poems from 1984-2000.

¹³⁹ Soni Farid Maulana, *Variasi Parijs van Java: Sepilihan Sajak Soni Farid Maulana*, (Bandung: Penerbit Kiblat, 2004). The poem is at pp. 40-50 of this more recent collection.

Variasi Parijs van Java (extract)

*Antara Ciwidey – Tangkuban Prah
Tak kudengar lagi gelik suling Cianjuran
Selain rangkaian nada musik dangdut
“Mabuk lagi, ah, Mabuk lagi”¹⁴⁰ menggelegar*

*Dalam ingatan. Sungguh, antara Soreang dan
Lembang: hamparan sawah berubah warna
Dan rupa. Lembah dan bukit yang sejuk
Adakah hanya kekal dalam buku-buku tua?*

*“Mabuk lagi, ah. Mabuk lagi...”
Bukit-bukit dibongkar buldozer,
Berton limbah industri dihanyutkan*

*Orang ke Sungai Citarum,
Sekali hujan turun airmata tumpah
Menggenangi perkampungan...*

Variation on Parijs van Java (extract)

*Between Ciwidey and Tangkuban Prah
I can no longer hear the sound of the Cianjur flute.
Rather it is the tone of dangdut song music,
“Drunk again, hey, drunk again” that thunders*

*away in my thoughts. In truth, between Soreang and
Lembang: there are spreading rice fields but they have changed
in colour and form. And are the lush valleys and hills
only everlasting in the books of old?*

*“Drunk again, hey, drunk again...”
The hills are exposed by the bulldozer,
Tons of industrial waste are washed away*

*by people into the Citarum river.
When the rains come its tears
spill over and flood the kampungs...*

The double-edge of the dangdut lines express repugnance of the drunken way in which changes to the traditional, more rural-based life seem to have occurred. Soni Farid Maulana explains the specific connotations of his use of the words from the dangdut song

¹⁴⁰ Footnoted in the poem, by Soni Farid Maulana himself as referring to the dangdut song by Cuc Cahyati.

where the singer cries out, ‘Mabuk lagi (Drunk again)’, as the ‘loss of rationality’ that arises when changes in the environment and accompanying loss of morality envelop the life of ordinary people.¹⁴¹ The orderly refinement of ‘Parijs van Java’ has given way to the rapaciousness of the bulldozers as they tear into and expose the hills. In this extract from the poem, the central square is no longer the meeting and greeting place for the civic-minded, but the place that is:

*disungkup gelak-tawa orang-orang
Yang nawar ngamar*¹⁴²

enveloped by the raucous laughter
of people haggling for prostitutes

The traditional pendopo no longer resounds to the notes of the kecapi (Sundanese lute):

*Pendopo seakan kusam,
Seakan sunyi pekuran. Tak ada denting kecapi*

*Di situ. Di jauhnya satu dua kendaraan
Lewat tergesa-gesa...*

The pendopos of houses seem faded
and as if they are in a quietitude of solitude.
No longer the sound of the kecapi’s strings

is there. In the distance a couple of vehicles
speed past...

Of course, the poet is seeking to make clear through his choice of the title “Parijs van Java” that Bandung no longer has the attributes of the imagined world of either Paris

¹⁴¹ “Diksi ‘mabuk’ yang berulang-ulang saya pakai dalam puisi tersebut saya pinjam dari lagu dangdut. Fungsinya antara lain untuk menggambarkan realitas sosial-politik saat ini yang terjadi di Indonesia..... Jadi mabuk dalam puisi tersebut semacam "hilangnya akal sehat" dalam kehidupan masyarakat elit khususnya yang memperdaya kaum pinggiran sedemikian rupa dalam berbagai hal, sehingga kaum pinggiran pun ikut-ikutan mabuk juga, entah jadi perampok atau jadi pelacur ketika mereka tidak bisa lagi mengatasi hidupnya secara rasional.” Personal communication, Soni Farid Maulana, 22 December 2003.

¹⁴² Footnoted in the poem appearing in *Anak Kabut* by Soni Farid Maulana himself, as referring to terms used by persons bartering for ‘perempuan malam’.

or the colonial city of the 1930s.¹⁴³ Yet not all critics felt that the direct allusion to the Ramadhan poem was successful in conveying the new approach to the Bandung environment that the younger poets have been so wedded to. In an article that appeared in *Pikiran Rakyat* in 2004¹⁴⁴, Prof. Jakob Sumardjo queried the literary merit of trying to mirror the earlier poem. He indicated he did not consider the aspect of social comment that poet was making through his poem had a ‘sense of authenticity’ (autentisitas penemuan).

There is an element of risk for any poet in implicitly drawing comparisons between a poem of iconic status like “Priangan si Jelita” and his own work. But the newer poem does appear to be reflective of a broader new genre of poetry writing by the younger generation of Bandung poets concerning the changes that have occurred in the physical environment of the Bandung high plains area over the last thirty years. It challenges and confronts the reader through poetry to take stock of what is happening in the physical and social environment of the Bandung high plains. Indeed, the poet’s view was that Prof. Sumardjo had not taken account of the essential difference between the poems.¹⁴⁵

¹⁴³ “Hal ini tak ada kaitannya dengan keinginan Bandung jadi Paris atau seperti Paris. Baiklah. Bagi saya menulis puisi tidak bisa lahir dari ruang yang kosong, yang dikhayal-khayalkan. Jika ini terjadi maka isi puisi akan hampa dari makna, tidak ada "greget" kata orang Jawa... Bandung bukan Parijs. Sungai-sungainya tercemar. Gedung-gedung yang bersejarah yang dibuat di zaman Belanda banyak yang dibongkar. Arus lalulintasnya macet. Pendeknya idealisasi Bandung dengan julukan "Parijs van Java" itu hanya omong kosong belaka.” Personal communication, Soni Farid Maulana, 20 July 2004.

¹⁴⁴ Prof Dr. Jakob Sumardjo, article titled: ‘Permainan Kontras dan Paradoks Dalam Puisi’ in *Khazanah of Pikiran Rakyat*, 22 May 2004.

¹⁴⁵ “...Puisi saya adalah puisi yang secara tegas dan jelas menggambarkan bagaimana perubahan nilai-nilai itu kini tengah terjadi di Bandung khususnya dan Jawa Barat pada umumnya atau di mana pun. Banyaknya perempuan yang terjun ke dunia pelacuran di satu sisi bukan hanya disebabkan karena mereka miskin, akan tetapi lebih disebabkan karena godaan gaya hidup yang tidak bisa lagi mereka bendung...” Personal communication, Soni Farid Maulana, 20 July 2004.

Apart from social critiques on these changes in the environment, clearly evidenced in poems like “Variasi”, Soni Farid Maulana’s poetry seems to have embraced a far more religious-moral view of what should be done and what temptations must be avoided. Again, the external landscape symbolises not only inner thoughts, but also the changes in the physical environment are reflective of moral decay and lack of awareness of the religious dimensions of social life. The poem, “Gelombang Hitam” (Black Cloud), written in 2000 is illustrative of this:

Gelombang Hitam

*ketika malam melepas kerudungnya
yang hitam pekat. Ketika rambutnya yang kelam
berkibaran dielus cahaya bintang:
o, kaki yang melangkah ke negeri sihir, dunia maya,*

*mengapa selalu mabuk bersambung mabuk
yang kau jelang di bumi? Dalam sepi
selalu jiwamu kau lepas mengikut gelombang hitam
nafsu yang dibangkitkan vokal dan konsonan hampa
makna?*

*Sungguh, madu kehidupan yang kau hisap
dari bibir merah merekah, adalah timah panas,
darah, dan nanah busuk, yang ngalir dari lembah
jubbul hazan. O, jiwa yang lengah, waspadalah;
kelahiran dibayang-bayangi kematian. Selemah
itukah hidupmu dikeloni kegelapan ruhani?*

(2000)

Black Cloud

when the evening sheds its veil of thick black.
when its hair flapping in the dark is stroked
and caressed by the rays of light of the stars:
oh, those steps that are taken into the land of ‘magic’,
an illusory world.

why always is it this loss of control that bedevils
you on the earth? In the quietness, do you always surrender

your soul to the black cloud that is passion aroused
by the meaningless words and sounds (lit: vowels and
consonants)?

in truth, the honey of life which you suck through those open red
lips, is it not just hot tin, blood, and ugly pus,
which flows from the valley of *jubbul hazan*.
oh, drifting and careless soul, be careful:
for birth is overshadowed by death.
is your life so weak that you are seduced by darkness of the spirit?

A noteworthy feature of this poem when considered later in relation to Nenden Lilis A's poem, "Negeri Sihir", is the different nuance each poet places on the idea of the 'magic land'. For Soni Farid Maulana, the idea is the sense of trickery and illusion and deceit is primary, but in the Nenden Lilis poem, the sense is of a 'place without time', a state of being.¹⁴⁶ Other notes from the poet himself about his poem emphasise the sense of moral and religious decay that he sees in contemporary society.¹⁴⁷

The environment as a continuing theme

Like many of the Bandung poets, Soni Farid Maulana returns again and again in his poetry to the theme of interaction between humankind and the environment. In an

¹⁴⁶ "...Sajak yang saya tulis itu berbicara tentang pengembaraan jiwa manusia yang secara spiritual tersesat di dunia maya (kenikmatan-kenikmatan duniawi yang jauh dari persoalan-persoalan religius maupun spiritual, dan bahkan nilai-nilai agama). Adanya metafor "negeri sihir" pada bait pertama larik keempat dalam puisi saya, adalah tentang godaan-godaan duniawi yang mempesona kita, seperti halnya kita memperhatikan permainan sihir dalam sebuah pertunjukan sulap atau apa saja yang kerap membuat kita terpesona karenanya...Nenden Lilis Aisyah memakai istilah itu erat kaitannya dengan terjadinya konflik-konflik sosial-politik ketika Orde Baru masih berkuasa yang berpuncak dengan meletusnya gerakan reformasi di Indonesia." Personal communication, Soni Farid Maulana, 22 December 2003.

¹⁴⁷ "Mabuk - adakah simbol dari aksi liar/kemabukan/ dll?"...dan saya jawab dengan tegas "Ya!" dalam berbagai hal, yang menyebabkan daya spiritual, daya religius kita, apapun namanya, jadi ternoda karenanya. Terperosok ke dalam lubang hitam peradaban, maupun kegelapan rohani."

... "Dikeloni"? "Saya ambil diskripsi ini dari bahasa Jawa. Larik puisi yang berbunyi. Selemah/ itukah hidupmu dikeloni kegelapan rohani?//adalah sebuah gambaran akan jiwa manusia yang tidak bisa membebaskan diri dari kenikmatan-kenikmatan usapan, belaian, dan juga pelukan lembutan kemabukan duniawi"...
... "timah panas - itu sendiri dari Alquran adalah sebuah metafor, yang maknanya akan hadir ke dalam diri kita, tergantung dari sisi mana kita menafsirnya...kalau kita minum air panas saja, mulut kita terbakar karenanya. Apalagi kalau minum cairan timah panas. Adalah rahang kita masih berbentuk wujudnya." Personal communication, Soni Farid Maulana, 22 December 2003.

earlier 1997 poem -- ostensibly a 'landskapis' snapshot of a rural or outer urban scene -- he described the nature of the environment (alam), and the way in which humans, both adults and children, respond to it in different ways:

Layang-Layang Terbakar

*Ada layang-layang terbakar
Disambar petir. Irisan cahaya tampak
Berkilat dengan terangnya
Pada ceruk langit yang gelap dan pekat
Dan anak-anak di depan televisi
Terbiasa melihat darah yang mengalir
Dari tubuh sang jagoan
"Hebat, aku ingin seperti dia"
Ujar seorang anak, sambil lompat
Dari bangunan tingkat dua*

*Dari kedua mata orang tuanya
Kulihat pagi itu – ada sebuah
Danau mengenang. Tak ada ikan
Selain maut yang berkilat
Pada ceruk kegelapan.*

Flaming kites

There are kites on fire,
as if struck by lightning. A flash of bright light
in a dark and heavy clump of sky
and children in front of the television
are used to seeing blood running from the body
of the fighter. "He's the greatest. I want to be like him",
said the child, leaping from a two-storey building.

From his parents' eyes
that morning I could see
that they were thinking of
the still waters of the lake.
There were no live fish, just the angel of death
in the dark shallows.

The poem, “Layang-layang terbakar”, reminds us of the links between local rural life and global influences, through television images. Nature must be nurtured, if it is to continue to provide sustenance, as we see in the last lines of the poem. A key idea in the poem is Soni’s use of the word ‘kilat’ – initially in reference to the kites that fly in the heavens, then later, in “death that shines in the lake”. Structurally, the poem is written in a sequence of three levels of actions and short scenes. The first is the world of the heavens, then the child’s world, and finally then the parents’ world. In the first, the kite tries to fly with, and then fight against, the heavens. In the second, the child’s world is one of ‘flaming’ violence reinforced by tv (global) images. But in the third, the environment, the ‘alam’ and its natural wealth, is suffering -- dead fish or the gleaming murkiness of death in the dark lake. The parents do not see the wonder, but fear, in what shines here.

The theme of local environmental degradation also strongly appears in much of Juniarso Ridwan’s poetry. Like some of Soni Farid Maulana’s poetry, the environmental degradation referred to in Juniarso Ridwan’s poetry is also ‘code’ for spiritual loss of values, although Juniarso uses less explicitly Islamic terminology than his contemporary. Indeed, in the following poem, Juniarso Ridwan makes a strong statement about the ecological damage the river system has suffered:

Air mengukir ikan

*bangkai radio itu telah menari bersama sungai,
melewati riwayat kematian kota-kota: dengan gulungan
kabel telah dihubungkan denyut masa depanku,
sebuah penantian yang tak berlimit waktu.*

*di mana-mana, air mengukir ikan, menerjemahkan
kepedihan demi kepedihan. Basahnya membakar lubuk,*

mengasingkan pasir ke muara-muara yang jauh.

*seperti dirundung berahi, daratan mendengus,
memburu biru laut. Air pun terus mengukir ikan.*

(1996)

Water carving fish

those thrown away carcasses of radios have bobbed
along with the river, passing by the story of the death of cities:
rolls of cable have been connected
to the throbbing pulse of my future,
that is a transit stop - but one that will be eternal, I fear.

everywhere, water carves the fish,
translating one bitterness after another.
This very wetness burns the depths,
expunging even the sand to far away estuaries

and the land heaves with a longing that is passionate, a longing
for the blue, that blue of the sea. And water goes on carving fish.

This poem was published in Juniarso Ridwan's 2001 edition of collected poems titled, *Air Mengukir Ikan*. He has expressed his concerns about development and its effect on the environment of Bandung in many publications, apart from his poetry. As he stated in a note of 14 June 2003 in discussing some of the reasons why the International Indonesian Poetry Festival had such merit at the time it was being mooted in early 2002:

“Certainly after Indonesia had successfully undertaken ‘development’, especially in its narrow physical sense, what was left (out) was the building of human resources, both in terms of morality and ability to develop thinking faculties. We had been seduced by the fruits of such development, so that we become confused as to what direction to take. So the idea of purging or renewing oneself is a reasonable proposition.”¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁸“Memang setelah Indonesia berhasil melakukan "pembangunan" khususnya fisik yang gempita, ada yang tertinggal yaitu membangun sumber daya manusia (moralitas dan mentalitasnya). Kami merasa terperangkap oleh buah pembangunan itu, sepertinya kami bingung akan pergi ke alam mana. Jadi ungkapan membebaskan diri, bisa juga diterima”. Personal communication, Juniarso Ridwan, 14 June 2003.

Juniarso Ridwan's background and the positions he has held have perhaps given him an unusual vantage point to put into poetry his thoughts about the 'alam', as well as other environmental themes. The poet holds a doctorate from the Bandung Institute of Technology, and his poetry is often replete with specific, not just general, references, to botanical and natural phenomena. Other commentators, including Jakarta-based poet, Afrizal Malna, have also picked up on the strong ecological concerns communicated in Juniarso's poetry. Malna states that: "in the poetry of Juniarso Ridwan there is the result of ruminations about ecology that moves from the environment and local cultural life to the confusion of the city."¹⁴⁹

Conclusion

In this chapter attention has been given to the way in which localism and themes concerning the environment have been given expression in some of the contemporary poetry being written in West Java. Poetry with local themes has been central to a great deal of Indonesian language poetry writing in West Java, and particularly in Bandung, from the 1950s. In the examples given in the chapter we can point to the way in which some of the poets mentioned reveal different emphases in the ways they tackle their theme.

Soni Farid Maulana is the proclaimer of changes in the environment and the world of the Bandung high plains as reflecting the moral and religious decay of the times. Juniarso Ridwan is the scientific environmentalist who also sees these changes as reflecting changes in the attitudes of humankind. Both ponder in their poetry on the effect

¹⁴⁹ "Dalam puisi-puisi Juniarso Ridwan terdapat produk ujaran-ujaran ekologis yang meniti jalanannya dari alam, kehidupan budaya lokal hingga kota yang ruwet". Juniarso Ridwan, *Air Mengukir Ikan* (Magelang: Indonesiatara, 2000). p. 76.

of such developments and seek to draw their readers' attention, often adopting polemic stances in their assumed role as moral awakeners.

Soni's poem "Variasi Parijs van Java" and the poems from the Yayasan Jendela Seni anthology *Bandung dalam Puisi* discussed in this chapter, show the extent to which the ideas expressed by Ramadhan KH in his iconic poem from 1956 about the world and locality of the Priangan highlands have become a new but transformed source of concern rather than inspiration, as younger poets consider the social and moral problems consequent upon and reflective of the environmental changes in the locality of the high plains of West Java, particularly in the Bandung valley.

As this chapter has shown, localism and environmental themes are common to a range of poets from West Java writing in Indonesian. In the next two chapters, I shall examine in detail the poetry of two major West Java poets, Nenden Lilis A and Acep Zamzam Noor, to show how localism and environmental themes are played out, often in starkly different ways to those of the poets whose work has been discussed in this chapter. What will also be evident is the way in which their poetry moves beyond the local to a broader canvas of ideas and perspectives. Place and absence of place will also be shown to be important aspects of their poetry.

CHAPTER FOUR

MYSTERY, ALLUSION AND REALISM: BEYOND THE LOCAL IN THE POETRY OF NENDEN LILIS AISYAH

Introduction

In February 2003 the Bandung-based women's literary association, Komunitas Sastra Dewi Sartika, published an anthology, *Bunga yang Berserak: Antologi puisi dan cerita pendek 1989-2002*. It was edited by Soni Farid Maulana and it included poetry and short stories by some of the younger generation of women poets from West Java. The writers were Eriyanti Nurmala Dewi, Heni Hendrayani, Katherina, Nina Minareli, Nuning Damayanti, Ratna Ayu Budhiarto, Shinta Kusumawati, Tetet Cahyati and Nenden Lilis A.¹⁵⁰ Tetet Cahyati, founding Chairperson of the Komunitas Sastra Dewi Sartika, wrote in her introductory preface to the anthology that the book was an attempt to show that, despite the many obstacles in the way of women's participation in writing, much had been achieved.¹⁵¹

Tetet stated that even if women writers only numbered about twelve percent of the total number of writers in contemporary Indonesia, their presence should be recognised and the obstacles to their greater level of participation acknowledged.¹⁵² In choosing the title *Bunga yang berserak*, the association has perhaps drawn upon the symbolism of flowers to suggest the kind of image they wished to project. It is a symbolism that has traditionally been associated with the feminine throughout the ages,

¹⁵⁰ Soni Farid Maulana, (ed.) *Bunga yang Berserak: Antologi puisi dan cerita pendek 1989-2002* (Bandung: Komunitas Sastra Dewi Sartika with Penerbit Angkasa, 2003).

¹⁵¹ *ibid.* p. xiii-xv. Tetet Cahyati is the wife of Juniarso Ridwan, whose poetry has been discussed in Chapter 3. She is the daughter of prominent painter, Popo Iskandar, whose abstract painting of a blue vase of flowers with a bright yellow light behind adorns the cover of the anthology.

¹⁵² *ibid.* p. xiv.

and is just as pervasive in Islamic traditions as it may be in Western literary thought. Yet it also seems at odds with the harder edge presented by much new writing by women writers in Indonesia today.

Indeed, as I suggested in the opening chapter of this thesis, perhaps the most important change in Indonesian literature since the Soeharto downfall has been the increasing prominence of literary works by women, many of which have sought to break down societal taboos in a new explicitness of language usage. The Bandung writers of the Komunitas Sastra Dewi Sartika have certainly taken note of the new trends, adopting some general stances of the new national style of harder-edged writing, whilst at the same time developing their own individual styles.

This chapter will examine poems by the most prominent younger generation female poet whose work has been included in the Bandung anthology, Nenden Lilis Aisyah, also known as Nenden Lilis A.¹⁵³ Noting her connections with the themes discussed in the preceding chapter, I shall discuss the various themes and styles that may be found in her poetry, making points of comparison with poetry being written by other poets from Bandung, as well as discussing the distinctive style she adopts as a female poet. I shall show that, generally speaking, her poetry is not marked by any specific exposition of locality-based themes, or attention to Sundanese cultural mythology.

Mystery and reality; allusions to the environment in the poetry of Nenden Lilis

While I have suggested that a particular characteristic of poetry of many of the male poets now domiciled in Bandung has been, in very direct form, to derive thematic

¹⁵³ Her full name is Nenden Lilis Aisyah, but she is also known as Nenden Lilis A.

inspiration from the changes they have witnessed in the environment – the poems of Soni Farid Malauna, Juniarso Ridwan, Diro Aritonang, Acep Iwan Saidi in the ‘Priangan si Derita’ thematic style, for example – this very direct objectifying and confrontational style of writing about the environment has not been evidenced to anywhere the same extent amongst the women poets from West Java.

In this chapter I begin by examining a number of poems by Nenden Lilis Aisyah which use allusions to the environment and nature themes. Like her male fellow poets, Nenden’s poetry is initially grounded in the West Javanese sense of place. However, one of the defining aspects of her poetry is the way this sense of place is overlaid with an exploration of aspects of human existence through her incorporation into her poetry of elements of the surreal, or illusion. A good starting point is her 1997 signature poem, “Negeri Sihir 1”, which was also the title of her first collection published in 1999¹⁵⁴:

Negeri Sihir 1

*angin surut dan cahaya beringsut
waktu seakan turun menemui kegaiban
kerisik senyap, segala sunyi
bertabuh di kegelapan*

*negeri tempatku hidup telah jadi mimpi
alangkah jauh, bagai bayang-bayang*

*aku entah berjejak di mana
tak juga pergi bersama suara-suara*

*inilah ketiadaan, ruang kekal kekosongan
tempat segalanya menghilang*

¹⁵⁴ Nenden Lilis A. *Negeri Sihir*. (Bandung: Diwan Pustaka, 1999). There are two versions of the poem, “Negeri Sihir 1”, written in 1997 and “Negeri Sihir 2”, written in 1998, included in the 1999 collection. However, the best-known version, which is also printed in handwritten form on the back cover of the 1999 collection, is the version written in 1997. The 1997 version of the poem can also be found, inter alia, in Korrie Layun Rampan, op. cit. p. 518.

Magical land

the wind dies down and the light is shimmering here and there
time seems to stand still when there is a sense of the magical
the quiet rustling of the leaves, all is silent;
silence alone that gently throbs in the dark

the land where I live has become a dream
so far away, like something only imagined

I cannot comprehend where my steps are taking me;
there are no voices of others that accompany me

here is the void, where eternal nothingness is,
that place where all things disappear

In this poem, the poet is immersed in the stillness, which is broken only by the rustling of the leaves. The presence of others is not sought as they may break the silence. Perhaps this strongly meditative poem is more in tune with Indian philosophical ideas. Indeed, it reminds me of some of the (Spanish language) poetry of Octavio Paz that covers India-related themes. Sometimes there is almost a sense of ‘nothingness’ or void (*sunyata*).¹⁵⁵ There is no reference to specifically Islamic world-views, but the poem does not contradict such views. Then there is the idea of the ‘land of magic’ (*negeri sibir*), in which the poet is immersed. Indeed, through the poem, there is movement into a state of alignment with the world that becomes ‘the void’. Yet as Sutardji Calzoum Bachri points out, Nenden’s is not that of a poet wanting to deconstruct previously existing ideas. She uses strong imagery that has the power to evoke the sense of mystery.¹⁵⁶ This she does

¹⁵⁵ Octavio Paz, (1914 –1997), Mexican poet, and Nobel Prize winner in 1990. Many of Paz’s poems had allusions to Indian themes, given his time as Mexican Ambassador to India from 1962-1968. The poem in Spanish, “Sunyata”, is included in bilingual Spanish-English collections, such as Octavio Paz, *A Draft of Shadows*, (New York: New Directions, 1979).

¹⁵⁶ Sutardji Calzoum Bachri, Introductory comments (no title given), *Bentara* literary segment, *Kompas*, 3 April 2000, writes, inter alia: “Nenden kelihatan masih berupaya menampilkan imaji-imaji yang diharapkan saling membantu untuk menampilkan keutuhan”.

through her attempt to elicit a sense of timelessness and ‘placelessness’, where there is no specific locale, just a state of being.

The poet is not seeking to denounce or proclaim. Rather, there seems to be an element of humility in the poet’s seeking of ‘nothingness’. But what are we to make of the symbol, the ‘land of magic’, *negeri sihir*? It does seem clear that the symbolism of ‘negeri sihir’ has allusions to what the poet’s own country (negeri) was not. Indeed, some, such as Soni Farid Maulana, see the poem in part as a social critique about the state of the nation.¹⁵⁷

I feel the strength of the poem lies in its ability to evoke the sense of mystery and feeling that Sutardji Calzoum Bachri alluded to in his introduction to her poems in *Kompas*. The reader gains a sense of being led into this imagined place where peace exists. Nenden’s use of the word ‘sihir’ in this poem does not have negative connotations that Soni Farid Maulana gave it when he used it in his poem, discussed in Chapter Three. Here it seems a deliberate choice to evoke also the idea that the world can be mysterious in a positive sense, even if there is still a sense of the unknowable that pervades the poem.¹⁵⁸

A poem much more closely linked to the idea of exploitation of the environment is “Sungai Batu” (River of Stone). In this poem, Nenden Lilis Aisyah creates a picture of the environment under threat from mankind. Even the stone is wanted from the riverbed when the river runs dry. In the poem, the poet uses the technique of personifying the river she is describing. The poet becomes one with the river. It is a startling transformation

¹⁵⁷ Personal communication, Soni Farid Maulana, 22 Desember 2003.

¹⁵⁸ Wendy Mukherjee (personal communication, 29 June 2005) has mentioned the tendency of ‘sihir’ to refer to sorcery in the West Java context, where in general parlance it has negative connotations.

from earlier poems from West Java that objectify the environment. Technically, it also represents a departure from poetry written by Soni Farid Maulana and Juniarso Ridwan about the natural environment, and indeed from the general stance adopted by (male) poets from Bandung writing in the 'Priangan si derita' thematic style. In Nenden's poem, by contrast, her use of 'aku' (I) floods the poem with meaning, by overtaking almost all other symbols and references, even if one notes the starkness of the imagery of the stone in the riverbed:

Sungai Batu

*aku tak memiliki apa-apa dalam tubuhku
tapi petani menugalnya seakan tubuhku tanah
kami akan menanam benih, seru mereka*

*kau pun datang, begitu saja melinggis dadaku
aku haus tedas darah desahmu*

*aku katakan padamu
di dadaku tinggal sungai kering berbatu
tak ada lagi yang mengalir*

*batu? batu pun tak apa-apa
tiba-tiba kau dan petani-petani itu berebut
"yang kita butuhkan sekarang memang batu!"*

dan batu, satu-satunya milikku yang tersisa, mereka ambil

(2000)

River of Stone

I possess nothing in my body
but the farmers who dig at it do so as if my body is land
we shall plant seeds, they cry

you also come and likewise prise open my breast
"I am thirsting for the clear essence of your blood", you hiss

I tell you
all that's left that in my breast is a dry river of stone
there is nothing left that flows

stone? stone will do
and suddenly you and the farmers fight and cry out
'what we need now is stone!'

and stone, the only thing that I possess which is left,
is what they take.

Apart from the references to the environment, it is possible to interpret this poem as symbolically alluding to the female body exploited by men. Some of the allusions she uses point to this interpretation. These include the ideas relating to the body, the planting of seeds and the taking of stone as the last possession, for example. Clearly the poem is about exploitation, in its many forms. There is some support for the view that this poem can be seen as a more feminist statement. Indeed, it probably would be difficult for a male poet to write as effectively as Nenden does employing the allusions she does.

Thus the poet's personification of the river and identification with it in the poem can, at first glance, lend credence to the idea that the poem is primarily a statement about herself as a woman. But it also can be interpreted as being a deeply felt sense of identification with the environment, and about exploitation in general, not just that that might pertain to the role of women. Certainly, the reader gets a more powerful sense of the 'agony' of the environment, under threat, than in poems which tend to objectify these threats. Yet it is a poem that can be interpreted on many levels. She leaves the reader with the puzzle of whether she is intending to highlight a more gender-based interpretation or one based on generic allusions to the environment. Perhaps it is both.

Another poem of Nenden's with environmental undertones is the poem, "Sumur" (The Well). This poem also looks back to the symbolism of the environment through the

idea that the poet has become at one with the environment through identification with it. But she also moves deftly, with her allusions to the symbol of the well, overflowing when the rains come, between the personal and the symbols of nature and the environment. In the first verse she describes the land, refreshed when bathed in the rain, with new growth emerging. She uses the allusion of the well to describe her alignment with this process. The rains enable water to be drawn again from the well, and this process comes alive in the heart. There is new growth. So, too, the 'well' of her being starts to overflow:

Sumur

*jika hujan memandikan tanah, timbalah
air sumur yang kembali subur di hatiku
ambung tumbuhan yang menebarkan
keharuman bagi sekelilingnya*

*sudah letih sang pawang menahan awan
demi sebuah keriuhan – cucuran air langit
adalah guguran anak panah baginya –
waktu mengungsikan aku dari kekeringan
dan masa kritis selama tahun-tahun panjang*

*petani mencangkuli bumi batinku
menggemburkan, menghidupkannya dengan tanaman
suatu hari, kuundang siapa pun memanenannya.*

(1997)

The Well

when the rains come and bathe the land, draw
the water from the well that comes to life again in my heart
sense the new growth spreading
its scent all around

the shaman has become tired of fighting against the clouds
and so to prevent a commotion – the sky starts to flow with the
rains, a cluster of darts is unleashed for him –
time takes me away from the drought
and the terrible long years

when the farmer hoes the earth in my inner self
loosens it up, makes things live again,
I will ask whomever I can to gather in its harvest.

There is, as in many of her other poems about nature, a third entity, the magician or shaman of nature, who becomes tired of trying to hold back the rains. It is in these times that long periods of drought and unhappiness are cast aside. In this second stanza the poet is reflecting upon the process of rainmaking by using the imagery of the shaman who unleashes the darts to make rain as a way of making peace between the warring aspects of nature. But also in this stanza the poet reflects back to the awareness that only a short while ago there was long-running drought. In the final verse the poet concludes by using images of new life and its manifestation through the fact and symbolism of the harvest analogy.

There are a number of comments to make. Firstly, it could again be considered that these allusions are (solely) allusions in an erotic poem about female experience. Certainly, there is a clear sense that Nenden Lilis Aisyah identifies ‘the female’ with the environment in a way that other (male) poets from Bandung do not, as was evident from the examples of poems by Soni Farid Maulana and Juniarso Ridwan mentioned in the previous chapter. However, in “Sumur” there is no sense of exploitation, even if we see the poem as essentially about female experiences. It is not a poem of rebellion, as Dorothea Rosa Herliany has written.¹⁵⁹ If it is about female experience, it is a joyous poem, about the feeling of spirits being lifted, as the rains come. We can say that Nenden

¹⁵⁹ Here one thinks of poems such as “Buku Harian Perkawinan”, and “Surat Lorena”. Dorothea Rosa Herliany, in Harry Aveling (ed. and trans.), *Kill the Radio/Sebuah Radio, Kumatikan*, (Magelang: Indonesiatara, 2001). pp. 24-25, 34-35.

seems to move almost effortlessly between allusion to her own feelings as a woman and the reflection of these feelings in the symbols of nature.

Like “Sungai Batu”, this poem allows the reader to delve into the possibilities of interpretation on a number of levels. Perhaps it is also an attempt through poetry to be at one with the physical environment; the poem shows how the external environment is mirrored by the poet’s feelings. It also may also be a case of what Acep Zamzam Noor sees in much of the poetry of the female poets from West Java, namely the use of ‘personal metaphors’, where in this example, the allusions to rural themes is also a metaphor for inner thoughts and feelings.¹⁶⁰

The forces of nature, however, cannot always be portrayed as harmonious and beneficent. Considering Nenden’s poem, “Penjemput maut” (The harbinger of death), Beni Setia wrote that it features a panorama that makes the reader shiver.¹⁶¹ There is also the suggested presence of a third person coming into the picture along with death itself. Here Nenden Lilis Aisyah uses this device of personifying the way the forces of nature act to create so much havoc:

Penjemput Maut

*kau mengirim musik
dari badai yang menghempaskan
kerikil-kerikil es ke kaca jendela
dan derak pohon-pohon tumbang*

raungan angin menyungkurkan

¹⁶⁰ See Acep Zamzam Noor’s review titled ‘Membaca “Bunga yang Berserak”’, *Khazanah* literary segment, *Pikiran Rakyat*, Bandung, 17 July 2003. The anthology had been launched on 19 June 2003 in Bandung, and in his review Acep mentions the tendency for women writers in the anthology to adopt the use of ‘metafora-metafora yang subjektif’.

¹⁶¹ Beni Setia, ‘Terserak Antara Kenangan dan Kerinduan’, *op.cit*, p.8.

*gelandangan yang lapar di jalanan
udara seperti mayat
yang tersangkut di tepi jembatan*

*seringai langit sedingin penjemput maut
dan kau, seorang yang sakit hati,*

berada di baliknya

*terus mengintai dengan kesumat nasar
paruhmu yang bengkok siap mengerkap*

(2000)

Harbinger of death

you send the music
from the hurricane which throws
hail stones onto the glass of the window
and there is the cracking of falling trees

the roaring sounds of the wind root out
the hungry homeless ones
the air is like a corpse which is stranded at the edge of the bridge

the grimace of the sky is as cold as that of our harbinger of death
and you, you who are sick at heart are behind that one

continuing to peep out like a dreaded hawk
crooked beak, itching to pounce

There is powerful imagery, for example, in the picture she creates of the homeless being forced to take shelter. This image is supplemented by the idea that the air is like a corpse. The destructive forces of the environment at its worst are ‘like a hawk ready to pounce’.

As mentioned, rural imagery is a theme in many of Nenden’s poems. Yet she likes to use the sound and feel of bamboo, the moon, pebbles or the well as allusions to the emotional state she is seeking to convey through her poems. In her 1999 poem, “Kerikil”, also there is a strong sense of continuity with the earlier poems that use the sounds and

touch of the rural symbolism to expound the inner feelings of a person who is unable to disentangle herself from her feelings for an (unnamed) person. Nenden's ability to use the sound and imagery of the environment is used to good effect to mirror the inner turmoil:

Kerikil

*akhirnya, tinggal kerikil di hatiku
dan rasa linu jari-jari yang dicongkel kukunya
bertahun mengingatmu, hanya mengundang
kesedihan seseorang yang menimba air
di sumur kering yang tua
di hening malam derit katrolnya kian terasa*

*tapi masih juga kakakanmu menggemaung
menepikan angin
lalu lama berhuni di gelap dadaku
memperdengarkan kepuasan seseorang
yang mengulur dan menarik tali
pada tangan yang tak kau sempatkan meraihnya*

*ada seseret bambu di ulu tenggorokan
yang ingin kuteriakkan agar kau dengar
sebelum lebih dalam menggoresi pita suaraku
dan membuatnya berdarah.*

Pebble

in recent times, there is lodged a pebble in my heart
and there are pains in my fingers whose nails are worn away
all those years being reminded of you, it only invites a sense of
sadness like the person who draws up water from a dry old well
in the gloom of night the squeak of the pulley can be felt
more and more

but still there is your chatter
casts the wind aside
always living for so long in the darkness of my breast
letting be heard the satisfaction of someone who is
stretching out and pulling back string from the hands
of someone you don't want to allow to get hold of it

there is the rustle of bamboo in the upper reaches of the throat
and I want to shout out so you can hear
before it scratches my vocal chords more deeply

and makes them bleed.

Here we get clear glimpses of what Sutardji Calzoum Bachri refers to as Nenden's strong imagery.¹⁶² There is internalised reflection which is enhanced by the use of the 'sound images' of the rustling of the bamboo in the throat, which could also be interpreted as suggesting that the poet can never rid herself, even if she wanted to try, of the impressions or events of past. As always, there is no definition of the 'you' in the poem. This is part of the mystery that she elicits through her poem. Yet much of the success of the poem derives from the use of imagery and onomatopoeic words that convey this scraping, gargling sound of the pebble in the throat. Following the tenor of Moh Wan Anwar's comments in his 2004 essay, 'Sajak-sajak penyair Jawa Barat; sejumlah usaha menggulati realitas', in this poem one can sense the bitter, rancid person-to-person exchanges or the effect that the other person has upon the poet.¹⁶³ Once again, it leaves us with a feeling of wanting to know more about the person being referred to. Just what is the mysterious reason for the effect that the person has on others?

The surreal and the real

In the poems mentioned so far, there has been an emphasis on the allusions to the environment and the quiet intrusion of nature themes. This observation recalls Moh Wan Anwar's views that an essential characteristic of West Java poetry has been its 'struggle' to deal satisfactorily with reality without degenerating into a more prosaic form of poetry which is no longer art but (merely) social commentary.¹⁶⁴ In Nenden's case, particularly,

¹⁶² Sutardji Calzoum Bachri, *op.cit.*

¹⁶³ Moh. Wan Anwar, "Sajak-sajak Penyair Jawa Barat; Sejumlah Usaha Menggulati Realitas", in Acep Zamzam Noor (ed.), *op.cit.* (2004), pp. 288-291.

¹⁶⁴ *ibid*, pp. 275-326.

the way she portrays this reality is to emphasise its bitter characteristics, although as I have shown there is no lessening in her empathetic sense of identification with those who confront this reality. The poet, perceiving the bitterness of human existence, must nevertheless be able to convey her feelings of empathy for her fellow human beings.¹⁶⁵ In the poem, “Pengintai”, there is the theme of bitterness and mutual suspicion in human relationships. Likewise, in the poem, “Nightmare”, the surreal elements of a nightmare produce a horrifying picture of the poet’s own emotions, caught up in a world perceived as heartless and soul-destroying at every turn of the road.

In “Rumah kenangan”, the poet explores the existential situation of a homeless person. In all cases she creates word pictures or scenes that may be likened to scenes in a movie. The bitterness of existence is exposed through the refracted light of the prism of her poems in the colours, sounds and images she evokes. For example, in terms of colour words, there is in “Pengintai”, the reference to yellow memories, for example; and in “Sajak Rumah”, there is the image of the bluish colour and of red dye. Yet in all cases, in creating a sense of the pain of the world, she is still able to harness sympathy for the fellow human beings whose struggle she portrays, even if the world is a bitter place full of traps and possibilities for exploitation and oppression in personal relationships. Her poem, “Pengintai” (The watching one), can be understood in this light:

Pengintai

*kau telah sampai di ujung
aku tak sampai-sampai
karena berkali-kali kembali ke rumah
mengintai dari balik kaca
taplak meja kusut dan separuh kopi*

¹⁶⁵ *ibid.* pp. 288-291.

yang telah membusuk

*aku masih ingin meminum kopi itu
sambil membuka-buka kenangan kuning
mencari mata
yang tertuju padaku*

*namun si ringkih yang tergopoh dari pintu
dengan gumaman kacau dan hujan anyir dari mulutnya
kerap mengusirku, menyuruh menyusulmu ke ujung*

(2000)

The watching one

you have reached the end point
I can't get there
because always I am compelled to return back to the house
peeping through the window
and there is the crumpled up table cloth and cup of
stale coffee

I still want to consume that coffee
while I start to remember those yellowed memories
and find those eyes
that are trained on me

and yet the weak one who beats a hasty retreat from the door,
mumbling in an incoherent fashion with rancid water from the
mouth, often drives me out, telling me to follow you to the end

Acep Zamzam Noor writes about this poem, which was included in the 2003 *Bunga yang Berserak* anthology that while its form is quite simple, it contains a depth of feeling that is very evident to the reader.¹⁶⁶ He also suggests that the poet wants to write about a human relationship which is based on mutual suspicion.¹⁶⁷ Eriyanti Nurmala Dewi considered the poem as having themes related to gender and exploitation in a patriarchal society. She sees it as not solely a case of describing a situation of mutual suspicion only, as suggested by Acep, but a more direct reference to male power to

¹⁶⁶ Acep Zamzam Noor, 'Membaca "Bunga yang Berserak"', op. cit.

¹⁶⁷ *ibid.*

intimidate. Certainly, also in the poem, there are elements of Nenden Lilis Aisyah's perception of the world as full of bitter and nasty experiences. There are references to old coffee, and rancid and yellow breath. But once again I think the poem is primarily trying to highlight the ambiguities present in such situations, whoever is the perpetrator and whoever is the apparent victim. We are left wondering who is this person, and why are they doing this, even if we acknowledge the underlying theme of exploitation in human relationships.

Even more surreal, as its title suggests, is the poem, "Nightmare". Here Nenden is searching through the surreal of the nightmare in her attempts to describe the (real) world:

Nightmare

*"pulanglah"
dan aku pulang
setelah tergesa merapikan baju kisut dan rambut kusut.
di dalam dada menumpuk kesakitan seorang pelacur
gelap memberiku jalan buntu
memaksaku memintas ke jalan batu
di persimpangan aku harus berhenti
di rumah setengah jadi berseng penyok.
di halamannya yang sempit di antara pagar kerompong
berdiri pohon entah apa, daunnya gimbang dan semrawut
seperti seorang gila yang sedang menunggu
di ruangan di antara patahan dinding bata
ada sepotong kaca retak
memantulkan wajah luka seorang pendosa
udara serbuk-serbuk pahit
di kursi reyuk
menanti kakek tua cerewet yang sakit
o, Waktu, tunggu agar tak menyerah disini*

(2003)

*"go home"
and I go home*

after hurriedly tidying up my wrinkled dress and dishevelled hair.
inside my breast the pains of a prostitute are heaped together,
darkness offers me nothing except a dead end
forcing me to take a short cut from the main road
at the cross roads I am compelled to stop
at a house, half built out of beaten up corrugated iron
in the narrow yard between the serrated fences
there stands a tree, I don't know what kind, its leaves are thick and
tousled and in a mess, like a mad person who is waiting.
in the space between the fragments of a brick wall
there is a piece of a cracked mirror
that bounces back at me the wounded face of a sinner
the air has a powdery, bitter taste
in a crumpled chair there is a quarrelsome old man waiting who
looks sick
o, Time, wait so I don't surrender myself in this place.

The poet is speaking about the capacity of horrible events to waylay a more serene existence, and a loss of bearings so that the familiar symbolised by 'home' can no longer be found. Indeed, as we have seen, the symbol of home is one often used by Nenden Lilis to describe existence. Having used this symbol of place in the early part of the poem, she moves to a more philosophical definition of existence as 'Time'. Time is seen as allowing her to return 'home' and free her from the surreal experiences and terrifying obstacles encountered on her journey of life.

Continuing the symbolism of the 'house' and its description in the surreal is the poem, "Sajak Rumah" (Poem of a House). It is once again possible to interpret the symbol of the house as a metaphor for existence. In the poem, there is the symbol of the house, but it then gives way to the idea of the body, as existence. She uses the technique of introducing 'an old chap who owns it' (si tua pemilik), her customary third figure to round off this extraordinary forest of symbols. Indeed, the technique of introducing a third figure into the poems was evident in the poems, "Sungai batu" and "Penjemput

maut”. In the latter poem, the mysterious third party is present when destructive forces of nature or humankind are at work. Sometimes Nenden addresses directly the mysterious personage who seems to cause or provoke such destruction.

In the poem, “Sajak Rumah”, the third figure also has malevolent intent, ‘the old chap who is coming to drive us away’; a kind of *deus ex machina* figure who acts as a counterpoint to the more descriptive aspects of existence in the bitter world Nenden draws in her poetry:

Sajak Rumah

*rumah ini semakin sempit
di dalamnya kita sama-sama terpuruk
dan tak bisa saling menolong*

*ruang bau mengkudu
sedang kuku tetap membiru
wajah kian tirus
dada kian tipis
mulut lesi
selalu terbatuk
sekian lama lupa bersenandung*

*si tua pemilik rumah datang
tidak untuk menjenguk
tapi mengusir*

(2001-2002)

Poem of a house

this house keeps shrinking
we're buried within it
and there's nothing any of us can do about it

there is the smell of red dye in the rooms
whilst the nails continue to exude a bluish colour

face gets narrower and narrower
breasts thinner

mouth pale
always coughing
the longer it goes on makes us forget even how to hum a song

the old person who owns it is coming
not to look in on us
but to drive us away

In this poem we have a sense of not just colour, light, and sound, but also of movement. Right at the beginning of the poem, there is the idea of the poem's subjects having disappeared inside the house, giving the poem a sense of movement between states of being. Later, she writes how the face of the subjects becomes narrower and narrower, the breasts thinner. Here Nenden creates a sense of the pressure being applied in this surreal depiction of the symbolic house (that is human existence). There is a blurring of the vertical and the horizontal lines, and hence a sense of proportion gone askew in this terrifying poem, resembling the imagery of the famous painting by Norwegian artist, Edvard Munch (1863-1944), "The Scream".

In "Rumah Kenangan" (House of Memories), we see again Nenden's ability to write meditative poems of great simplicity, but which are replete with strong imagery. She uses her descriptive powers to picture what it is like to be without shelter or a house with all its memories and old personal meanings. She draws a sympathetic portrait of the person who has lost the past, the house imagery again symbolizing the familiar. As the poem begins, the reference is to a person who is homeless, indeed to a person who has no possessions at all. Only gradually does the poem's subject acquire some vestiges of other characteristics. These are nothing but the memories of the past to comfort the pain of the present:

Rumah Kenangan

*seorang tanpa rumah tak bisa pulang ke mana-mana
kecuali pada kenangan di pohon jambu klutuk
pada ibu-bapak renta yang terpekur di kamar berdebu*

*lemari kusam itu masih dirasa miliknya
meski lubang kuncinya macet, kuncinya tak bisa
menutup, cerminnya memantulkan bayangan lojong*

*bekas tanah dicangkul dan baju berlumpur
yang menggantung di bilik dapur juga
seperti sisa hatinya
meski selalu ada yang terasa sulit tumbuh
seperti pohon apel di kebun belakang
daunnya rangkas dimakan ulat
atau pohon delima, buahnya belah sebelum masak*

*tapi seorang tanpa rumah masih ingin tinggal
meski tak tahu, masih adakah yang rindu,
masihkah ada yang menunggu?*

*ia hanya tahu
hidup sesungguhnya sendiri*

(2002)

House of Memories

a person who has no home cannot go back anywhere,
except perhaps to memories of a *jambu klutuk* tree
of her wizened old father and mother sitting
lost in thought in a dusty room

there is a faded cupboard that still feels as if it is hers
even if the key hole is blocked up, and the key unable to
shut the lock, and with a mirror of the cupboard reflecting
back his elongated image

there are clods of ploughed earth and the muddy shirt
that is hanging too on a peg in the kitchen
like the remnants of her heart
and though there is always something that doesn't seem to grow
like the apple tree in the yard at the back with so few leaves
because the grubs and caterpillars have eaten them and the
pomegranate, with its fruit cracked open even before it is ripe

but one who has no home still just wants to live somewhere
even though she doesn't know whether there is someone
who still longs for her, whether someone still waits for her

she only knows
that living is to be alone¹⁶⁸

Here is a poem that evokes the reader's sympathy through the richness of the descriptive imagery she employs. It is also an example of the poetry of Nenden Lilis Aisyah that looks at a world that is bitter. Yet she draws a tender portrait of the situation of the subject of the poem that highlights one of the most fundamental of all human dilemmas, the seeking of shelter.

Turning to her poem, "Ia memilih jalan asing", we can see how her focus on the mystery of the unknown is transposed into a poem somewhat reminiscent of American poet, Robert Frost's, "The Road not Taken":¹⁶⁹

Ia Memilih Jalan Asing

*para pejalan tak pernah melalui jalan
itu lagi, tapi ia lewat juga dan menanti
terus menanti, barangkali seseorang
akan menemaninya ke tujuan*

*di bawah bulan sabit yang berat oleh kabut
telepon umum pucat menatapnya
tapi ia tak pernah ingin menelepon
ia yang berwajah bisu, dingin menunggu*

*(suatu hari, ada mayat membusuk di situ
orang-orang tak pernah mengetahui*

¹⁶⁸ I have chosen to translate the reference in this poem to 'seorang tanpa rumah' as referring to a female person, although equally it could be translated with a reference to the male gender. It is possible that this perspective increases the sense of pathos that Nenden has evoked.

¹⁶⁹ "Two roads diverged in a yellow wood,
And sorry I could not travel both
And be one traveller, long I stood
And looked down one as far as I could". From "The Road not Taken", by Robert Frost (1874-1963).

apalagi peduli siapakah itu)

(1997)

The path not taken

No-one ever took that path any more,
but he did, and he waited and waited,
maybe some one would come along and go along with him
to where he wanted to go.

beneath the sickle-shaped moon which hangs heavy with
mist and the pale glow of the phone box just stares back at him
but he never tried to make a phone call
he just had a vacant expression on his face,
waiting there in the cold

(one day, there was a corpse that had started to rot and decay there
people said they didn't know who it was
and what's more they didn't care)¹⁷⁰

Here the poet describes the behaviour of someone who has no identity other than that of appearing to want to set off on a journey. It is someone who took the road no one else took any more, and who was waiting for a companion. But no one came. There was a phone nearby but he never made a call to ask someone to accompany him. He just waited in the cold and eventually died, without anybody else apparently noticing this. These events are set against a backdrop of nature. The moon hangs heavy. The mist surrounds and makes it hard to see what is happening. The traveller has a vacant expression on his face. All these elements reinforce the sense of not knowing 'the story behind the story'. It is perhaps the closest in any poem Nenden Lilis Aisyah comes to picturing the world as absurd, in a Camus-like fashion, even if there is still a yearning for human connection in

¹⁷⁰ In this case I have chosen to translate 'ia' in the poem as referring to a male person, although equally it could be referring to a woman.

Nenden's poem that is absent in much of Camus' more existential writings.¹⁷¹ Yet in the poem there is no explanation beyond a recognition that others in the community have not cared about the fate of the traveller.

In some respects what we have here is a perception and example of the 'bitterness' and 'harshness' of human existence. Indeed, if we follow the themes that Moh Wan Anwar sets out in his *Cakrawala* comments about Indonesian language poetry from West Java referred to earlier, we see this poem as a further example of this thematic concern of such poetry, in general. But I suggest it goes some way further than this. It is a statement by Nenden that through the mystery of everyday events and circumstances, a much more existential statement about absurdity of the world can be made. In many cases, this artistic insight must be held in balance with religious explanations of human existence that see purpose and meaning, despite the bitterness and suffering. Indeed, quite unlike the "Negeri Sihir" poem, where the allusions have more the quality of the quasi-Indian philosophy of Octavio Paz's poetry, here the comparisons are more with the absurd nature of human existence portrayed in Camus' novels and short stories.

But even this comparison gives way to social comment in her poem, "Pengungsi" (Refugee), where she uses the strength of her descriptive powers to put in poetic form the need for compassion:

Pengungsi

*ini dada kami
segetas gelas, serapuh kasa tua
dapat dengan mudah kau pecahkan atau kau robek*

¹⁷¹ For example, in the works of Albert Camus (1913-1960), such as his 1942 novel, *L'étranger* (*The Outsider*) 1942. But there is also the idea of 'revolt' as in Camus' 1947 novel, *La Peste* (*The Plague*).

*apalagi jika kau bidik dengan senjata
dan kau koyak dengan runcing tombak*

*setelah itu, di rongga yang dalam
akan kau temukan darah menghitam
yang mengalirkan nyeri hantaman ratusan tahun*

*jika kau masih haus pada anyirnya
tenggaklah sekalian mengunyah jantungnya
bagus pula mengemasnya dalam labu
lalu berteriak, “kami mengalahkan pengacau!”*

*kami hanya pengungsi yang turun ke kaki gunung
pendatang yang tiba di pinggir laut
orang yang lama melata di jalanan kota
atau baru muncul dari balik waktu*

*tapi ini dada kami
berbaris melingkarimu*

Refugee

this is our breast
as brittle as glass, as fragile as old gauze
that you can easily break or tear apart,
moreover, if you take aim with firearms
and you tear it with a sharp spear

afterwards, in the deep cavity inside
you will find blackened blood
which carries with it the pain of hundreds of years

if you still are thirsty for its rancid taste
gulp down and chew the heart of it and
you might as well pack it up in a flask
and cry out, “we have conquered the rebel!”

we are only refugees that come down to the foot of the mountain
newcomers who arrive at the shores of the sea
people who for a long time have walked the streets of the town
or just appeared from the back of time

but this is our breast
lined up and coiled around you

From its very beginning, the poet assumes that there is still some conceptual distance between her readership and their full identification with the refugees' plight. But

to counteract this, the poet writes as if she is the refugee, whose plight is in danger of being seen as ‘potential enemy’. “This is our heart”, she intimates. Through the poem and its powerful descriptive images, her tone is strong, so that by the end of the poem she shows how the plight of the refugee envelops all.

It is in poems like these that she moves closer to the tone and style of poems of social comment by other Bandung-based poets, such as Soni Farid Maulana. Indeed, in an earlier poem of 1995, “Menuju Lembang” (Heading for Lembang), she returns to a more directly stated environmental theme somewhat aligned with the ‘Priangan si derita’ thematic style discussed earlier as she examines the characteristics of Bandung people and their relationship to their environment, man-made and natural. They are portrayed searching for the primal and old. Yet it is also a search for rejuvenation of things that are in danger of being possessed and loved to death:

Menuju Lembang

*Kabut tipis luruh dari langit
bagai gerimis abu tangkuban prahu
jalan samar, aspal lembab, jajaran pinus
dan cemara menggigil dalam sorot lampu*

*di atas jalan mendaki yang menikung
kendaraan antri dan berdesis-desis
sambil meriakkan klakson
itu tubuh terbentur di hotel-hotel dan villa
di akhir pekan, lembang selalu menggoda
orang-orang memburunya, ditinggalkannya
bandung dan kota-kota
(di sana, dayang sumbi dengan dandanan jelita
dan sangkuriang memanggil-manggil)*

Heading for Lembang

The thin mist comes down from the sky
as drizzle with ash of Tangkuban Prah

the road is dim, the asphalt moist,
and the fir trees shiver in the rays of the lamps

on this road that winds as it rises
the vehicles line up and seem to hiss
as their horns shriek out
those bodies collide in the hotels and villas
at the week's end, for Lembang always tempts and
people chase her, leaving behind Bandung and the cities
(They are Dayang Sumbi, the weaving girl with her lovely
clothing adornments and that's Sangkuriang who calls out her
name again and again)

At first glance the poem appears to be similar to poems Soni Farid Maulana and Juniarso Ridwan have written about the nature of the changing Bandung high plains, with the pace, the imagery, hills winding, snapshots past quickly, and the past mythology of the Bandung valley environment. In fact, it reverses the kinds of concerns they expressed to focus more on the way in which the city dwellers yearn to escape the ordinariness of city life. In the mountains, she suggests, is the Sundanese mythological figure of Sangkuriang with his incestuous love for his mother, Dayang Sumbi.¹⁷² In this poem, Nenden portrays the city dwellers' flight to indulge their senses as having something akin to participation in the myth itself.

On a broader canvas, we can note the poems Nenden has written from her travels to Holland and France in 1999 when she read at the Winternachten Festival in Den Haag, Holland, and in Paris. These poems include "Que sera sera", "Menuju Negeri Dingin" and "Di Jembatan Merabeau".¹⁷³ As Acep Zamzam Noor has suggested, they are not just

¹⁷² See also Ajip Rosidi, *Manusia Sunda: sebuah esei tentang tokoh-tokoh sastra dan sejarah*, (Jakarta: Inti Idayu Press, 1984) pp. 16-25.

¹⁷³ These were included, inter alia, in the 2003 *Muktamar* anthology.

travel notes. There is a kind of contemplation and reflection between time and space, as in her poem, “Que sera sera”¹⁷⁴:

Que Sera-Sera

- kepada para penyair Indo

*pulang dari kotamu malam hari, di kereta
yang melaju dalam angin keras musim dingin
masih terhirup uap anggur yang hangat
parfum tajam menyengat
dan semerbak dadamu dalam kota gemerlap*

*masih terasa kental bau pertemuan itu
dan tubuh kita tercium napas benua yang jauh
di matamu perahu-perahu nenek moyang berlabuh
mulutmu menjeritkan lagu keroncong tanah yang hilang
terpatah-patah mengeja syair
dari sebuah negeri yang ditelan mimpi*

*(di wajah kami seperti kau lihat kembali
bukit jelita, kebun lada, dan kerinduan itu
“aku pulang! aku pulang!”
tapi suaramu terpendam dataran yang diam)*

*akhirnya kami yang mesti pulang
di stasiun Utrecht kita saling melambai
ketika kau berlalu, kulihat kulit coklat
serta rambut hitammu disepuh bulan biru*

Que sera sera

- to Indo poets

Coming back from your city in the night, by train
which speeds up in the hard cold winter's wind
still inhaling the vapours of warm wine
and stinging perfume and the fragrant smell
of your chest in the twinkling lights of the town

I can still sense the thick smell of that meeting
and our bodies imbued with the breath of a far continent
in your eyes the boats of your ancestors are anchored

¹⁷⁴ Acep Zamzam Noor, ‘Membaca *Bunga yang Berserak*’, op. cit. He refers to: “semacam renungan sublim di dalamnya dan semacam refleksi di antara ruang dan waktu yang berbeda.”

your mouth screams out the *kroncong* songs of a lost land
snatches of an old poem
from a country that has been swallowed up in a dream

in those faces of ours it's as though you see again
the beautiful hills, the pepper plantations, and that longing
"I am going home! I am going home!"
but your voice is hidden in the silent high lands

finally we both must leave for home
at the station in Utrecht and we wave goodbye
and as you pass by, I see your chocolate-coloured skin
and black hair coated with the blue light of the moon

Nenden's poem here is part of a whole genre of writing by West Java poets reflecting on their journeys to Europe. She speaks about the impact of images from her own travels, as she reflects on the 'strange meeting' and contradictions in her circumstances and that of the Indo poet she has met. Who is really going home, she asks? Home, or existence, is defined differently in each case. The Indo poet is depicted longing for the highlands of her ancestors. But she can never 'go home', is the suggestion that Nenden makes here.

"Untitled"; the most autobiographical of Nenden's poems?

In 2002 Nenden Lilis Aisyah's husband, poet and essayist, Beni R. Budiman died. He was 38 years old and the Bandung poetry community was greatly saddened. He had been something of a gadfly to the 'Jakarta elites' as he had identified them. But to the writers in Bandung and West Java, including Acep Zamzam Noor, he had been a fine poet but even more so, a generous promoter of poetry and literature throughout the province.¹⁷⁵ Nenden wrote the poem in 2003, "Untitled", dedicated to her late husband.

¹⁷⁵ Following his death Hawe Setiawan edited a posthumous collection of the poetry of Beni R. Budiman, *Beni R. Budiman: Penunggu Makam: Dua Kumpulan Sajak*, (Jakarta: Pustaka Jaya, 2003).

Perhaps her most autobiographical in tone to date, this poem draws upon many of the themes outlined in her earlier poems.

Part One sets the graveside scene. Sorrow is redness, the trees planted and the mystery of death that has separated her from her loved one, who has arrived 'at the secret':

Untitled

- Beni R. Budiman

*duka ini tanah merah
sebatang kemboja yang kutanam dengan tangan lemah
pohon hanjuang penunggu nisanmu*

*kau yang tiba pada rahasia
tak tahu, seorang penziarah
tinggal dengan hati patah*

*ada rumput baru tumbuh di pusarmu
apakah itu kehidupan baruku*

This sorrow is a land of red earth,
a frangipanni tree that I have planted with my weak hand
and the *hanjuang* tree that stands over your gravestone

you who have arrived at the secret
do not know, that this graveside visitor
remaining here is heart-broken

there is some new grass growing in your navel
is this a sign of my new life?

In the second part of this poem in honour of her late husband, the poet uses various rural metaphors to give expression to her grief, the bamboo, the coconut trees, the rice knives which signify the human world of activity in interaction with the natural world. But here there is the added dimension of human grief:

aku masih harus menggali batu sungai

*tersenyum pada pohon-pohon kelapa
yang bersorak dan melambai
melupakan angin telah merobek daun waru*

*kerit silu batang bambu
jerami teronggok di sawah sunyi
sehabis dipotong ani-ani
itu memang hatiku*

*(di tebing ini aku berdiri dengan dada kandas
biar kuseka air mata yang lepas)*

I still must dig up the stones of the river
must smile at the coconut trees
which applaud and wave
forgetful of the wind that has torn the leaves of the waru tree

there is the painful gnashing of the bamboo tree stalks
dried padi stalks are piled up in the deserted ricefield
after being cut up with the rice knives
oh such is my heart

(on the steep river bank I stand, marooned on the shore
let me wipe away my tears that come so freely)

How are we to interpret the references to the ‘stones of the river’? I suggest that this is a direct reference to the poet’s earlier poem, “Sungai batu”. But it is also a personal statement about her role as a poet. It is as though she realises her poems themselves had become a way of identifying herself, or code about her personhood in the eyes of her late husband. But rather than having an exploitative sense, here it becomes a very tender reference, as a marker of her feelings. No longer as stand-alone poems about exploitation, but now with their themes interwoven in a new setting to illustrate the thread of her life and the way she wishes to reflect on it. However, here it now is in the context of her relationship with her now-deceased husband.

Moving to Part Three of the poem, we can detect many references to the symbols and allusions she has used in previous poems. Again, these references become symbolic

gifts to her deceased husband. There are the images of the road, the journey, and the house familiar to us from her poems such as “Nightmare”, “Sajak Rumah”, and “Rumah kenangan”:

*harus terlambat aku merasakan rindu
setelah seseorang meninggalkan
dan aku tak tahu jalan pulang*

*lihat. jalan itu lengang
entah ke mana menuju
di ujungnya,
ingin kutemukan dan kumasuki kembali
rumah dengan bumbungan kembali
walau pemiliknya malam-malam mengusir*

*atau gang berkelok
menyongsong seseorang pulang subuh
dalam langkah cepat dan suara batuk
dan suara anjing mengaing
dan suara berat sepatu bot tukang sampah*

*atau kamar, atau rumah di pojoknya
dengan anyir airnya
dengan bau jamur yang mengelupas di dinding*

*tapi lihat. Jalan itu lengang
pagi-pagi membawa seseorang pergi
dengan kulit tak sempat mengeriput
rambut tak sempat memutih*

*(ah, mengapa waktu tiba-tiba memintas
dan aku harus terlambat menyatakan rindu
mengejar ke persimpangan
: mengapa terburu-buru kau penuhi
janji perpisahan itu)*

and I long for him, but it's too late
after a person leaves, and
I don't know the way back

look, the road is wide open
I don't know where it will lead in the end,
but I want to find and go inside again that house
with the angled roof edges

even if its owner has chased me away in the depth of night

or perhaps the laneway that winds along and
welcomes someone coming home at dawn
with their quick steps and the sound of their coughing
and the sound of whining dogs
and the heavy steps of the rubbish collector

or the room, or the house on the corner
with its rancid watery smell
and with the smell of mould peeling off on top of the walls

but look, that road is a lonely road
in the very early morning it carries a person whose skin was not
even wrinkled and whose hair never will become white

(oh, why does time suddenly take such a short cut
and why am I left too late declaring my longing
in chasing it to the crossroads of life:
why in so much of a hurry to leave me now)

Here too, in this verse we can see the many allusions to the reality of life and the world as a bitter place, such as the references to the rancid watery smell of the rooms of the house, and the mould peeling off. And yet now the road carries a person whose skin was not even wrinkled. In the last section the poet asks why she is left, but there is a recognition that she must go on to finish what was unfinished. Here the poem about a woman mourning becomes a powerful statement of human grief. It is as though the whole poem has approached the mystery of death by taking the strident language of the original poems and inverting their intent to give them a more personal meaning in the light of her (late) husband's death:

*mengapa pergi terburu-buru
bukankah kau menungguku
aku ingin penuhi janjiku
menuntaskan cerita itu*

tapi kau tak peduli lagi

*hanya isyaratmu:
begitulah hidup
membiarkan tak tuntas
cerita yang ingin lepas*

why did you go in such a hurry
aren't you waiting for me
I want to fulfil my promise
to complete that story

but you don't care any more
your only unspoken sign is this:
that's the way life leaves unfinished a story that wants to be free

Thus the poem, "Untitled" is a masterly example of how the poet has threaded some of her earlier works into a single coherent whole as a statement of grief about the loss of life partner. All the poetic techniques and nuance we have seen in the earlier poems are brought together – the sense of mystery, the imagery of the road and the house as symbolic allusions to human existence, the sense of colour, light and the idea of movement that is characteristic of many of her other poems. It is precisely this capacity of Nenden Lilis Aisyah to elucidate the mystery of everyday life through the mystery of words that makes much of her poetry so striking.

Conclusion

At the beginning of this chapter I suggested that much of Nenden Lilis Aisyah's poetry can be seen as an attempt to describe in poetic form the mystery of everyday events and aspects of existence itself. Indeed, it appears that the poet's aim is to invite the reader to comprehend something of 'the mystery of the world', much as Sutardji Calzoum Bachri suggested in his *Kompas* article introducing the publication of her new poems: "...it is a kind of poetry which appears when normal people are facing or

experience a particular human or natural situation, and there is an atmosphere of the mystery of the world or the mysterious nature of human events. It is what appears just by itself from the mystery of daily events in people's lives...it doesn't really need words to assist it. It is a "natural" poetry, where the poetry may be present in a thousand words or none, in prose style or even in prosaic language."¹⁷⁶

He goes on to say: "What is best is if the poet can bring out the mystery of life through being aware of the mysterious nature of words themselves. In this way the deep significance of life, which often contains poetry, with a capital P can be felt in the words of a poet."¹⁷⁷

But this focus which is identifiable in these examples of Nenden's poems differs somewhat from the way in which other contemporary Indonesian female poets use strident and harsh language in their poems to comment on and to confront reality that is unjust. In an unpublished 2004 paper, Harry Aveling characterizes this increasingly prominent strand in contemporary Indonesian women's literature, as using 'the language of rocks', taking the term from the references in a poem by Dorothea Rosa Herliany'.¹⁷⁸

The poem, "Ziarah batu; kepada para orator" (A pilgrimage to a rocky place; to our

¹⁷⁶ "...puisi yang muncul pada manusia normal ketika berhadapan atau menghayati suatu situasi kemanusiaan atau alam tertentu, suasana misteri alam serta misteri peristiwa kehidupan manusia. Puisi yang muncul dengan sendirinya dari misteri peristiwa kehidupan manusia sehari-hari. Puisi yang tidak memerlukan pertolongan kata-kata. Puisi "alamiah" yang dengan seribu kata atau tanpa kata sekalipun atau dengan gaya prosa bahkan prosaik sekalipun dari penyair, puisi itu tetap hadir". Sutardji Calzoum Bachri, Introduction, *Bentara* literary segment, *Kompas*, op.cit.

¹⁷⁷ "Ada baiknya kalau penyair bisa memanfaatkan (menciptakan) misteri kata-kata untuk menampilkan misteri kehidupan. Dengan demikian kehidupan yang sering mengandung Puisi dengan P kapital bisa terasa hunjaman kedalaman maknanya lewat kata-kata puisi dari seorang penyair." ibid.

¹⁷⁸ See H. Aveling, "Indonesian Literature after *Reformasi*: the Tongues of Women". Paper presented to the Seminar on *Indonesian Elections 2004: The end of Reformasi*, organised by the Regional Studies Program, Institute of Liberal Arts, Walailak University, 9 June 2004. p.1.

Orators), is one in which Dorothea Rosa Herliany is saying that she must use ‘the language of rocks’ to express forcefully her views on social and political issues.¹⁷⁹

The ways in which Nenden Lilis Aisyah uses the ‘language of rocks’ often differs from those used by her counterparts elsewhere in Indonesia. Nenden uses the starkness of language and power of exhortation in many of her poems of comment on social and environmental themes. But she also fuses this with elements of the mysterious. A further tension at play in her work is the poetic tension between emphasis upon gender specificity and the idea that what the poet is really seeking to describe is common humanity, which is of course a broader concept than one that sees poetry writing by women as being solely accessible through using a feminist perspective.

The result is a form of contemporary Indonesian language poetry from West Java by a female poet that represents a distinctive style of verse in the Indonesian pantheon of contemporary writing by women. Not a style that is fully within the stream of new writing that focuses on ‘the breaking of taboos’ but still powerful in its recognition of exploitation. It is a style that goes to the heart of the problems of existence – in a bitter and often uncaring world. Yet she never really loses sight of her essential poetic task – to convey to her readers a sense of the mystery of every day events and occurrences, through visual and verbal imagery which leaves readers feeling that they, too, have experienced the very sensations she is describing through her poetry.

¹⁷⁹ Aveling suggests that each of the writers whose work he discusses in the 2004 paper uses ‘the language of rocks’ “as a way of attacking “the hypocritical arrogance of the society in which they live, and to assert the rights of the tongues of women to speak in an honest, frank and unrestrained manner”, *ibid*, p. 18.

We can now see the ways in which Nenden's poetry provides another dimension to the style of poetry being written in West Java compared to the poetry discussed in Chapter Three. The balance between 'mystery' and 'exploitation' is at the heart of her poetry as she reaches for the universal in human experience beyond any specific reference to 'place' as the land and environment of contemporary West Java. In the next chapter I explore the work of santri poet, Acep Zamzam Noor, in his search through his Indonesian language poetry for the essence of life in the world and environment around him.

CHAPTER FIVE

MYSTICISM, AESTHETICISM AND ACTIVISM: TOWARDS THE UNIVERSAL IN THE INDONESIAN LANGUAGE POETRY OF SANTRI POET ACEP ZAMZAM NOOR

Introduction

In March 2005 the Komunitas Azan Tasikmalaya held a gathering of pesantren-linked writers of literature (*Silaturahmi Sastrawan Santri*) at Hotel Surya Tasikmalaya and the campus of Universitas Siliwangi in Tasikmalaya.¹⁸⁰ Sponsored by Komunitas Azan and Desantara, the theme of the gathering was announced as pluralism of culture within literature.¹⁸¹ Sessions were held on the themes of the creative process, pluralism of culture in literature, literature and religion, and literary presentation.¹⁸² Participants

¹⁸⁰ The Komunitas Azan Tasikmalaya is a literary and arts association based in and under the auspices of the Cipasung pesantren, where Acep Zamzam Noor lives. Key members are Acep Zamzam Noor and Sarabunis Mubarak. Ahmad Suedy, in 'An artist-activist from a mock political party in Tasikmalaya', in Margaret Kartomi (ed.), *The year of voting frequently: politics and artists in Indonesia's 2004 elections* (Clayton, Victoria: Monash Asia Institute, 2005, p.77) suggests that the foundation of Komunitas Azan occurred just after Acep returned from Italy after his long sojourn there in 1992-93. It preceded the formal foundation in 1996 of the Yayasan Sanggar Sastra Tasikmalaya in 1996, which is the other literary association with which Acep is associated. (See Chapter Two).

¹⁸¹ The three terms included in the Indonesian *Silaturahmi Sastrawan Santri* are not easily translated into English. Perhaps it may best be explained as a 'get-together of pesantren-linked writers or literary artists'. It is less formal, perhaps, than a conference and has the sense of allowing some to-and-fro of debate. The theme in Indonesian was '*Pluralisme Budaya Dalam Sastra*'. There are few details available about Desantara.

¹⁸² The exact terms used by the committee were: Proses Kreatif, Pluralisme Budaya dalam Sastra, Sastra dan Religiusitas and Pentas Sastra. (Press release of Komunitas Azan, 26 February 2005). A number of articles appeared in *Pikiran Rakyat* in February/March 2005 about the gathering: Ahda Imran, 'Silaturahmi Sastrawan Santri di Tasikmalaya', *Pikiran Rakyat*, 26 February 2005; Acep Iwan Saidi, 'Pertemuan Sastrawan Santri, Memperkarakan Diri Dalam Pluralitas', *Pikiran Rakyat*, 19 March 2005; Eriyanti Nurmala Dewi, 'Proses Kreatif Pesantren 'Kegilaan' Yang Diharamkan', *Pikiran Rakyat*, 19 March 2005; Ahda Imran, 'Sebuah Label Bernama Sastrawan Santri', *Pikiran Rakyat*, 26 March 2005; and Soni Farid Maulana, 'Sastrawan Santri, Adakah Ia?' *Pikiran Rakyat*, 26 March 2005. There was also an (unattributed) article, 'Karya Sastra Santri 'Terpinggirkan'' *Pikiran Rakyat*, 21 March 2005. A press release, headed 'Silaturahmi Sastrawan Santri', was issued by Sarabunis Mubarak on 26 February 2005 on behalf of Komunitas Azan Tasikmalaya. It outlined the proposed program for the silaturahmi, and listed expected participants and their roles in the proposed sessions. Participants listed as attending came primarily from cities and kabupaten in West Java: Bandung, and Kab. Bandung, Subang, Tasikmalaya, Cirebon, Garut,

came from throughout West Java and beyond, being primarily writers who identified with literature and who had a pesantren background or links with pesantren, as defined by the committee. In his opening remarks to the gathering, Acep Zamzam Noor explained that the organising committee had deliberately adopted a very broad definition of the concept of “santri identity” (kesantrian). As used in this context, the term referred not only to people with a pesantren educational background (whether as students, graduates or members of a pesantren community) but also those who at one time or other had been active in a wide range of Islamic institutions (secondary schools [madrasah], mosques or religious organizations).¹⁸³ He emphasised that although graduates from pesantren had produced literary works of merit, often their works were not published widely, or had been sidelined (terpinggirkan).¹⁸⁴ The location of many pesantren in rural areas outside the national capital, Jakarta often accentuated this situation.¹⁸⁵ This present gathering, he said, was an opportunity to explore the role of the pesantren-educated or pesantren-identifying writer within the development of Indonesian literature, at both regional and national levels.¹⁸⁶

The holding of the Tasikmalaya *silaturahmi* took place in a climate of renewed interest in Islamic revivalism in Indonesia, and in particular the form which Sufist

Majalengka, Cimahi and Indramayu, but there were also a few participants from Yogyakarta and Malang. (Personal communication, Sarabunis Mubarak, 26 February 2005, including copy of Press Release).

¹⁸³ “Istilah kesantrian di sini bukan hanya terbatas bagi mereka yang memiliki latar belakang dari pesantren (jebolan/alumni/mukiman), tetapi juga mereka yang pernah aktif di madrasah, masjid atau organisasi keagamaan.” This definition of ‘santri’ for the silaturahmi’s Terms of Reference for inclusion of poets in the event was given by Acep Zamzam Noor in Ahda Imran, op.cit. Acep Iwan Saidi also discussed the origins of the word in his article, ‘Pertemuan Sastrawan Santri , Memperkarakan Diri Dalam Pluralitas’, op. cit.

¹⁸⁴ Acep Zamzam Noor’s comments are quoted in the (unattributed) *Pikiran Rakyat* article of 21 March 2005, ‘Karya Sastra Santri ‘Terpinggirkan’.

¹⁸⁵ *ibid.*

¹⁸⁶ Soni Farid Maulana, ‘Sastrawan Santri, Adakah Ia?’ op.cit. It is clear there was considerable discussion at the get-together, and indeed in subsequent articles in *Pikiran Rakyat*, about whether there were any special insights about literature available to those writers who specifically highlighted their pesantren links.

tradition has taken in Indonesia. In her 2001 article on ‘Sufism and the Indonesian Islamic Revival’, Julia Howell argues that the appeal of new manifestations of Sufism in Indonesia has transcended the distinctions between priyayi, abangan and santri forms of religiosity in Indonesian Islam first suggested by Geertz.¹⁸⁷ She writes that new alignments between modernity in Islam and Sufist thought have “combined in new forms an Islamic spirituality that infuses ritual forms with personal emotional meaning, an interpretation of Islam’s ascetic and mystical traditions in ways that encourage full engagement with the world and innovation of social forms that support spiritual practice without imposing requirements for obedience to a spiritual master”.¹⁸⁸ Such an approach to ‘practical sufism’, she suggests, offers adherents an alternative to the ‘scripturalist’ interpretations of Islam with their overwhelming attention to adherence to Islamic religious practice (ibadah). Additionally, there is the closer alignment in thinking with those who see the possibility of a greater emphasis on the role of the pesantren as a supportive environment for the practice of mystical contemplation.¹⁸⁹

Despite many challenges from ‘strict’ modernist interpretations of Islam, West Java has been a fertile environment for the development of this new Sufism, in part due to the long established tradition of Islamic mysticism associated with Sundanese religion and culture and the continuing existence of Sufi orders (*tarekat*), such as the Tarekat Qodiriyyah Naqsabandiyyah (TQN) in Suryalaya pesantren, West Java, discussed by

¹⁸⁷ Julia Day Howell, ‘Sufism and the Indonesian Islamic Revival’, *Journal of Asian Studies*, Vol 60, No. 3, 2001, pp.701-729.

¹⁸⁸ *ibid.* pp. 721-722.

¹⁸⁹ See also Acep Iwan Saidi, ‘Pertemuan Sastrawan Santri, Memperkarakan Diri Dalam Pluralitas’ *op.cit.*

Howell, Subandi and Nelson.¹⁹⁰ By focussing upon the potential for alignment of modernist Islam with forms of *tasuwuf* that do not rely upon the existence of Sufi orders and hierarchy, intellectuals and those with interests in literary endeavours can adopt both modernist and cosmopolitan forms of Islam as well as take up the challenges of pursuing interests in mystical contemplation without there being a sense of conflict between these polarities of Islamic tradition. It is these broad anthropological conceptualisations about Sufism in the Indonesian context, covering many types of spirituality associated with Islam, or thought to be compatible with Islam, that I will be adopting in this chapter.

Specific links between this climate of Sufist practices and the writing of literature in West Java have been also noted by critics and observers such as Ajip Rosidi. In his introduction to a collection of modern Sundanese poetry, he wrote (in translation) that “an inclination towards sufism or mysticism is often met among Sundanese poets. Their works illustrate an acceptance or an awareness of the humble self bowing down before Him”.¹⁹¹ More recently, Moh Wan Anwar wrote: “Through his poems Acep (Zamzam Noor) becomes a spiritual journeyman in the midst of the unruly clamour of our time. As a spiritual traveller who is drunk with eternal beauty, it is natural that Acep is not really concerned with social problems. What he is about is how to achieve quietitude and beauty, self-cleansing, searching for ways to achieve eternity. Like the Sufis, Acep’s attitude towards the world is clear enough: rejection, including normative dogmas.

¹⁹⁰ Julia Day Howell, with M.A. Subandi, and Peter L. Nelson, ‘New Faces of Indonesian Sufism: A Demographic Profile of Tarekat Qodiriyyah-Naqsabandihyyah Pesantren Suryalaya, in the 1990s’, in *Rima/Review of Indonesian and Malaysian Affairs*, Vol 35, No. 2, Summer 2001, pp. 33-60.

¹⁹¹ “Kecenderungan ke arah sufi sering dijumpai pada para penyair Sunda. Sajak-sajaknya melukiskan ketaatan atau kesadaran diri yang hina dina bersujud di hadapan Yang Maha Mulia.” Ajip Rosidi, *op.cit.* (2001), p. 22. (In the Mukherjee English translation (2001) of Ajip Rosidi’s Introduction to *Puisi Sunda Modern dalam dua bahasa*, the quote is at p. 23).

Acep's passion is the passion of seeking. In this context it is not the right answer that is the important thing, but the seeking in itself."¹⁹²

As I mentioned in Chapter One, in his survey of Indonesian poetry between 1966-1998, Harry Aveling suggests that a new generation of poets writing religiously-oriented (Islamic) poetry began to emerge in the 1980s, and he uses the term 'new Sufism' to characterise the emergence of these poets on the Indonesian literary scene.¹⁹³ Aveling adopted this term for his own anthology as it had also come into use in Indonesia, not just in literary circles but also in Islamic modernist discourse generally, to group together writers such as Emha Ainun Nadjib, born in 1953, Ahmadun Yosi Herfanda, born in 1956, and West Java-born poet, Acep Zamzam Noor, born in 1960.¹⁹⁴ All these poets had produced poetry that had gained national recognition. The literature on which they had been raised, and to which they were to contribute, was Islamic literature written in Indonesian, often from the Arabic or Persian translations, but sometimes known in the English translation. None of these writers, he notes, chose to spend any lengthy period in the national capital, Jakarta, and they all had close connections with residential Muslim school systems.¹⁹⁵ Aveling writes that it was the lyrical emphasis on interior religious experience which defined these 'new Sufis'. They were writing a type of verse that was often "youthful, light, playful, at ease with Koranic references as well as the names of

¹⁹² "Lewat sajak Acep menjadi pejalan ruhani di tengah keriuhan semrawut zaman. Sebagai pejalan ruhani yang mabuk dengan keindahan abadi adalah wajar bila Acep tidak terlalu peduli dengan masalah sosial. Urusannya bagaimana mencapai sunyi dan keindahan, membersihkan diri, mencari jala, agar sampai di keabadian. *Seperti para sufi* (my italics), sikap Acep terhadap dunia cukup jelas: menolak, termasuk terhadap dogma-dogma normative. Gairah Acep adalah gairah pencarian. Dalam konteks itu bukan jawaban benar yang penting, tetapi pencarian itu sendiri." Moh. Wan Anwar Anwar, 'Sajak-sajak Penyair Jawa Barat: Sejumlah Usaha Menggulati Realitas,' in Acep Zamzam Noor (ed.), op.cit, (2004), p.304.

¹⁹³ Aveling, op.cit, (2001), pp. 231-233.

¹⁹⁴ ibid.

¹⁹⁵ ibid. p. 231.

prophets and the Persian mystics, set in the neo-romantic realm of the rural countryside, and deeply mystical... There was almost a radiance to their descriptions of a world filled with the God whose beauty attracted spontaneous worship.”¹⁹⁶ He characterised Acep Zamzam Noor, along with Emha Ainun Nadjib and Ahmadun Yosi Herfanda, as “amongst the best exponents of this worldview, simultaneously modern (and even post-modern) and yet also accessible to the most conservative of believers.”¹⁹⁷

In fact, it was Acep, the West Java ‘representative’ of this new Sufism in Indonesian literature, who was one of the key figures behind the March 2005 *Silaturahmi Sastrawan Santri*. Acep himself has long been a proponent of the special relationship between the pesantren, an interest in mysticism or *tasuwuf* and Indonesian literature. In an article of 1997 he argued that pesantren often did offer, amongst other activities, a tradition of contemplation in its daily routine and the possibilities of living a life that is tinged with mystical possibilities (berbau tasuwuf).¹⁹⁸ In this article he also stated his belief that in the development of Indonesian literature, poetry that had Sufist tendencies or characteristics had appeared in similar form to mystical Islamic poetry derived from Persian and other Middle-Eastern literatures.¹⁹⁹ From Acehese poet Fanshuri to its influence upon Amir Hamzah, he suggested that Sufism was a central thread in aspects of the development of modern Indonesian poetry, as seen in the nature of the symbols used and the sublime religious messages that are part of the poems.²⁰⁰ Indeed, he wrote that

¹⁹⁶ *ibid.* p. 233.

¹⁹⁷ *ibid.*

¹⁹⁸ Acep Zamzam Noor refers to this process as a life ‘berbau tasuwuf’. Acep Zamzam Noor, ‘Pesantren, Santri dan Puisi’, *Horison*, No.4, Vol. XXXI, April 1997. Article in Korrie Layun Rampan, *op. cit.*, (2000), pp. 35 - 44.

¹⁹⁹ “Dalam sejarah kesusastraan Indonesia puisi-puisi yang bercenderung sufist telah muncul sejak awal perkembangannya”, *ibid.*, p. 36-37.

²⁰⁰ *ibid.*

poetry with Islamic religious themes continued to be written after independence, with something of an explosion in such writing, under the banner of ‘new Sufi’ poetry in the late 1970s and early 1980s.²⁰¹ But most important, although not specifically mentioned by him in the *Horison* article, has been his acknowledgement of the impact of reading Persian and other Sufist poetry from Middle Eastern sources upon his own development as a poet.²⁰² Nevertheless, as the son of a prominent kiyai, Acep would also be well aware of the controversy in scholarly Islamic circles over the practice of Sufism in Indonesia.

The holding of the *Silaturahmi Sastrawan Santri* in Tasikmalaya, West Java can thus be seen as both a reflection of this broader climate of the development of new forms of Islamic revival (as marked by the increased interest amongst both modernist muslims in *tasuwuf*) as well as part of a particular interest by poets such as Acep Zamzam Noor to promote and develop this long-standing tradition of mystically-tinged religious poetry in West Java. Acep’s own Indonesian language poetry, I suggest, is best approached within this framework, as an expression of a deeply held commitment to the modernist practice of Islamic mysticism and its place in the development of the national tradition of modern Indonesian poetry. His poetry is wide-ranging, incorporating explicitly religious and mystical themes, alongside issues of social concern, while at the same time exploring the potential for creativity of form, visual richness and movement.

²⁰¹ *ibid.*, p. 42.

²⁰² Personal communication, Acep Zamzam Noor, 31 October 2005.

Wellsprings of Sufism in the poetry of Acep Zamzam Noor

The three poems by Acep Zamzam Noor that Aveling includes in his 2001 publication demonstrate, often in contrasting ways, aspects of the Sufist thread discernible in much of Acep's poetry. They are all poems which the author himself suggests can be interpreted as having Sufist tendencies (*kecenderungan sufi*), even if he is less inclined to consider other poems in this light.²⁰³ Whilst Aveling indicated in broad terms that these poems were examples of 'new Sufi' poetry, he did not explore the poems "Angin dan batu", "Requiem" and "Para kekasih", in any detail.²⁰⁴

The poem "Angin dan batu" was written in 1984 when Acep was in his early twenties. It is an early example of his endeavours to adapt his own poetic style to the kind of verse that is within the Persian Sufist tradition: short, replete with metaphor, and with a central theme about meditation:

Angin dan batu

*1. Kenapa harus batu yang diam
Dan bukan angin? Ia padat dan dingin
Tapi bergolak bagai api
Di perutnya sungai mengalir dan keheningan
Sembahyang. Ia diam dan bisu
Sekaligus menderu*

*2. Kenapa bukan angin
Dan harus batu? Ia tersepuh waktu
Matang oleh rindu*

Wind and rock

Why must it be the silent rock
and not the wind? Rock is compressed and cold
but it seethes like fire

²⁰³ *ibid.*

²⁰⁴ The poems are at Aveling, *op.cit.*, (2001), pp. 260-265.

In its belly is the flowing river
and the stillness of prayer.
Rock seems silent, unable to talk
and yet it roars.

Why not the wind?
Why does it have to be rock?
It is rock that is gilded by time
and it is rock that is (full) ripened from longing.²⁰⁵

“Angin dan batu” is a classic example of the Sufist tradition re-emerging in Indonesian poetry. It includes a sense of contemplation and questioning about the essence of things. It employs metaphors and allusions to convey meaning, such as the idea of batu (rock) as a symbol for meditation, which is contrasted with the symbol of the wind (angin), which is fickle, like a wanderer. The poem ends with the assertion that through meditation, existence is transformed through mystic concentration, into the ‘longed for state-of-being’.

Continuing this theme of searching for meaning in the silence, Acep chooses the Latin religious term, “Requiem”, associated with the mass for the dead in the Christian liturgy as the title for his 1988 poem of that name. It is perhaps doubtful that he has in mind the specifically Christian allusions by choosing the title. The repeated use of ‘kau’ or you, has the effect of concentrating the reader’s attention upon the fate of the ‘truth seeker’:

Requiem

*Apa yang kau cari
Dari kediaman? Belajar pada batu
Berguru pada air*

²⁰⁵ My translation of the poem here differs somewhat from the first translation into English by Harry Aveling in Aveling (2001), pp. 260-261. (In particular, I have taken ‘Ia’ in the poem to signify the ‘rock’, as a symbol of meditation).

*Membaca cuaca
Bicara dengan angin*

*Kautinggalkan rumah
Kautinggalakan buku-buku
Kaulepas seluruh pakaian
Kaubanting cincin
Kaumasuki malam yang dingin*

*Apa yang kau cari
Dari kebisuan? Bersekutu dengan malam
Tapi menolak bintang-bintang
Suaramu bagaikan sunyi
Tapi hatimu besi*

*Kautempuh topan
Kaujelajah waktu
Kaubakar rambutmu yang indah
Kauabukan hidupmu
Dalam perapian cinta*

*Tapi apa yang kau cari
Dari tiadaan?*

What are you seeking
In silence? Learning from the rocks
Studying with the water
Reading the weather
Talking with the wind

You have left your home
Left your books
Taken off all your clothing
Thrown away your rings
And entered the cold night

What are you seeking
From the silence?
You are the one with the night
But you do not see the stars
Your voice is filled with loneliness
But your heart is made of steel

You fought your way through the storms
Crossed vast expanses of time
You burned your beautiful hair

And turned your life to ash
In the furnace of love

But what are you seeking
In the void?²⁰⁶

In the poem, there is the ceaseless self-questioning and drawing upon the force of all the elements to describe the dark night of the soul. What is being sought, from the silence, he asks? 'Learning', the poet suggests, is derived from contemplation of the essence of the rocks, water, weather, wind. Acep also introduces aspects of the anthropomorphic imagery that he so often employs to gain extra effect – reading, studying, hearing -- to describe the link between the natural world and human attempts to contemplate it, however inadequate. The second verse continues the idea of the search for meaning, as a journey. Acep attributes the ability of physical characteristics of the human body to experience emotions *per se* as a means of heightening the metaphors he is using about existence. Just like the artist trying to paint feeling into his picture, so too Acep draws emotions into his canvas of the body. The result is the coldness we experience in our imagination through trying to imagine 'solitariness' at its core. The next verses take the poet further into the journey of the soul – the imagery of storms, time crossed, the imagined 'you', without other elaboration. In the process the hair is burnt and turns to ash the truth-seeker's life in the furnace of love. But even at the poem's end, there is the relentless question repeated, as if in trance: what are you seeking?

The poem "Para kekasih" was written during the period when Acep was in Europe in 1991-1993. There are the references to God's lovers caressing the rocks and turning them into sapphires. In this respect, it reminds us of the earlier poem, "Angin dan

²⁰⁶ Translation based on the Aveling translation (2001), in Aveling, op.cit. pp. 260-263.

batu”, but now the twenty-eight year old Acep has progressed the metaphor to suggest the sapphires, not just the idea of ‘rock’. The air is filled with the incense of hearts of believers on fire. Then fish and lizards appear, symbolic of natural things. Images fade in and out, replaced gradually, one by one:

Para kekasih

*Attar telah bernyanyi tentang burung
Yang terbang dari dahan-dahan jiwa
Sana’i telah menanam dan memetik mawar abadi
Telah banyak nyanyian dan juga kesedihan
Dibisikkan angin yang memuja keramahan Sulaiman
Batu-batu digosok para kekasih menjadi nilam sejati
Dan udara dipenuhi aroma hati yang terbakar*

*Begitu mendengar senandung Daud yang merdu
Pohon-pohon terhenti dari kejatuhannya ke tanah
Dan airmata langit mengkristal di udara
Jalaluddin telah mengundang matahari turun ke hatinya
Rumput-rumput terkejut dari keterikatannya pada akar
Sedang jiwa bumi bergerak dalam tarian yang riang
Hingga batu-batu berterbangan bagaikan kapas*

*Di sepanjang Laut Tengah yang tawar
Langit bagaikan logam yang disepuh keemasan
Di sana Yunus memahat sajak-sajaknya dalam kaligrafi
Yang sulit dibaca. Tapi ikan-ikan dapat membacanya
Kadal-kadal telah membacanya dengan mata yang terpejam
Karang-karang menyusut menjadi butiran pasir
Dan lautan membukakan lembaran-lembaran buku*

*Hafiz menyuling anggur dari kebun hatinya
Lalu mengundang burung-burung untuk mabuk bersama
Jami bergoyang-goyang di antara dua cawan besar
Yang disajikan langit dan bumi pada kehidupan
Tak terhitung berapa lagu dan juga airmata
Disalurkan sungai-sungai rahasia ke Safa dan Marwah
Menjadi gelombang para kekasih yang mengalir*

(1992)

The lovers of God

Attar sang of the birds
Flying from the branches of the soul
Sana'i planted roses of eternity and picked them
After many songs and much sadness
The whispering wind praised Solomon's hospitality
God's lovers caressed the rocks and turned them into sapphires
And the air was filled with the incense of hearts on fire

When they heard David's sweet singing
Trees stopped growing
Rain turned to crystal teardrops
When Jalaluddin invited the sun into his heart
The grass leaped high,
The spirit's earth moved in happy dance
Sending stones flying like tufts of cotton

The leaden skies over the innocuous-looking Mediterranean
Were streaked with the golden calligraphy
Of Jonah's poems, which was not easy (for humans) to read.
But the fish could read it, and the lizards
even with their eyes apparently closed read it,
The long reefs shrinking into grains of sand,
And the seas opened up the pages of the book.

Hafiz' distilled wine from the distillery of the heart
And invited the birds to share in his drunkenness
Jami staggered between two cups
Offered to life by heaven and earth
No one can tell how many songs, how many tears,
Have run together as if the secret streams to Safa and Marwah
That become the human waves of the Lovers of God that flow,
ever flowing.²⁰⁷

In the third verse Acep portrays the long reefs shrinking into (mere) grains of sand, evidence of his technique of gently conjuring up images of the vastness of creation, then gradually replacing them with images of the most infinitesimal. The metaphor of the opening of the sea, as if it is a book, gives us a sense of activity on a huge scale. The sea and a book become shared images, with the powerful imagery continuing with the

²⁰⁷ Translation based on Aveling (2001), pp. 262-265.

allusions to the waves of believers. From the references to Persian poet, Hafiz, we move to the evocation of masses – the songs of the huge waves of pilgrims. There is allusion to Safa and Marwah, in the Islamic Holy Land, as distinctly Islamic imagery.

'Keindahan' and the European-period poems

What we see in “Para kekasih”, in its religious guise moves into high gear in more secular poems such as “Buat Malika Hamoudi”, and other Parisian and Italian-themed poems of the early and late 1990s. In these poems, a slow-paced initial focus on one polarity gives way to the ‘dance’ and movement of all polarities across the canvas of Acep’s imagination. Possibly one of the most intriguing aspects of some of the poetry of Acep Zamzam Noor, is how this pesantren-educated poet responded to the extensive periods when he was either living in or visiting Europe. In many ways Acep Zamzam Noor’s European-period poetry appears the most accessible to a foreign readership.²⁰⁸ They have appeared, obviously with Acep’s concurrence, in various Indonesian anthologies.²⁰⁹ Indeed, twenty four of the one hundred poems in his 2004 collection, *Jalan Menuju Rumahmu*, are from the periods during or immediately after his visits to Europe.

In the 1997 *Horison* article mentioned earlier, Acep discussed the relationship between ‘santri’ and ‘sastra’.²¹⁰ We also can gain some insight from this article in our exploration of the linkages between Acep’s poetry with its Sufist undertones, written with Indonesian background themes, and much of the poetry from his European periods.

²⁰⁸ Joko Pinurbo, ‘Puisi Indonesia: Antara Komitmen Sosial dan Jelajah Estetik’, *Kalam*, 13, 1999, p. 44. He also suggested that Acep’s poems from this period and afterwards were among the best he had written.

²⁰⁹ For example, in the *Horison* anthology produced for the *Festival Puisi Internasional Indonesia* in 2002.

²¹⁰ Acep Zamzam Noor, in Korrie Layun Rampan, op. cit. p. 35-44.

Certainly, the linkages are derived from consideration of Sufist poetic traditions and the idea of beauty. Acep writes, inter alia, that at their height the mystical experience is tinged with (*bersinggungan*) with aesthetic experience.²¹¹ It follows from this that there can be a close linkage between mystical experience and the experiential nature of beauty, form and movement, which is not necessarily dependent upon cultural or geographical setting. Indeed, art, or more specifically painting, is very much a part of the underlying foundation and strength of visual imagery in Acep's poetry. This was also hinted at by Joko Pinurbo²¹², and even alluded to by Acep himself in a 2005 article.²¹³

Yet not all poems rely on the idea of colours and form in a simple aesthetic sense. Sometimes, as in "Percakapan musim gugur", the abstract symbolism that can be seen in some of his paintings also is played out in the poems in extraordinary ways²¹⁴:

Percakapan Musim Gugur

*Percakapan antara kita
Tetesan gairah dan anggur merah
Di atas meja, wajahmu tergolek pucat
Rambutmu menyimpan angin ribut
Tanganmu dingin. Sebuah musim gugur
Merontokkan hari-hariku
Daun-daun penuh lentik api*

²¹¹ "Munculnya tokoh-tokoh tasawuf seperti Rumi, Sana'i, Attar atau al-Hallaj dalam panggung sejarah peradaban dan kebudayaan Islam, tasawuf dan kesusasteraan, khususnya puisi, hampir tak bisa dipisahkan satu sama lain. Pengalaman-pengalaman kerohanian mereka begitu akrab diungkapkan dalam wujud puisi yang indah dan tinggi nilainya. Erat hubungan tasawuf dengan puisi, konon berpangkal pada kenyataan bahwa *pada puncaknya pengalaman mistis bersinggungan dengan pengalaman estetis. Seperti seniman dalam artian yang sesungguhnya, mereka tidak pernah puas dengan apa yang dicapai oleh akal. Mereka mencari hakikat yang tersembunyi dan menangkap keindahan yang paling hakiki.*" (my italics), Acep Zamzam Noor, in Korrie Layun Rampan, op. cit. p. 35.

²¹² Joko Pinurbo, op. cit. (1999), p.43.

²¹³ Acep Zamzam Noor, www.islamlib.com/id/index.php?page=article&id=906 accessed on 17 October 2005. It should also be noted that by the time Acep had graduated from the Bandung Institute of Technology (ITB), he had already begun to regard himself as a 'serious' painter, as well as a poet.

²¹⁴ The covers on most of the poetry anthologies produced by the Sanggar Sastra Tasikmalaya in recent years have featured abstract paintings by Acep. For example, on the cover of the 2003 *Muktamar* anthology.

*Berpijar dan membusuk
Di dalamnya kita terkubur*

*Di dalamnya
Kita membangun gedung-gedung baru
Dari rerontokan sebuah dunia yang hancur:
Botol-botol kosong, puntung-puntung rokok
Tetesan darah yang mengering di atas meja
Bangunan masa depan menyerap cahaya ungu
Melahirkan kegelapan. Keningku pecah
Halilintar bersujud pada tanah
Impianmu hanyut di sungai*

*Pohon-pohon beton
Belantara bayang-bayang
Puing-puing sejarah dan sebuah menara
Yang miring. Kenangku meledak
Tanganku memanjang ke laut
Kakiku tertidur di hutan
Perutku bermimpi dan mengigau
Pikiranku basah
Sebutir peluru menembus pahaku*

*Percakapan kita
Perkawinan dan perceraian
Di wajahmu, sebutir apel membusuk
Sebuah granat menari-nari
Hujan dan topan berkobar dimulutmu
Dunia menguning. Gedung-gedung kaca berkilauan
Jalan-jalan melingkar di sekelilingnya
Kata-kataku memasuki terowongan
Menjadi lebih kelam dari sebuah masa lalu*

(1992)

Autumn conversation

Our conversation,
A drop of passion and red wine
On the table, your face sprawled pale
Your hair flushed by the force of the wind
Your hands are cold. An autumn
That makes my days fall away like the leaves
Leaves of curving flames
Blazing and decomposing
Burying us within them

Within it
We build new structures
From the ruins of a destroyed world:
Empty bottles, cigarette butts
Dried drops of blood on the table
Buildings of future absorb the purple light
Delivering darkness. My forehead bursts
Thunderbolts bow to earth
Your dreams are washed away by the river

Concrete trees
Jungle of shadows
Historical debris and a tower that leans
My memories explode. My hand reaches the sea
My feet fall asleep in the forest
My stomach is dreaming and delirious
My brain is wet
A bullet piercing my thigh

Our conversation
Marriage and divorce
In your face a rotten apple
A hand-grenade dancing
Rain and storm flare in your mouth
The world turns yellow. Shining glass houses
Ring roads surrounding them
My words entering a tunnel
Darker than whatever the past was ²¹⁵

“Percakapan musim gugur” was written in the first period when Acep was in Europe in 1991-1992. There are a number of influences, and even a touch of the modernist T.S. Eliot.²¹⁶ But here Acep interweaves both the matter-of-factness of an autumn conversation with striking visual imagery and sharp movement, interposing the mundane and the deadly serious. There are the references to the symbolism of wine and

²¹⁵ Translation based on Nikmah Sarjono, (2002), in *Edisi Khusus: Puisi Internasional Indonesia 2002*, *Horison*, p. 57.

²¹⁶ It reminds me somewhat of T.S. Eliot’s poem, “The Prelude.” “...The winter evening settles down./with the smell of steaks in passageways./ Six o’clock./ The burnt-out ends of smoky days”.

blood as passion and pain. Indeed, whilst the second line reads ‘gairah dan anggur’ in the 1992 version, by 1993 it is ‘darah dan anggur’.²¹⁷

In the poem Acep aligns the stages in the conversation with the autumnal season, the season of change in Europe, before winter takes hold. The face of the person being talked to and her bodily features reflect the mood of the season, autumn. Even the hair of the other person referred to, retains the sound of the wind, as in “rambutmu menyimpan angin ribut”. Then the leaves of curling flames blaze away and, the poet suggests, below them, they will be buried. These are powerful images leading into the second verse, where the poet suggests, as if musing in the table scene, that new structures will be planned and built. In the third verse there are the descriptions of bodily sensations, aligned with descriptions of the urban landscape, presumably the leaning tower of Pisa. This reference adds to the sense of things not being in balance, whilst in verse four there are traces of an Eliot, as in “in your face a rotten apple”. Verse five is replete with visual colour imagery of all the stanzas: the world turns yellow, and ring roads fly around, as if in dance, surrounding the conversing couple, and the imagery of the hand grenade. Movement is swift and circular. From unassuming beginnings the poem builds into one of tremendous force, with movement, in all directions.

This attention to the portrayal of striking, multi-faceted imagery that fades and reappears is a feature of one of Acep’s poems written against an Italian background, such as the Fontana Maggiore, the subject of another Italian period poem.²¹⁸ This poem begins

²¹⁷The 1992 version appears in the 2002 *Horison* anthology, *Edisi Khusus: Puisi Indonesia 2002*, op.cit. p.57, while the 1993 version appears in Acep’s 2003 anthology, *Jalan Menuju Rumahmu*, pp. 90-91.

²¹⁸ The reference is presumably to this great fountain in Rome, known as Fontana Maggiore.

with an image of a human figure, presumably female that emerges from the fountain,
spreading its watery, soaking spray:

Fontana Maggiore

*Tiba-tiba tubuhmu penuh hujan
Seperti patung di tengah air mancur itu
Dan waktu menjadi pohon yang ditinggalkan daun-daun
Aku ingat sebatang lilin di tengah laut malam hari
Di sini pun cahaya memperlebar wilayah kelamnya
Hingga kita bersudutan yang mengeras*

*Kebisuan menjadi bahasa
Antara undakan-undakan dan detik-detik
Yang menggenang. Bunyi gitar terdengar nyaring
Tapi segera dipatahkan angin yang runcing
Wajah pengamen itu menjadi pucat dan keperakan
Di tengah deretan hari-hari yang menyusut
Dan mengembun pada patung-patung*

*Di dinding kasar nampak bayang-bayangmu
Yang bergerak-gerak tanpa lakon
Dan orang-orang masih berjalan dengan anjing
Atau anak-anak yang menggigil
Kulihat lehermu menghijau seperti tembaga
Tapi segera mulut cahaya menyerapnya
Ke dalam lampu-lampu*

*Tubuhmu menyusut dan menjadi percikan air
Kekakalan memenuhi seluruh kolam
Kunang-kunang terbang, menjauh dan menghilang
Adalah pikiranmu yang masih terpatah-patah –
Di taman-taman lain yang lebih remang
Kulihat jurang-jurang yang digali cahaya
Seluruh hujan diterjunkan ke sana*

(1992)

Suddenly your body soaking wet this rainy day
Like the statue standing in the middle of that fountain
Time became a tree, deserted by its leaves
I remember a candle at night in the middle of the ocean
Even in here, the light widened its shadowy places
Until we appear diagonally opposite each other

Muteness becomes language
Between the staircases and the inundated seconds.
Guitar tinkles loudly, immediately crashed
By the sharp wind
That singing busker's turns pale and silvery
Amidst the shortening days
And the condensation forming upon the statues

On the rough walls your shadows appear
Moving unscripted
And people still walking their dogs
Or their shivering children
I saw your neck turned green like copper
But the mouth of light hurriedly sucked it
Into lamps

Your body shrinks and becomes splashing water
The pond surrounded by eternity
Fireflies, flying further and further
It is your mind that still unsettled
At the other murkier parks
I see gulches dug up by the light
Upon them, all the precipitation poured ²¹⁹

So time becomes a tree, bereft of its leaves, as the poet contemplates a woman as the figure emerging within the fountain. In the second verse the poet alludes to the musical notes of a guitar as well as the imagery of the stairs to describe the ephemeral movement of water, higher and higher, into nothingness. There is striking visual phosphorescent imagery of the human figure – the neck that turns green like copper, as it disappears with the mouth of light hurriedly sucked it into lamps. The play of light from the waters of the fountain merges with the lamps, in a horizontal motion. The last verse is expressed, just as the first, anthropomorphically -- as a female body shrinking and becoming the splashing water.

²¹⁹ Translation based on Nikmah Sarjono, in *Edisi Khusus: Puisi Internasional Indonesia 2002: Horison*, op.cit. (2002), p. 59.

Acep concludes this poem where he is imagining the fountain as if it is constantly changing between the image of a woman and her outer form as if a spray of waters. The idea portrayed is that of the fountain as a mixture of wild uncontrolled waters and constant unrelenting patterns of motion. It has an unsettled mind. It is a fine poem about the interplay between elements of natural phenomena, on the one hand, and the steady movement between the imagery of the fountain as a woman and alternatively as a shimmering, changing mass of both controlled and uncontrolled water.²²⁰ I suggest it can be said that, even in this European-period poem, we can see how Acep is still seeking, in the way of the Sufi, to explain the core essence of the fountain's beauty. What is it, he is asking, that the fountain tells us about form, movement, imagery and beauty?

In 1997 Acep went again to Europe. A major poem from this period, and much anthologised, is his poem, "Buat Malika Hamoudi". It is here that we perhaps have a poem which brings together the various influences in Acep's poetry--the Sufist orientation but transposed into a more secular setting, but also one which allows the poet to explore the sensations of movement and desire. There is the trance-like nature of the poet's travels and movement across the city of Paris. Indeed, the city *itself* becomes the horizontal and vertical dancer, whirling with the poet:

Buat Malika Hamoudi

*Kulihat jemarimu yang lentik, dan kusaksikan di langit
Arakan awan mengirimkan senja yang lain
Ke arah kita. Ada warna merah, warna biru yang pupus
Bongkahan-bongkahan kelabu yang melayang jauh
Dari jendela. Kulihat sungai Seine yang membelah kota
Dengan jembatan-jembatan yang penuh ukiran*

²²⁰ There are some similarities between this poem and poems in the modern Spanish poetic tradition which portray the waters of a fountain as a woman. For example, in Juan Ramón Jiménez's poem, "La música".

*Seperti rambut ikalmu. Lalu dari puncak apartement tinggi
Kita berloncatan, meliuk-liuk dan berteriak di udara:
Senja pecah menjadi ribuan isyarat sunyi
Yang mungkin bisa diterjemahkan sebagai hasrat
Atau niat tersembunyi untuk bunuh diri*

*Masih kuingat tarian perutmu, dan kubayangkan sosokmu
Yang ramping, rautmu yang runcing, dengan alis Alzajairmu
Yang menikam seorang penyair. Di gerbong kereta api
Di sepanjang terowongan yang menembus tubuh tua kota ini
Ada yang menggelepar karena kehilangan kata-kata
Ketika sunyi menyediakan sebuah beranda merah muda
Yang bernama kebisuan. Lalu apakah arti percakapan kita
Dari halte ke halte, menyusuri jalan-jalan yang berliku
Keluar masuk restoran, museum atau toko buku
Sedang yang kutemukan selalu bukan ruang? Demikianlah
Aku mengerti gerak liar sang takdir, hukum awal dan akhir
Pengkhianatan yang kemudian menjadi monumen terkenal
Seperti Bastille yang ramai dikunjungi orang*

*Di bawah cahaya lampu merkuri, di antara tiang-tiang marmar
Kita merasa lebih tua dari usia bumi yang sebenarnya
Rautmu yang runcing, tatapanmu yang tajam dan berkilat
Seperti ingin membunuhku. Tapi ajal telah beranjak ke timur
Ke lereng-lereng perbukitan, ke Montmartre yang murung
Kini tanganku menyentuh dagumu pelan dan tiba-tiba kurasakan
Sebuah ketajaman yang lain lagi:
Mengapa kecantikan yang luar biasa selalu menghunuskan
Pisau? Seperti senja yang menancapkan satu jawaban
Yang tak mungkin bisa kuucapkan lagi padamu
Tak mungkin bisa kutuliskan di atas pakaian dalammu.*

(1997)

For Malika Hamoudi

I see your curving fingers, and I witness the clouds
Send another twilight in the sky
To us. The colour of red and obliterated blue
Clumps of gray drift away from the window.
I see the Seine splits the city
With its carved bridges
Like your curly hair. Then the top of
An apartment building, we jump, twist our bodies
And shout to the air: the twilight bursts into
Thousands of silent signals
Which could be translated as desires

Or the hidden wish to suicide

I still remember your belly dancing, and I imagine
Your slender body, your oval face, with your Algerian
Eyebrows that stabbed a poet's heart. On the train,
Along the tunnel that penetrates the old body
Of this city, something is wriggling, speechless,
When silence provided a pink porch
Called muteness. So what is the meaning of our
Conversations from bus stop to bus stop, along the winding streets,
In and out of restaurants, museums, bookstores,
While what I found there was always no space? This is the way
I comprehend the wild motions of destiny, the law of the beginning
And the end. A betrayal that becomes a famous monument
Like the Bastille that today is still full of visitors.

Under the mercury lamplight, between marble posts
We feel much older than the earth, your oval face,
Your sharp and shining glance, like wanting to kill me.
But death has gone to the east, to the hills, to melancholic
Montmartre. Now my hand gently touches your chin and
Suddenly I notice another pain; why does extraordinary beauty
Always unsheathe its knife? Like a twilight which implants an answer
That I can never utter to you, I can never
Write it on your underwear.²²¹

After Ramadhan KH visited Europe in the early 1950s, West Java poets had been influenced by European poetry, particularly from France, and the poetry based on the experiences of Indonesian poets generally visiting Europe after independence. Of the Indonesian poets who had visited Europe, none had perhaps drawn as much inspiration from these experiences as Sitor Situmorang.²²² Yet there is nothing in the generally more measured poetry of Sitor from Europe that prepares us for the imagery, colour and sense of movement, even trance that many of Acep's poems demonstrate. It falls to this most santri of poets to explore these dimensions. Is it really so far from the Sufist foundations

²²¹ Translation based on Nikmah Sarjono, *op.cit.*, (2002), pp.60-61.

²²² For example, Sitor Situmorang, *Paris la Nuit/Paris di Waktu Malam: Sajak-Sajak Sitor Situmorang*, (Jakarta: Komunitas Bambu, 2002).

of his poetry? There are the whirling dervish dimensions of some of Acep's European period poetry, and even the question of temptations, as in the references to the writing on the underwear. But it is an Algerian, a foreigner perhaps, who is the entrancer. Yet for Acep, the theme is not just the dancer, but the power of aestheticism, movement and the power of visual imagery and colour.

This approach of Acep's is also seen when we consider Acep's poem, "Sacre Coeur":

Sacre Coeur

*Lewat pasar yang riuh
Lewat deretan panjang kaki lima
Lewat tangga yang disandarkan
Ke bukit. Aku merasa tak akan sampai
Ke puncak menara Sacre Coeur*

*Aku pun diam
Aku pun terpaku
Menghitung detak waktu
Yang disirami butir-butir salju
Di lereng bukit itu*

*Pada ranting-ranting pohon linden
Kulukiskan raut wajahmu
Yang runcing namun bertenaga
Lalu kusimpan sebuah nama
Di bawah judul sajak
Tentang cinta
Yang belum selesai kutuliskan*

*Angin mendengung dan burung-burung
Tak bisa berlindung
Dari dingin. Menara menjulung
Dan udara yang bawah
Terasa menekan*

*Seperti ada yang tersembunyi
Dari balik mantel bulumu
Yang tebal. Salju berhamburan
Dari rambutmu yang ikal
Harum anggur*

*Tercium dari napasmu
Suaramu bergelombang di udara
Kakimu menginjak awan
Yang berkilauan dan penuh pahatan*

*Aku merasa tak akan sampai
Ke puncak menara Sacre Coeur.*

(1997)

Past the noisy market
Past the long rows of street sellers
Past the stairs that are leaning back
Against the hill. I feel I never will reach
The top of the tower of Sacre Coeur

And I am quiet
And also transfixed
Counting the passing moments
In each movement of the hands of the clock
Which itself is bathed in snowflakes
On the side of that hill

In the twigs of the linden tree
I paint the outlines of your face
Its sharp yet strong features
Then I store away in my memory the name
Under the title of a poem
About love that has not yet
Been written down

The wind drones and birds
are unable to find shelter
from the cold. The tower
soars up into the sky
and the sky below seems to
press down

As if there is
Something hidden
From behind your thick fur coat
The snow scatters everywhere around
In your wavy hair
I can smell the fragrance of wine on
Your breath
Your voice in the waves of the clouds
Your feet step upon the clouds

Which shine brightly and are
full of shapes as if carved in the sky

I think that perhaps I will not reach
The top of the tower
Of Sacre Coeur.

Perhaps Acep's poem is a direct response to the kind of imagery he would have been aware of in a poem by Sitor Situmorang, also titled "Sacre Coeur". Both are about the hill in metropolitan Paris where Sacre Coeur is located.²²³ Acep, like Sitor before him, uses the theme of the landscape and scenes from Paris to invoke images of women. But whilst Sitor's poem has an element of wistful sadness, Acep's poem has more of a hint of the surreal and the mysterious. Like Sitor, he climbs and surveys the scene, but unlike the former, he questions whether he will ever reach the top of the hill.

A third stream; local environment as metaphor for life and existence

By way of contrast it is helpful to consider Acep's poetry that features local and environmental themes in order to understand how he interweaves such themes within his Islamic Sufist world view. In Acep's poetry, the rural world of Cipasung, the pesantren in which he lives, is one that is suffused with Islamic and Sufist ideas in a very direct way. However, in contrast to the themes of degradation of the environment, physical and moral, portrayed by Juniarso Ridwan and Soni Farid Maulana, Acep draws out a picture of the local environment with which he clearly feels in harmony. Indeed, much of Acep Zamzam Noor's Indonesian language poetry in the 1990s featured themes based on the life of the countryside. His poetry does not present us with an overt sense of opposition of country against city, as appears in much of the *Priangan si derita* thematic style of

²²³ *ibid.* pp. 72-73. Sitor Situmorang's poem, "Sacre Coeur" is a poem of morning reflections.

writing of some of the Bandung-based poets. Rather, in Acep's case, it is a 'song of praise' with religious feeling for country life for its own sake. However, I also believe that there can also be detected in his 1980s poetry a sense in which the poet is conveying optimism about his return to a more rurally-centred life style after his period in the metropolis when he was undertaking his education in Jakarta.²²⁴ His 1982 poem, "Cipasung" illustrates this:

Cipasung

*Di lengkung alis matamu sawah-sawah menguning
Seperti rambutku padi-padi semakin merundukkan diri
Dengan ketam kupanen terus kesabaran hatimu
Cangkulku iman dan sajadahku lumpur dan kental
Langit yang menguji ibadahku meneteskan cahaya redup
Dan surauku terbakar kesunyian yang menyalakan rindu*

*Aku semakin mendekat pada kepunahan yang disimpan bumi
Pada lahan-lahan kepedihan masih kutanam bijian hari
Segala tumbuhan dan pohonan membuahakan pahala segar
Bagi pagar-pagar bambu yang dibangun keimananku
Mendekatlah padaku dan dengarkan kasidah ikan-ikan
Kini hatiku kolam yang menyimpan kemurnianmu*

*Hari esok adalah perjalananku sebagai petani
Membuka ladang-ladang amal dalam belantara yang pekat
Pahamilah jalan ketiadaan yang semakin ada ini
Dunia telah lama kutimbang dan berulang kuhancurkan
Tanpa ketam masih ingin kepanen kesabaranmu yang lain
Atas sajadah lumpur aku tersungkur dan berkubur*

Cipasung

At the curve of your eyebrows the rice fields turn yellow.
Like my hair the rice plants bend lower and lower, as if to bow down.
With the rice knife I go on harvesting the patience of your heart
My hoe is my faith and my prayer mat is the thick clay.
The heavens that take stock of my prayer let fall droplets of dim light.

²²⁴ Joko Pinurbo in his discussion paper presented to the Tasikmalaya *Muktamar* suggests that even if there is no direct oppositional statement within the poem, there still may be a sense that there is a 'tempat suaka' or place of refuge, to be found in the West Java countryside. Joko Pinurbo, op cit. (2003), p. 3.

My prayer house is burnt by a loneliness that inflames my longing.

I am getting closer and closer to the extinction of decomposition that is held fast
in the earth and the land is in anguish as I continue to plant the seeds each day.
All new growth and trees bring forth their own new rewards.
The bamboo fences that I make are but icons of my faith.
Oh, come and hear the verses of the fish
Here is the pond of my heart that stores away your perfect being.

Tomorrow my road as a farmer goes on,
draw wide open the fields where good deeds shall be done in the deep forest,
Come and take up the way of the void that is becoming what is,
a world I have pondered about and sought its destruction.
Without the rice knife I still want to gather up the bountifulness of that other
patience of yours, on this mat of prayer that is the clay,
I fall down and inter my being.

The rural images used in the poem suggest that whilst he certainly draws upon aspects of the rural landscape of his home or 'local place', Cipasung, he has also fashioned some of these as expressions of a 'Sufist' outlook upon his faith as a Muslim. The rural world is not just a 'place for expression of his religious faith', but also the very land becomes the immanent God. He becomes immersed in the land and its rhythms of farming, and indeed decomposition and rebirth.

Yet there is also an aspect of 'the seeing eye' wherein, just as in his paintings, there is a sense of 'the mind looking outwards as well as inwards.'²²⁵ There is also an affirmation of the rural way of life as an expression of faith, but there are no direct criticisms in the poem of the ravages of the city or the moral, social and environmental shortcomings of such life, as portrayed in the poems of Soni Farid Maulana and Juniarmo Ridwan, for example. There are suggestions of a woman's presence but I am inclined to think that the imagery in the poem is also a Sufist interpretation of how the poet is

²²⁵ As mentioned previously, some of Acep's abstract paintings appear on the cover face of SST poetry anthologies.

interpreting the world. The passion he refers to is religious passion, even if some of the imagery used for his immersion in the land, and his consciousness of ‘planting new life’ through disturbing the land draws upon that associated with male-female intercourse. And yet one can also detect some of the ‘playfulness’ that Harry Aveling refers to in *Secrets Need Words*.²²⁶ In line two he refers to the imagery of the rice plants bending lower and lower, as if similar to the shape of his hairline!²²⁷

The title of the poem, “Cipasung”, locates the poem, at least in so far as its commencement is concerned, as being squarely within the strong tradition of localism in West Javanese poetry that Joko Pinurbo was alluding to in his paper delivered to the Tasikmalaya *Muktamar* in 2003. However, it also departs from the poems written from a Bandung perspective mentioned previously, in that it seeks to align the ideas of ‘local area and environment’ with a sense of the religious immanence of the environment where the poet ‘embraces the environment’, rather than being repelled by it.

In the first line, the poet uses the imagery of the face to define and lay out the landscape of the local area. The poet continues this allusion to the face looking out when he uses the simile of his hair to allude to the scene of the rice plants stooped over. This is a typical technique used by Acep Zamzam Noor in a number of his poems.²²⁸ The next lines of the poem move beyond mere observation, as the poet signifies his actions in harvesting the patience of her heart. What is the meaning here? I suggest that the poet is addressing the ‘bounty of the land’ and what the earth, perhaps seen with feminine

²²⁶ Aveling, op.cit, (2001), p.233.

²²⁷ In many photographs of Acep Zamzam Noor the poet’s long hair is evident!

²²⁸ The imagery in many of Acep’s paintings featured on SST anthology covers seem to suggest ideas of the mind becoming ‘aware’ of not just the subconscious, but also of what is in the external environment.

characteristics, is prepared to give up after so much effort has been put in to creating the fruits of the land. But then the next line contains the statement that suggests total alignment by the poet of his religious faith with the rural way of life and its symbols. Then subsequently the poet gazes upward, as almost imperceptibly the heavens are watching the poet's actions, seemingly releasing traces of droplets of human tears as they watch on in approval. There is the tension of the opposites – flame and yearning, silence and light -- fills out his imagery of the prayer house.

In the second verse the poet shows that he is aware of the eternal processes of decomposition associated with the land. But there are also strong suggestions that he is also referring to a more mystical allusion associated with contemplation of this process; the Sufi notion of loss of self in the process of contemplating Allah. Yet the poet is also aware that he is imposing upon the land once again through the act of planting seeds. The land is 'anguished' yet somehow is being asked to become fruitful once again. The poet, as farmer, is conscious of the nature of his actions. Yet he is compelled to break the earth and submit it to the task of growing new things. The rural images abound. Acep uses the image of the fishpond and the song of fishes to reinforce the sense of being in unison with nature and God.

In the last line he returns to the idea of the heart as a pond that retains purity. It is difficult to be certain about the allusion here. But I suggest that he is referring again to the purity of the earth as conceived by the rural dweller or farmer that he identifies with. It also embraces the idea of the earth or nature, with Sufist ideas of fusion of man as a religious being with the land and God as being immanent in the land. The last stanza sets

out his continuing credo, namely that he is a farmer, and that all the future is in tune with this sense of identification. It is in this last verse that he generalises beyond the (merely) local references. ‘Cipasang’ (sic) is no longer just a sense of ‘locale’, but a state of being. The poet longs to inter himself in the very earth that he has been cultivating. He restates the Sufist idea of death and becoming nothingness, in order to gain rebirth.

Other commentators have seen this poem as an important aspect of Acep’s overall poetic oeuvre. In his *Muktamar* paper, Joko Pinurbo also chose to draw a line of continuity between the Ramadhan poem of “Priangan si Jelita” and much of Acep Zamzam Noor’s poetry of the countryside. He also quotes the first line of “Cipasang” as highlighting this common thread with the language Ramadhan had used in his 1956 poem – the rural scenes, the colour of the rice fields as seen through the eye of the poet.²²⁹

Sapardi Djoko Damono, has also drawn our attention to the way Acep’s poem expresses religious experience bound up with a farming life.²³⁰ Sapardi also mentions how Acep uses and intertwines religious terminology within his description of the life of a farmer and the rural cycle: how for the poet the muddy rice field clay symbolises the prayer mat used to carry out religious duties and in this sense work in the fields is also an expression of piety.²³¹

In 1997, after returning from his second visit to Europe, Acep turned to the West Java countryside as a starting point for his new poem, “Nafas Gunung”, which covering

²²⁹ Joko Pinurbo, op.cit, (2003), p.1.

²³⁰ Sapardi Djoko Damono, ‘Pedusunan Acep’ in *Sihir Rendra: Permainan Makna* (Jakarta: Penerbit Putaka Firdaus, 1999) p. 192. Sapardi refers to “pengalaman keagamaan diungkap lewat kehidupan pertanian”.

²³¹ *ibid*, p. 192. Sapardi suggests that “lumpur sawah adalah sajadahnya: sajadah adalah piranti untuk melaksanakan salah satu ibadah, demikian juga kerja di lumpur sawah.”

some of the same ground as the earlier poem, nevertheless more intensely develops the ideas and creative possibilities inherent in taking some of the symbolism of the landscape and reflecting upon the nature of existence. He uses as the title for the poem the idea of the breath of the mountains (*nafas gunung*), encompassing not just the sense of life force that flows from the mountains that dominate the West Java high country, but also perhaps the ideas of the creative force that emanates from the still active volcanoes, such as Gunung Galunggung, which can be seen in the distance from the poet's house in Cipasung, near Tasikmalaya. But the poem also explores the complex relationship the poet has with the environment:

Nafas Gunung

*Seperti senja yang bersimpuh di kaki langit
Kupuja bola matamu yang melelehkan cahaya redup
Serta hurup-hurup samar yang menuliskan
Keabadian. Senyummu yang tergantung di udara
Dinaungi gumpalan mendung yang kemerahan
Tuturmu yang menggulirkan butir-butir embun
Tak bisa kutampung dengan bibirku yang bergetar*

*Nafas gunung yang dikibarkan kerudungmu
Menghijaukan sawah-sawah di hatiku
Selemba sajadah yang dihamparkan rindu
Membuatku tersungkur lagi. Kudirup wangi tanah
Kucium akar rumputan dan dingin batu:
Seorang lelaki berlumuran darah
Ditikam sepasang alis matamu*

*Tariklah sedikit ujung kerudungmu, Dini
Agar langit menampakkan rahasia keindahannya
Pada bumi. Parasmu yang dipantulkan sinar bulan
Dengan bulu-bulu halus yang tersapu tiupan angin
Seakan menyibakkan yang selama ini tertutupi
Itulah sebabnya aku memuja bola matamu
Seperti seribu laron mengerumuni satu-satunya
Nyala lampu*

(1997)

Breath of the mountains

Just like twilight that comes to sit low on the horizon
I worship your eyeballs that pour forth the dim light
And the dim letters that spell eternity.
Your smile that hangs in the heavens
is protected by the clouds, tinged with red.
Your words become the rolling grains or droplets of dew
I am unable to speak, no movement passes from my lips.

The breath of the mountain, which your veil sends forth
Makes the rice fields of my heart green
The threads of my prayer mat which are unfolded with longing
Drawing me down so that I am prostrate once more.
I draw in the scent of the earth
And kiss the roots of grasses and the coldness of stones:
A man stained with blood
Is stabbed by the curve of your eyebrows

Pull away a little the edge of your veil, Dini,
So that the sky can make visible the secret of its beauty
to the earth. The smoothness of your face shall be reflected
By the moonlight and its rays become like the fine hair
which has been swept up by the movement of the breeze
As if all during this time remains covered
Like worshipping your eyes, just like a thousand moths
That swarm around a single flame

The twilight scene is replete with anthropomorphic references that allow us to move almost effortlessly across the whole landscape – the very eyeballs of the sun and the smile that hangs in the heavens. For Acep’s world of the rural mountain high country is one where the female essence pervades. Images and symbols come into prominence then fade at every stage of the poem. The veil of the woman, Dini, to whom the poem is addressed in passing, is likened to the veil of the mists that cover over the beauty and power of the mountain’s breath. But Dini is not only the woman addressed but also represents the femaleness of the environment and human interaction with it. We too are conscious of ‘the breath’, as it refreshes and invigorates the ricefields of the heart.

Mountains are the very core of the world and its breath, even if not always explicitly acknowledged, is always present.

But alongside these images the poet becomes aware of his (male) mortality and his failings as a man stained with blood is stabbed by the curve of the woman's eyelids. It appears as a very Persian style reference, as if to reinforce the power of contemplation and mystical union with the essence of the world the poet feels. Indeed, the poem concludes with the paying homage to the 'eyeball' that is the sun, but also the symbol for conscious existence. The final images include one of the thousand moths that swarm over the one and only – the dying sun, perhaps. The last stanza explores the imagery of the gradual setting of the sun, and the slow pulling away of the veil, the smoothness of the woman's face reflecting the incoming moonlight. As indicated in Chapter Two this poem was also used as the title poem to the collection of West Java poetry that featured at the *Cakrawala Sastra Indonesia* in 2004.²³² It is not hard to see why it was such an ideal choice to express the idea of highland West Java's symbiotic links with its mountains.²³³

Yet for a poet whose roots are in the mountainous high country, and who draws upon the breath of the mountains as a creative source of inspiration, it may come as something of a surprise to note that Acep has a rich range of poems that use the sea and its surroundings as thematic loci or starting points for more philosophical reflections on life. One can consider his poem, "Usia", a more traditional blending in beautiful imagery of the sea environment as symbol for the process of ageing. Far from the breath of the mountains, it is about the life cycle and the sea:

²³² Acep Zamzam Noor, (ed.), op. cit, (2004).

²³³ It is presumed Acep Zamzam Noor chose the title, in consultation with the organizing committee.

Usia

*Sebuah pulau
Memutih di rambut malam
Keajaiban musim tanpa suara
Terpahat di keheningan
Langit tembaga*

*Keagungan hujan
Dengan sulur-sulur cahayanya
Tersimpan jauh di lautan
Arus besar tanpa riak
Gema tanpa sahutan
Mengendap
Di kedalaman
Waktu*

*Abad-abad angin
Tahun-tahun kabut
Malam-malam murni
Antara kelahiran
Dan kejatuhan*

*Kita telanjang
Menghuni karang.*

(2002)

Age

The island becomes white
Amidst the tresses of evening
A miracle of a season that has no voice (of its own)
Chiselled in the purity of the
Copper skies

The majesty of rain
With shoots of its rays of light
Stored far out to sea
A great current without a ripple
An echo that settles as a sediment
Into the depths
Of time

Centuries of wind
Years of mists
Between birth

And its demise

We are naked

When we inhabit such a coral island

Images are gradually built up through the poem. Indeed, the sense of colour imagery begins right from the poem's commencement, as the poet suggests that the island is becoming white, amidst the tresses of evening. In this anthropomorphising of the coming night, and the tresses of evening, the poet is imagining the island, changing colour to a paler white (*memutih*), suggesting the metaphor of ageing. We sense that the island (of existence) is changing in the twilight of the coming night, death. He uses the idea of the human agency in this process, through his employment of the idea that words are chiselled, as signs in the sky to signify cosmic purpose. There is colour again, and it is copper, the metal of resonating depth. The sky becomes a coppery colour, as the bright twilight of the sun becomes harsh before it dies in the night. The next verse brings on the evening rain. Perhaps the rain is mixed with the sun's rays reflected on the water. We are led into the strongest metaphor of the poem, the idea of the great currents of life without a ripple showing, to emphasise its strength, in this verse. The poet conveys the idea of time passing over the eons with the idea that an echo is settling as sediment into the depths of time. The next verse continues this contrast between eons of time and the shortness of man's life span compared to this, between birth and its demise. Then the last verse ends with the image of the nakedness of human existence, of humans as if naked upon a coral platform just above the sea -- an unfolding image, full of colour, of symbolism and of metaphor about life.

The activist stream; a counterbalancing theme in Acep's poetry

I have so far given the impression that the only poetry written by this santri poet has been poetry of high art. Yet Acep is also an activist wrestling with the dilemmas that arise from a consideration of the responsibility of the artist in contemporary Indonesia.²³⁴ There is a corpus of his work, although not as well-known or perhaps as skilful an oeuvre, that deals with social issues and corruption. Some of this is included in the Tasikmalaya poetry anthologies. For example, there is the poem. "Ada Banyak Cara" which was included in the *Orasi kue serabi* anthology of West Java poetry published by the Gedung Kesenian Tasikmalaya in 2001.²³⁵ The poem, "Ada banyak cara", runs to 38 short couplets, commencing:

1.
*Ada banyak cara untuk menyengsarakan rakyat
Salah satunya menjadi konglomerat*
2.
*Ada banyak cara untuk melacurkan diri
Salah satunya menjadi politisi*
3.
*Ada banyak cara untuk menambah pundi-pundi
Salah satunya rajin ikut demonstrasi*
4.
*Ada banyak cara untuk tampil di televisi
Salah satunya menjadi buronan polisi....*

There are many ways

1.
There are many ways to torment the people

²³⁴ Acep set out some of his ideas on 'art and politics' in, 'Kesenian dan Politik', *Pikiran Rakyat*, 5 February 2004. This article was written to publicise a gathering or 'halakah budaya' on 13-15 February 2004 in Ciamis of fellow writers and artists to discuss the role of the arts in politics, specifically in the then-approaching election period.

²³⁵ Jojo Nuryanto, (ed.), op. cit. pp. 1-4.

One of them is to become a conglomerate

2.

There are many ways to prostitute oneself
One of these is to become a politician

3.

There are many ways to make money
One of these is to be assiduous in joining demonstrations

4.

There are many ways to appear on television
One of these is to become a fugitive from the police...²³⁶

By the time the 2004 election had eventuated Acep had apparently altered some of the lines and their ordering to allude to the then-prevailing circumstances.²³⁷ In ‘An artist-activist from a mock political party in Tasikmalaya’, Ahmad Suaedy writes about the political and artistic activities Acep was engaged in.²³⁸ He draws attention to these more politically edged, satirical poems of Acep’s such as “Ada banyak cara” (There are many ways) and “Kaupun tahu” (You knew as well).²³⁹ Suaedy also mentions Acep’s involvement with what the former terms a ‘mock political party’ in highlighting the issues that artists wish to bring into the public political domain.²⁴⁰ Many of these activities involved the placement of banners (spanduk) in public places.²⁴¹ Other

²³⁶ Translation by Iwan Dzulvan Amir (2005), in Margaret Kartomi (ed.) (2005), pp. 77-78.

²³⁷ I deduce this from a comparison of the translated version that appeared in the earlier *Orasi kue serabi* anthology (2001) produced by the Gedung Kesenian Tasikmalaya and the version that appears in the article by Ahmad Suaedy, ‘An artist-activist from a mock political party in Tasikmalaya’, in Margaret Kartomi (ed.), *The year of voting frequently; politics and artists in Indonesia’s 2004 elections* (Clayton, Victoria: Monash Asia Institute, 2005). In the latter the translation into English is by Iwan Dzulvan Amir.

²³⁸ Ahmad Suaedy, *ibid.* pp. 75-80.

²³⁹ *ibid.* pp. 77-78.

²⁴⁰ *Ibid.* pp. 75-76. The mock political party is Partai Nurul Sembako (PNS). I translate this as ‘Party of Light for the Necessities of Life’. 75-76.

²⁴¹ *ibid.* p. 76. Ahmad Suaedy gives some examples of the wording of these banners. The practice of placing banners in public places in Tasikmalaya was also mentioned in an article by Adi Wicaksana, ‘Politik spanduk di Tasikmalaya,’ *Pikiran Rakyat*, 1 August 2002. In another *Pikiran Rakyat* article in 2002, Acep Zamzam Noor, ‘BRB dan Tasikmalaya,’ *Pikiran Rakyat*, 29 December 2002, Acep mentions that he happened to be putting up banners on 4 December 2002 near the DPRD building and the Parapatan

activities included parades of artists and writers, such as the 3 April 2004 parade around Tasikmalaya.²⁴² Such activism, and its entry through his satirical poems into his overall genre, suggests that the idea of retreat from the world that might at first be associated with the mystical and meditative aspects of his Sufist poetry, is not what Acep has in mind. Clearly he sees room for both styles in his total oeuvre, as satirical references are juxtaposed against meditation, and seems to be able to encompass the whole range of activities that might be embraced as ‘practical *tasuwuf*’, mentioned in the introduction to this chapter.

Jalan menuju rumahmu; a poetic credo

In closing this chapter on Acep’s poetry it is fitting that we return to a poem written in 1986, but which Acep used in 2004 as his signature poem for a collected works with which he won the SEA Write Award in late 2005.²⁴³ Although written in 1986, but not included by Aveling in his *Secrets Need Words* selection of Acep’s poetry, it is possible to see the poem, “Jalan Menuju Rumahmu”, also as an example of the Sufist poetic stream that Acep has pursued in his writings:

Jalan Menuju Rumahmu

Jalan menuju rumahmu kian memanjang

Lima Tasikmalaya when he received the news of the death of Bandung poet, Beni R. Budiman, husband of Nenden Lilis (See Chapter Three). He writes in the article: “Selain karena hobi, saya dan teman-teman menganggap memasang spanduk yang biasa dilakukan setelah jalanan sepi ini sebagai “tugas” negara. Sampaikan kebenaran meskipun hanya lewat spanduk, begitulah kira-kira alasan kami. Maka dengan semangat “jihad” kami berjalan kaki menggotong tangga, memanjat pohon, menaiki tiang listrik atau melompati kawat berduri yang dipasang pada toko.” He ends the article with the words: “Selamat jalan, BRB, untuk menenangmu kami akan terus memasang spanduk”.

²⁴² Acep Zamzam Noor, Press release of PNS, 28 March 2004.

²⁴³ Ahda Imran, ‘Jalan Munuju SEA Write Award 2005’, *Pikiran Rakyat*, 30 July 2005. The South East Asia (SEA) Writ(ing) Award has been awarded by the King of Thailand since 1987 for the best literary works in South Est Asia. The Indonesian committee, under the auspices of the Indonesian Department of Education and the Pusat Bahasa consisted of: Supardi Djoko Damono, Abdul Razak Zaidan, Boen Oemarjati, Taufiq Ismail and Sutardji Calzoum Bachri.

*Udara berkabut dan dingin subuh
Membungkus perbukitan. Aku menggelepar
Di tengah salak anjing dan ringkik kuda
Engkau di mana? Angin mengupas lembar-lembar
Kulitku dan terbongkarlah kesepian dari tulang-tulang
Rusukku. Bulan semakin samar dan gemetar*

*Aku menyusuri pantai, menghitung lokan dan bicara
Pada batu karang. Jalan menuju rumahmu kian lengang
Udara semakin tiris dan langit menaburkan serbuk
Gerimis. Aku pun mengalun bersama gelombang
Meliuk mengikuti topan dan jumpalitan
Bagai ikan. Tapi matamu kian tak tergambarkan*

*Kulit-kulit kayu, daun-daun lontar, kertas-kertas tak lagi
Menuliskan iguaanku. Semuanya berterbangan dan hangus
Seperti putaran waktu. Kini tak ada lagi sisa
Tak ada lagi yang tinggal pada pasir dan kelopakku
Kian runcing dan pucat. Kembali aku bergulingan
Bagai cacing. Bersujud lama sekali*

*Engkau siapa? Sebab telah kutatah nisan yang indah
Telah kutulis sajak-sajak paling sunyi*

(1986)

The Road to your House

The road towards your house becomes longer and longer
The sky is hazy and the cold dawn
Draws a veil over the hills. I am startled
By the barking of dogs and the neighing of a horse:
Where are you? The wind makes the hair on my skin
Bristle with the cold and right down to my bare bones
My feelings of aloneness are utterly exposed.
The trembling moon becomes dimmer and dimmer;
It trembles still.

I follow the beach line, counting the shellfish along the way and
Chat to the coral. The way to your house is becoming so lonely and
Desolate. The air seems to be becoming more and more porous
And the sky spreads out its powdery mists.
I sway as the waves sway and I bend as the violent storms
And leap like the fish. And yet, I can no longer grasp
The form and image that are painted by your eyes.

The bark of trees, the *lontar* leaves, paper sheets, no longer

Can function to record my dreams.
Everything is flying past me and burnt to a crisp
Like the passing of time. Now there is nothingness
There is nothing on the beach and my eyelids
Are becoming thinner and paler. I wriggle over as if a mere worm.
I am prostrate in prayer for so long a time

Who are you? That is the question. I have chiselled a beautiful
Gravestone. I have written poems of such great solitude.

The poem was written when Acep was in his late twenties but still defining his poetic voice. I interpret “Jalan Menuju Rumahmu”, in part as a statement of the role and quest of the poet for the immanent God, who is Everlasting. The road never ends. It is always ongoing, as Acep says in the line: “Jalan menuju rumahmu kian memanjang.” What is the house or ‘rumah’? Perhaps it is both a statement of ‘the oneness with God’ and also a description of existence. Here Acep is aligning his task and journey, both as a religious believer but also as a poet, with the ways in which ‘signs’ and ‘gravestones of words’ mark the human traces of this spiritual journey. We can also trace from Persian poetry the way in which the imagery of the house is used to symbolise worldly human existence and the poet’s aspiration to be ‘one with God’. The quest for God is eternal, never ending, broken only by the recognition of ‘markers’ along the way.

There are the sensations of the hazy dawn and coldness of the sky, all heightening the sense of a journey as often fraught with difficulties. Additionally, the poem uses the sensations of the body’s reactions to signify inner feelings, and even the attribution of psychological state to physical qualities of parts of the body. So, too, Acep employs references to the moon, giving the idea of the sensation of movement to the moon, as a counterpoint to the descriptions of the effect of the dawn upon the poet’s body. He once again restates nature’s sensations, of the moist air, of the sky spreading its powdery mists.

He mentions the billowing waves and in lines reminiscent of “Para kekasih”, he describes his alignment with the actions of the fish. He wants to leap, like the fish.

The poet then writes about the difficulty he is experiencing making out the nature of the images he sees, perhaps suggesting that even words are not sufficient to describe this quest. He hints that his emotions and the sensations of an ordinary person cannot be expressed in paper, in the bark of trees, and writing is no longer sufficient to express the ‘igauan’ or heightened sensations he is experiencing. The past seems to be flying past, burnt to a crisp, like the passage of time. There is a sense of trance. Indeed, Acep often uses in his poems this ‘sense of sudden movement’, even of trance, to express the soul in pilgrimage. Then he alludes to the idea of the nothingness of existence – ‘ketiadaan’.

There is no human movement, or sense of human souls, on the beach. The effect of this is enhanced by his description of the eyelids becoming thinner and paler, a common allusion in Sufist poetry to the role of the eyelids as expression of human intersection with the eternal. Then he introduces the symbolic reference to human insignificance – the wriggling worm. He is prostrate in prayer. And the question arises. What is the meaning of this? The next two lines seem to answer his question. Perhaps the poem’s last lines show that he is aware of his own journey as a poet. It becomes a poetic credo, drawing together much of what Acep has written about the world, the environment, self discovery, love and spirituality.²⁴⁴ When written in 1986 the poem was

²⁴⁴ Acep mentions the importance of poetry in his life in the following extract from the Introduction to *Jalan menuju Rumahmu*: “...tanpa terasa puisi telah menjadi jalan hidup saya telah menjadi nafas saya...” Acep Zamzam Noor, (2004), p.x.

an initial statement of his poetic and religious journeying. But by 2004 it had become the title poem for his collected poetic works published by Grasindo.²⁴⁵

Conclusion

I have covered aspects of the Indonesian language poetry of Acep Zamzam Noor that demonstrate the breadth of his poetry writing, beyond those poems that might be considered to easily fall under the rubric ‘new Sufi’ identified by Aveling. Perhaps one of the most interesting aspects of Acep’s total oeuvre has been his willingness to incorporate aestheticism in the broadest sense in the way in which he responds to the sights and sounds and phenomena of Europe that he visited in 1991-93, and again in 1997. It is the Sufist thread identifiable in his own poetry, coupled with the high value he also places upon aestheticism, that gives Acep such an ideal foundation to explore in more depth his ideas of form, visual imagery and beauty. These come to fruition in poems such as “Buat Malika Hamoudi”. But the richness of his European experience also finds its way back into the poetry of the high country. Like West Java poets before him, such as Ramadhan for example, he returned from Europe with a more focussed appreciation of the colours and special characteristics of his homeland. Indeed, as his poem “Nafas Gunung” shows, just as in the earlier “Cipasung”, he succeeds in conveying the essence of the interaction between poet and his world, symbolising existence through the multi-layered imagery he creates. But so too is ‘his painter’s brush’ evident in his sketch of ageing, in the symbolism of the coral island in a rain shower, as in “Usia”.

Certainly, there is poetry that is akin to that of other ‘new Sufis’. But even in his poems of the 1980s, Acep is already showing that his use of colour and his ability to

²⁴⁵ Acep Zamzam Noor, *Jalan Menuju Rumahmu: Pilihan Sajak* (Jakarta: Grasindo, 2004).

move between bodily image and spiritual images are far beyond the others. Of course, there are differing interpretations possible concerning the question of the identification of Sufism in Acep's poetry. Fellow poet, Joko Pinurbo, whose comments have been mentioned in Chapter Three concerning the concentration of much recent poetry from West Java on local themes and environmental issues, highlights what he calls the 'spiritual background' or *latar batin* of Acep's treatment of the landscape in his poetry.²⁴⁶ These comments suggest that to a poet like Joko Pinurbo, the question of whether some of Acep's poetry has Sufist elements, is of no specific interest. On the other hand, where he does show great critical insight concerning Acep's poetry is in his references to the visual and artistic elements in Acep's poetry.²⁴⁷

In commenting on the 2004 collection *Jalan Menuju Rumahmu*, Acep preferred to characterise the poems he has chosen for the collected works edition as thematically being linked together under the rubrics of the world and the environment, love, spirituality and belief, and self-awareness.²⁴⁸ I suggest that this is, in part, to suggest the broadest possible thematic interpretation of his poetry. He is eschewing any *specific* Sufist interpretations or attributions that might perhaps be considered unsustainable by the broad mass of his potential readership. Yet Soni Farid Maulana writes of *Jalan Menuju Rumahmu* that its 'Sufist breath' (nafas sufisme).²⁴⁹ Certainly, Aveling believed

²⁴⁶ Joko Pinurbo, op.cit, (1999), pp. 43-44. Pinurbo states, inter alia: "Acep banyak menulis sajak suasana yang menjadikan alam sebagai latanya. Pada Acep, alam dicerap bukan sekadar sebagai latar fisik, melainkan pula latar batin." He also highlights the 'solitude' that seems to be such a characteristic of Acep's poetry: 'kesunyian' (walaupun mungkin bukan kesunyian total) di tengah amuk dan kekalutan pada karya beberapa penyair. Misalnya, karya Acep Zamzam Noor."

²⁴⁷ ibid.

²⁴⁸ 'secara tema masih ada kaitan satu sama lain (alam, lingkungan, cinta, keimanan, dan pencarian diri).' Acep Zamzam Noor, op.cit. (2004), p. x

²⁴⁹ "Nafas sufisme di dalam bukunya ini bisa kita rasakan. Di situ sang penyair berupaya sedemikian rupa renungan-renungannya religius, yang diakibatkan oleh meluapnya rasa cinta yang demikian melimpah dan

that the poetry he was discussing in *Secrets Need Words* had these characteristics, although he never explicitly justified his views. In part, this is understandable as he was commenting upon the fact that Indonesian poets and commentators themselves had drawn attention to the use of the term, 'new Sufi'.²⁵⁰ What can be said as a result of this divergence of views? Ultimately, it is a matter of judgement by Indonesian Muslim and other literary critics -- and poets themselves -- as to whether they consider there are Sufist elements in Acep's poetry. There is no universal agreement within the ranks of modern Indonesian literary critics on the links between Sufist thought and Indonesian Islamic poetry. Indeed, in an article in *www Islam Liberal* of 17 October 2005 Acep implicitly acknowledges this.²⁵¹

Notwithstanding his more activist and satirical kinds of poems, one of Acep Zamzam Noor's major achievements has been to take the idea of what it means to be a 'santri' poet and push it into areas never really explored in contemporary Indonesian language poetry. As I mentioned above, it goes beyond the form and imagery of the other 'new Sufist' poets Aveling identifies. He sees the potential for creativity of form, visual richness and movement and can produce poetry, that, to reverse Aveling's comments, is just as accessible, admittedly through translation, by the most modernist of European readers, yet able to be appreciated by his Indonesian-speaking, predominantly Muslim readership.

mendalam kepada Allah Swt". Soni Farid Maulana, 'Acep, "Pertemuan Kecil", dan Hadiah Sastra', *Pikiran Rakyat*, 27 July 2005.

²⁵⁰ Aveling, *op.cit.* (2001), p.233.

²⁵¹ Acep Zamzam Noor, www.islamlib.com/id/index.php?page=article&id=906 accessed on 17 October 2005.

CONCLUSION

I have set out in this thesis to map aspects of contemporary Indonesian language poetry from West Java. In doing so, I have shown how the writing of poetry in West Java is embedded in a culture that sustains an extensive network of associations and events that in many respects replicates in Bandung as well as in other regional centres the literary life of the nation's capital. In this way, the nation is drawn into the region, while at the same time the region claims space in the national literary tradition. This dynamic interplay between the nation and region leads me to conclude that the contemporary Indonesian language poetry from West Java should best be considered as regional manifestations of the national literature, rather than a literature that sets out to be 'distinctly regional'. However, while the interplay of local, regional, national and even global influences is always present, the key tension in this literature is the way in which it focuses on 'place' and its absence. This is what characterizes this particular regional manifestation of the national literary tradition.

In my opening chapter, I mentioned the pioneering account by Aveling of developments in Indonesian language poetry that has greatly assisted in mapping some of the forms poetry took in the period when Soeharto was president of Indonesia. But that account does not seek to portray the specific ways in which different contributions were coming from the regions to inform the national literary tradition. I have argued for the importance of Rosidi's contribution, which has been to set out a place for regional literature, as a part of the many-faceted picture that is modern Indonesian literature as it has developed since independence from the Dutch. The key point is that, unlike champions of the national culture like Alisjahbana, Rosidi has argued persuasively that a

uniform assumption that regional means old fashioned and dying away is a misreading of the possibilities opened up by Indonesia's early constitution makers when they turned their gaze to the kind of cultural policies that should form the foundation of the new state.

I have taken issue with those who would argue that 'regional literature' refers only to literature in a regional language. This thesis is influenced strongly by the evidence that Derks presents, suggesting that there is a great deal happening in the local areas in Indonesian language literature that is beyond the centralizing tendencies that emanate from Jakarta. Hence my observation that there has been a lack of attention to Indonesian language literature, notably poetry, that is being written in the regions. There have been so far no real attempts, beyond Maier's work on literature from Riau, to show how we should regard the poetry being produced in the national language from within the regions outside Jakarta.

This thesis sets out to suggest how these questions might be answered, by examining the writing of poetry in the Indonesian language in a region that stands in distinctive relation to the national centre by virtue of its contiguous geographical proximity. Particularly in the context of changes described by the poets in relation to the Bandung highlands, no other region, apart from Bali perhaps, has had built up around it such a core of ideas about what was beautiful and what has been lost from its primordial state.

To frame the discussion, it was necessary first to set some definitions. The focus on the case of West Java meant that I have had to give some background about the administrative unit that is provincial West Java now. In this context, I mentioned the

gradual movement beyond the idea of a single ethnic group and regional language to a more multicultural view of the demographics of West Java. At the same time, it was necessary to note that the encroachments of the Jakarta metropolis now reach far into West Java in a cultural sense. The result has been that my study primarily refers to the poetry of the highlands of Priangan, to the exclusion of the work by poets around Depok who more closely identify with the capital.

Another disadvantage of considering contemporary Indonesian literature solely from the perspective of the development of a national tradition centred on Jakarta is that we often fail to appreciate the extent to which literary associational life is supportive of the creative work of individual writers. Even if the act of writing a new poem is a solitary process, it is very much the case, and especially for the development of poetry in the regions, that associations are of great importance. In Chapter Two, I have shown in some detail just how in the example of Tasikmalaya, the general literary association, the Sanggar Sastra Tasikmalaya, has acted to foster the production and dissemination of Indonesian language poetry, not just in its immediate environs, but even throughout much of West Java. These links primarily draw in those poets living within the geographical area of West Java, but while associational life may be based locally and regionally, there is no evidence to suggest that those who direct these associations are seeking to establish a separate regional literary consciousness.

Rather, the anthologies produced by and the membership attracted to these associations seem more focused on fulfilling literary objectives related to cultural participation in the Indonesian state. This means that unlike the picture suggested by

Derks, there are in the West Java case, points of intersection between local and the national, as in the examples of the *Festival Puisi Internasional Indonesia 2002* and the *Cakrawala Sastra Indonesia* in 2004 serve to illustrate.

It was the *Muktamar Penyair Jawa Barat* in 2003 that focused a great deal of attention upon the key place of localism in the map of West Java Indonesia language poetry. Indeed, I have argued that localism in poetry has been a powerful thematic thread running through a great deal of the poetry written in West Java. I suggested that the pivotal poem by Ramadhan KH about West Java, “Priangan si Jelita”, which was a key early marker for the use of the Indonesian language by West Java poets to portray aspects of the regional environment to a wider readership, has been the subject of reinterpretation by a younger generation of regional poets. In much of the contemporary poetry writing from Bandung, this reinterpretation has become so widespread that it has led to the emergence of a new stylistic genre, *Priangan si derita*. Thus the sense of attachment to the locality – once the hallmark of earlier poetry from region – has been lost, being replaced by a more ambiguous and ambivalent stance, including poetry now that takes as its sub-theme the environmental degradation of the locality. Here the tensions between past and present conceptions of the natural and man-made world of the Priangan highlands are played out. Indeed, it is this last element that has become such a potent theme in contemporary poetry, wherein conceptions of the way in which the physical landscape have been altered becomes symptomatic, in the poet’s eyes at least, of changes to the moral and political landscape of the region as well.

As regionally-based poets writing within the mainstream of contemporary Indonesian poetry, poets from West Java have been successful in putting in creative form their ideas about the environment, (*alam*), and the interactions between humankind (*manusia*) and the environment. The strength of this regional thread of Indonesian language poetry from West Java of the late part of the 20th century and early 21st century has often been its playing out of the theme of the rural/urban interface. Its strength also lies in its portrayal of the environment, the *alam*, beyond the cityscape of the Jakarta metropolis.

Yet it would be misleading to suggest that these are the only ways in which local environmental themes are dealt with by West Java poets writing in Indonesian. In Chapters Four and Five I considered the contrasting styles of Nenden Lilis Aisyah and Acep Zamzam Noor, two of West Java's most prominent poets writing in Indonesian today. The significance of the poetry of Nenden Lilis Aisyah lies in the fact that she brings to the national canon of contemporary Indonesian poetry a distinct female voice. Her work replicates some of the style adopted by Bandung male poets about exploitation, but in her poems the theme of exploitation is couched in a distinctly female sense of mystery. Her poetry appeared in every event from 2002 to 2004 where local and regional associational activities drew attention to the poetry of women poets. It has been her contribution to broaden out the way in which poetry by women at the end of the 20th and the beginning of the 21st century can be regarded. In her work there is not just a focus on exploitation, but an elusive ability to lay before us the mystery of life. Few poets can balance the inevitable tensions between portrayal of the hard edged realism of human existence with its counterpoints of allusion and mystery.

But while her poetry is very much grounded in the symbols of rural life, Nenden takes her readers beyond the local environment of the high country of West Java. We do not feel in reading her poetry that we are only in West Java or Indonesia for that matter. Rather Nenden's readers find themselves in the realm of 'negeri sihir', not just as a place, but a state of mind. The images of West Java are still present, but Nenden's work is the epitome of the combination of place and placelessness that characterizes contemporary Indonesian language poetry from West Java. It is as though writing from the 'periphery' means that the poet is unconsciously driven to reassert the importance of the rural and local but in ways that go beyond the specifics.

This same combination of place and its absence can be seen in the poetry of Acep Zamzam Noor. There are few references in Acep's poetry to Sundanese mythology or a conscious stress upon the idea of Sundanese-ness in his poetry, even though we can see many direct and indirect references to the ideas of the mountains as background. The idea of 'nafas gunung', seen in his poem which became as the title of the 2004 anthology from West Java in the *Cakrawala* festival in Jakarta is a good indicator of this. The key element driving the poem is the theme of the richness and power associated with the idea of the mountain. Although the volcanic origins of much of the high country are not directly mentioned, it is clear that Acep is greatly influenced by the symbolism of the force of the volcano. Likewise, Nenden Lilis Aisyah also does not generally allude to ideas of specific attachment to a traditional sense of homeland and Sundanese mythology, however much the nature imagery of her poems is redolent of the Priangan high country.

Thus the evidence is that the current generation of West Java poets writing in Indonesian are more concerned to portray the problems of their environment, the nature of their own spiritual journeys and their conceptualisation of the essential nature of human existence rather than to suggest ideas of attachment to a region, as either an ethnic or administratively defined area, or to hark back to earlier times when there were specific language and ethnic markers that reflected a Sundanese identity in West Java. Indeed, as I suggested in my opening chapter, this confirms the fact that it is no longer possible to see West Java as *solely* an ethnically and linguistically Sundanese heartland, but rather as one with the overlay of a dynamic multicultural province where poets of many regional and ethnic backgrounds are living and working in a common literary culture.

Acep Zamzam Noor's achievement is not just to traverse a huge range of literary landscape, from the localised concerns of his 'Ada banyak cara' style, through the religious poetry that is heavily infused with the traditions derived from Islamic Sufism, to the range of aesthetic experiences that characterises much of the poetry from Europe. His poetry is bound up with a relentless search for the universals in human existence. Though primarily writing from the vantage point of living in rural West Java, as his selection for the SEA Write Award in 2005 and his role in each of the events I have mentioned shows, he is very much a participant in the national level tradition of Indonesian literature.

Thus this thesis has attempted to show how poetry that emanates from West Java region is very much part of an evolving national tradition of Indonesian language poetry. I hope that my research is a contribution to understanding the vital role which regional centres play, not just in terms of the production of literary works within the unbroken

links in a chain of literary life across Indonesia. A strong tradition of Indonesian language poetry is developing in the region of West Java, and it can rightly be seen in many respects as the regional manifestations of this broadly defined national tradition. The thesis has shown that it is possible for contemporary Indonesian poets to be both local in their concerns and universal in their outlook, to benefit from the support that their local and regional literary associations offer them, and to have their works placed squarely within the developing Indonesian national literary canon. In this respect, contemporary Indonesian language poetry from West Java gives cause for literary optimism in the years ahead.

APPENDIX A

Some biographical and publication information about the West Java poets whose work is covered in more detail in the thesis

Acep Zamzam Noor

Acep Zamzam Noor was born in Tasikmalaya on 28 February 1960. His early years were spent in the Pondok Pesantren Cipasung, Tasikmalaya, but he completed his high school education in 1980 at Pondok Pesantren As-Syafi'iyah, Jakarta. He then undertook studies in the Art in the Faculty of Art and Design at ITB in Bandung from 1980 to 1987. He received a scholarship from the Italian government to study at the Università Italiana per Stranieri, Perugia and remained in Italy for the period 1991 to 1993. He visited Europe again in 1997. His poetry has been featured in both regional and Jakarta mass media, such as *Pikiran Rakyat*, *Kedaulatan Rakyat*, *Suara Merdeka*, *Jawa Pos*, *Surabaya Post*, *Bali Pos*, *Republika*, *Media Indonesia*, *Suara Pembaruan*, *Suara Karya Minggu*, *Berita Buana*, *Amana Ulumul Qur'an*, literary magazine *Horison*, cultural journal *Kalam*, *Puisi* journal and also in *Dewan Sastra* as well as in the Malaysian poetry journal, *Perisa*. Much of his poetry has been collected in *Tamparkah Mukaku* (1982), *Aku Kini Doa* (1986), *Kasidah Sunyi* (1989), *Dari Kota Hujan* (1996), *Di Luar Kata* (1996), *Di Atas Umbria* (1999) and *Jalan Menuju Rumahmu* (2004). He also published a collection of Sundanese language poetry, *Dayeuh Matapoe* in 1993. Acep Zamzam Noor played a key role in curating the selection of works by West Java poets to be included in the *Cakrawala Sastra Indonesia* festival held in September 2004. He was awarded the SEA Write Award in September 2005 for his collection, "Jalan Menuju Rumahmu".

Juniarso Ridwan

Juniarso Ridwan was born on 10 Juni 1955 in Bandung. Whilst he was a student at Institut Teknologi Bandung (ITB) he was active in the groups Grup Apresiasi Sastra (GAS) and Studi Teater Mahasiswa (Stema). His creative writing has been published in *Pikiran Rakyat, Kompas, Suara Pembaruan, Mandala, Pelita, Media Indonesia, Suara Karya, Aktuil, Bandung Pos, Suara Merdeka, Galamedia, Mangle, Galura, Kania, Koran Tempo, Republika, Horison, Ulumul Qur'an* and other publications. He has read his poetry upon invitation in Purwokerto, Solo, Yogyakarta, Depok, Garut, Indramayu, Cirebon, Tasikmalaya, Denpasar and Jakarta (Taman Ismail Marzuki). He was one of the poets who read in the 1999 season at Den Haag, Netherlands. In 2002 he was chair of the Bandung organising committee for the Bandung leg of the Festival Puisi Internasional Indonesia and he also read poems at that Festival. His published collections of Indonesian language poetry are: *Dua Penyair di Depan* (1976), *Penipu Waktu* (1979), *Robocop* (1994), *Tanah Terluka* (1996), *Air Mengukir Ikan* (2000) and *Semua sudah berubah, Tuan* (2006). His poetry is included in the following anthologies: *Orba* (1994), *Malam 1000 Bulan* (1994), *Cermin Alam* (1996), *Dari Bumi Lada* (1996), *Songket I* (1996), *Sajak Kudus* (1997), *Tangan Besi* (1997), *Kitab Puisi Horison Sastra Indonesia* (2002) and *Gelombang Mata Langit* (2002), the latter being a joint publication with Soni Farid Maulana. His books of poetry written in Sundanese are: *Lalaki Langit* (1987) and *Langit Katiga* (1996). His poetry in Sundanese received awards from Lembaga Basa jeung Sastra Sunda (LBSS) in 1996 and again in 2000. His books for children are: *Budak Motekar* (1984) and *Pengalaman Regu Macan* (1984). Details of his literary works and activities

are included in the *Ensiklopedia Sunda* (2000). His most recent publication is *Semua Telah Berubah, Tuan.* (2006).

Nenden Lilis Aisyah

Nenden Lilis A. was born in Malangbong, Garut on 26 September 1971. She graduated in Indonesian language and literature from FPBS IKIP Bandung. Her writings have included poetry, essays, short stories and book reviews, appearing in *Kompas*, *Ulumul Qur'an*, *Republika*, *Media Indonesia*, *Pikiran Rakyat*, *Bandung Pos*, *Mitra Desa*, *Hai Isola* and other newspaper and magazine publications. Her poetry has also been included in various anthologies, particularly those edited by Korrie Layun Lampan. The anthologies are: *Mimbar Penyair Abad 21* (1996), *Malam Seribu Bulan* (1997), *Ungu: Antologi Puisi Wanita Penyair Indonesia* (1997), *Tangan Besi* (1998), *Angkatan 2000 dalam Sastra Indonesia* (2000), *Gelak Esai dan Gelombang Sajak Anno 2001* (2001), *Muktamar: Antologi Penyair Jawa Barat* (2003) and *Bunga yang Berserak* (2003). Her own anthology of collected poetry appeared in 1999 under the title *Negeri Sihir*.

Nenden Lilis' short stories have appeared in various anthologies: *Dunia Ibu: Antologi Cerita Pendek Wanita Cerpenis Indonesia* (Edited by Korrie Layun Rampan), *Apresiasi Cerita Pendek Indonesia Mutakhir 2* and also in *Dua Tengkorak Kepala*, *Cerpen Pilihan Kompas 2000*. In 1999 she visited Holland to attend the *Winternachten Festival* in Den Haag, and also visited France where she presenting her works to Indonesian-speaking audiences in Paris. In 2004 she was part of a group of female poets from West Java visiting Malaysia for literary performances.

Soni Farid Maulana

Soni Farid Maulana was born in Tasikmalaya on 19 February 1962. Following his graduation from SMA Pancasila Tasikmalaya in 1982 he went on to study Theatre Studies at STSI, Bandung. Although he had started writing poetry in his school years, his first publications of poetry were in the 1980s in the young literary segment known as *Pertemuan Kecil*, then under the stewardship of poet K. M. Saini, in the Bandung paper, *Pikiran Rakyat*. He later had poetry published in *Berita Buana*, whose literary columns were organised by poet Abdul Hadi W.M. Apart from these publications his poetry has also appeared in *Suara Karya*, *Sinar Harapan*, *Media Indonesia*, *Republika*, in *Bentara* literary segment in *Kompas*, in the *Khazanah* literary segment in *Pikiran Rakyat* (*HU Pikiran Rakyat*), *Suara Pembaruan*, the literary magazine *Horison* and various other publications.

Some of his poetry was translated into Dutch by Prof. Dr. A. Teeuw and Linde Voute for inclusion in the 1999 anthology *Winternachten* (Den Haag, 1999), and also into German by Dr Berthold Damshausser, in *Orientierungen*, 2/2000, University of Bonn, Germany.

There is an entry about his literary writing in Indonesian and Sundanese in the *Ensiklopedi Sunda*. His poetry collections published include: *Di Luar Mimpi* (1997), *Kita Lahir sebagai Dongengan* (2000), *Anak Kabut* (2002), with Juniarso Ridwan, *Gelombang Mata Langit* (2002), *Selepas Kata* (2004), *Tepi Waktu Tepi Salju* (2004), *Variasi Parijs van Java* (2004) and *Secangkir Teh* (2005). Also published is a collection of short stories, *Di Ranjangmu Aku Tahu Aku Mati* (2004). His poetry has been in the various anthologies: *Dari Hamzah Fansuri ke Handayani* (2001), *Gelak Esai dan Ombak Sajak* (2001), *Horison Sastra Indonesia: Kitab Puisi* (2002), *Hijau Kelon dan Puisi 2002*

(2002), *Puisi tak pernah Pergi* (2003) and *Muktamar: Antologi Penyair Jabar* (2003). He has read his poetry upon invitation from the Dewan Kesenian Jakarta (DKJ) at Taman Ismail Marzuki (TIM) Jakarta, including at the forum *Temu Budaya 1986*, and *Puisi Indonesia 1987*. In 1990, he attended the *South East Asian Writers Conference* in Quezon City, Philippines, and was part of the 1999 *Festival de Winternachten* in Den Haag along with Rendra, Agus R. Sarjono, Juniarso Ridwan and Nenden Lilis A.

In 1999, in his role as a journalist with *Pikiran Rakyat* in Bandung he received the Anugerah Jurnalistik Zulharmans from PWI Pusat for his published article *Taufiq Ismail Penyair yang Peka Terhadap Sejarah* which appeared in *Pikiran Rakyat*. He edited the *Khazanah* literary segment of *Pikiran Rakyat* for many years until July 2005.

APPENDIX B

Names of the 30 poets of the anthology *Muktamar: antologi puisi penyair jabar (2002)*

No	Name	Area of origin
1	Diro Aritonang	Bandung
2	Juniarso Ridwan	Bandung
3	Soni Farid Maulana	Bandung
4	Nenden Lilis A	Bandung
5	A Faisal Imron	Bandung
6	Syilfi Purnama Sari	Bandung
7	Deddy Koral	Bandung
8	Eriyandi Budiman	Bandung
9	Atasi Amin	Bandung
10	Nazarudin Azhar	Tasikmalaya
11	Sarabunis Mubarak	Tasikmalaya
12	Nina Minareli	Tasikmalaya
13	Ashmansyah Timutiah	Tasikmalaya
14	Kidung Purnama	Ciamis
15	Ratna Ayu Budiarti	Garut
16	S Dimarulloh	Garut
17	Darda Surya Pertama	Garut
18	Nizar Kobani	Sumedang
19	Tati Haryati	Sumedang
20	Ahmad Syubbanuddin Alwy	Cirebon
21	Sy Endar Syam	Cirebon
22	Pandu A Hamzah	Kuningan
23	Ahmad Taufik Akbar	Subang
24	Diah Hadaning	Bogor
25	Lukman A Sya	Sukabumi
26	Eriyanti Nurmala Dewi	Sukabumi
27	Cecep Syamsul Hari	Cimahi
28	Deden Abdul Aziz	Cianjur
29	Nandang Darana	Majalengka
30	Erwan Juhara	Majalengka

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