

## Practices of translation and starting a small press

Andy Fuller & Nuraini Juliastuti

Translation implies the standard practice of transferring one text into another language. However, it also offers opportunities for shifting one project to another context. From 'Indonesian' to 'English' is perhaps a too-easy formulation of the role of a translator. More challenging (and, more pressing) is how to translate a colonizing-perspective into a decolonizing imagination of language and literary practice. This essay will address efforts in this direction by translators and publishers of Indonesian literature, including the author's own small press.

The translation of Indonesian literature into English has been marked by strong roles played by a very few. The two most well-known and productive translators are Harry Aveling of Monash University (formerly a professor at La Trobe University) and John McGlynn, one of the founders of the Lontar Foundation in Jakarta. Aveling, active also as a scholar and researcher, has translated dozens of texts. McGlynn's Lontar has published dozens of novels and volumes of short stories and poems over their 30-year history.

'Modern Indonesian literature' in English is given depth through the contribution of these two figures. Important roles have also been played by area studies scholars, who focus on Indonesian literature – i.e., those who contextualise, analyse and interpret the texts (primarily in their original language), such as Henk Maier, Keith Foulcher and Pam Allen. These scholars' work covers a much broader scope of texts than those which have been translated into English. Maier's work reaches across national borders and explores patterns happening in the Malay-archipelago and those of the peninsula.

Aveling has made his contribution through the dual role of academic and translator. Aveling's first translations were published during the 1970s by branches of relatively large publishing houses such as Heinemann and Oxford University Press. University of Queensland Press also published translations of Indonesian literature. Those might have

been the good ol' days when a non-specialist publisher considered it good sense to make writings from Indonesia, Malaysia, Vietnam and elsewhere available to the lay reader. Over time, those series have fallen by the wayside, leaving a publisher like Lontar to do the heavy lifting of making a critical mass of texts available in English. The choice for translators like Aveling for finding a publisher have largely been limited to Lontar or academic presses. Options are, however, diversifying.

Aveling usually accompanies his translations with short introductions, which often place the stories in the social-cultural context in which they were written. These introductions become a translator intervention, where the translator leaves her or his mediating steps clearly marked. Aveling, as such, voices his interpretation of the stories and may indicate his reasoning for his translation style. His translations of the activist and poet WS Rendra during the 1980-90s, and those of Dorothea Rosa Herliany during the 2000s, are perhaps his best known. Translating informs Aveling's scholarship and vice versa.

In contrast to the relative anonymity of many translated senior Indonesian authors, is the fame and notoriety through translations, reviews and festival invitations of young, emerging authors. Two of the most prominent examples are Eka Kurniawan with his novel *Beauty is a Wound* (Text Publishing, 2015) and Intan Paramaditha, with her collection of short stories *Apple and Knife* (translated by Stephen Epstein and published by Brow Books, 2018). Eka's novel fitted well into the genre of magic realism and was glowingly endorsed by the late Benedict Anderson, unquestionably the most well-known scholar of Indonesia through his book *Imagined Communities* (1983). Anderson was also an early translator and advocate of Pramoedya's writings. Intan's emergence as a writer of fiction has been concomitant with her mobility and work as a researcher: she was a lecturer at the University of Indonesia, before doing her PhD in New York, which included stints in the Netherlands, before moving to Sydney to take up a position at

Macquarie University. An accomplished public speaker with a strong social media presence, Intan is fluent and comfortable in a range of contexts and platforms. She is mobile and cosmopolitan and knowledgeable of her literary background and trajectory.

In 2018, Nuraini Juliastuti and I started a small press, *Reading Sideways Press*, which predominantly focuses on the translation and publication of Indonesian literary works by both established and less known authors. Partly in thanks to the LitRI program of the Indonesian Ministry for Culture and Education, we have works in progress by Afrizal Malna and Seno Gumira Ajidarma, to be published in 2019. Collaboration between author, translator and editor is largely done informally and at a geographic distance.

Having a holiday or going home (*berlibur* or *pulang*) are two ideas which inform and challenge our translation practice, and with which we seek to contest a standard of translation based on bringing the classics of one language into another. Translation does not only aim to satisfy the desire for understanding a cultural context through reading materials. In using translation as the main reference for our small press, we seek to move it away from being a mere tool of cultural production. We re-imagine translation as a political site in order to pose relevant questions about our histories and contexts. We ask about what is left that we can do, and to what extent we can respect the stories of the others.

Our translation of Arista Devi is one such case. Arista Devi is an Indonesian domestic worker in Hong Kong, who is also a prolific writer. At the same time, her works are not usually acknowledged as a representative of Indonesian literature. To translate Arista Devi's works can be regarded as an attempt to present a new voice – but our efforts seek to go deeper than that. We are seeking to disrupt the representation of Indonesian literary works maintained by the established literary centres.

We would not be able to translate Arista Devi's short story "Adelina and the Bite Wound on Her Hand", if *Kunci Cultural Studies Center*, the Jogja-based researchers' collective where Nuraini works, did not initiate the *Afterwork Reading Club*, a series of reading groups and a migrant workers' literary works project in Hong Kong, in 2015. On the organizational level, our translation serves as an opportunity to develop a further collaboration between Kunci and Reading Sideways Press. Kunci was able

to organize the project because writing and reading performed the important elements of the migrant workers' activities in Hong Kong.

During the research we observed how writing short stories, poems, and other forms of writing, as well as the running of independent and DIY-like libraries, have been part of their weekend rituals. Every Sunday, these migrant workers, mostly women, would congregate in Victoria Park. Books of any kinds, arranged in suitcases, were available to be borrowed and read. Suitcases emerged like kinds of bookcases. And the women behind them appeared as not only migrant workers, but librarians who provided library services for their fellow workers every week. Other workers would sit in groups in different spots of the park – chatting, singing, eating various nostalgic snacks. When their Sunday strolls and hang-out time ended, they would go back to their own places, ready to work in various domestic spaces. In between doing menial labour and a day-off every Sunday, some of them steal the time to read and write.

The migrant workers' experiences are distinct, personal and treasured archives. Arista Devi's story is based on this attitude. She inhabits an environment where the migrant workers respect their own stories. We were able to translate Arista Devi's story because she was willing to share it with others. To translate Arista Devi's work, and possibly the works of other Indonesian migrant workers in the future, is to create a political mediation in creative format. We multiply the numbers of ears that can hear what stories these works want to convey. Aveling and McGlynn have laid the basis for the playful – yet serious and complex – language games of writers such as Arista Devi, Afrizal Malna and Seno Gumira Ajidarma. To elaborate on the meaning of cultural traffic mentioned earlier, we will continue to ask what types of stories can be put alongside the story of Arista Devi. We will continue to question whose stories we want to publish, how we would like to amplify these voices, and in what ways we take part in balancing knowledge production.

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## Antipodean perspectives on Sundanese art, time and space

Edwin Jurriëns

Recently, some young Australian artists have been inspired by Sundanese culture from West Java, Indonesia. In their work, they integrate, translate and transform traditional Sundanese notions of time, space and nature. They engage with the Sundanese cultural heritage as a valuable source for cross-cultural artistic renewal and/or exploring issues of shared concern, such as more sustainable human interactions with the natural environment.

One of the main facilitators of the Australian-Sundanese cultural exchanges is the Melbourne-based 'Asialink Arts' program in partnership with the Bandung-based new media art collective 'Common Room Networks Foundation'. Common Room Networks Foundation's involvement itself represents a growing trend among young Indonesian artists and art collectives to move their attention from predominantly urban issues to engagements and collaborations with rural sites and communities.

Asialink Arts is one of the programs of Asialink, a centre of the philanthropic Myer Foundation, based at The University of Melbourne. Asialink Arts was established in 1991 "to enable access, conversations and exchange to new international networks and cultural exchange for the Australian and Asian creative communities". Over the years, the program has enabled residencies for numerous

emerging Australian artists and assisted them in collaborating with local artists in Asia, including Indonesia. One of its local partners is Common Room Networks Foundation, which was established in 2006 as a continuation of the Common Room cultural centre (established in 2003) and the Bandung Center for New Media Art (BCfNMA, established in 2001).

In 2013, Common Room Networks Foundation was commissioned by the West Java Planning Agency to explore the possibility of developing eco-tourism in 16 regencies in the province of West Java. One of its partners, the rural *Kasepuhan Ciptagelar* community (Mount Halimun-Salak National Park) has attracted the attention of outsiders, including Indonesian and foreign artists, academics and tourists, because of the ways in which the community interacts with the natural environment. It is a migratory community which distinguishes between three different types of forest: protected forest, reserved forest and land for agricultural and agroforestry purposes. According to customary law, the community members can use rice for personal consumption, but are not allowed to turn it into a commodity for sale to others. Unlike modern intensified rice cultivation, *Kasepuhan Ciptagelar* has only one rice-growing cycle per year. These types of ideas and practices inspire and integrate well with contemporary thinking about environmental sustainability.

In 2015, *Kasepuhan Ciptagelar* produced its own video album of Sundanese pop music, containing clips of performers singing about life in the community against a background of local landscapes, people, daily life activities and rituals. Since then, the community has invited artists from other places, including Bandung, Berlin, Sydney and Melbourne, to collaborate and create their own inter-pretations of the songs, with styles ranging from jungle, hip hop and reggae to industrial, ambient and electro. In 2017, the community worked on the 'Ciptagelar Remixed' project with musician-statistician and 2015 Asialink Arts resident Dan MacKinlay from Sydney, Common Room Networks Foundation, and the Bandung-based death-metal a cappella choir 'Ensemble Tikoro'. The idea of 'remix' designates a desire to bring different times and places in innovative dialogue with each other.

Melbourne-based musician and radio producer Kieran Ruffles also created his own sound project, titled 'Sunda Sway'. This audio-work was broadcast on Australian Broadcasting Corporation's (ABC) Radio National on 7 October 2016 and is available as a podcast on the radio station's website. Listeners can follow Ruffles on his journey from Bandung to Ciptagelar, where he attended the annual *Seren Taun* rice harvest festival. The use of sounds, music, voice and narration gives an intimate impression of *pranatamangsa*, or traditional Sundanese ways of measuring time relating to the lifecycle of musical instruments, the growth of plants, human and animal biorhythms, and astrology, among others. Common Room Network Foundations' Gustaff Harriman Iskandar provides background to the traditional ways of time- and season-keeping in soliloquies or snippets of conversation with Ruffles. The themes of temporality and transition are replicated

in various ways throughout the audio work, including sounds and narration relating to the producer's road trip to Ciptagelar, and the use of drone-copters by locals and guests to traverse and explore the rural area from above.

Another Australian artist, Anna Madeleine, during a 2017 Asialink Arts Residency with Common Room Networks Foundation, produced an Augmented Reality (AR) art work, titled 'Pranatamangsa AR', based on *Kasepuhan Ciptagelar's* traditional farming calendar. In the work, which can be downloaded as a mobile phone application, virtual objects illustrating the various seasons overlay related stellar constellations in an accompanying booklet. The full-length animation was presented at the Melbourne International Animation Festival 2018.

The artistic work covered in this essay does not address important socio-political issues, such as *Kasepuhan Ciptagelar's* legal struggles over land rights. The Australian art-translators do succeed, however, in creating awareness about alternative systems and devices for tracking time and space and organising society, outside hegemonic and environmentally destructive capitalist cycles of production and consumption. Following my previous research on Indonesian contemporary art in a predominantly urban context, I will continue to critically analyse the rural and international collaborations of art collectives such as Common Room Networks Foundation. Their work is relevant, not only artistically, but also in relation to one of the main issues of our times, the state and future of the natural environment.

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