
SALUTE TO THE JOURNAL *INDONESIA* AND ITS FIELDWORKERS

Deborah Homsher

In June 1995, when I began work as a fledgling editor for Southeast Asia Program Publications, the SEAP press at Cornell had already earned and secured an international reputation. I was ushered to a second-floor office at the George McT. Kahin Center, a historic local mansion first converted by the university into a fraternity house, then, years later, into a research center for Southeast Asian studies. The editor's office (obviously a former bedroom) came furnished with a teal-cushioned window seat, a massive dictionary that required its own wheeled stand, and file cabinets containing the letters and contracts written by Audrey Kahin, my predecessor, Dolina Millar, and Donna Amoroso. The steel shelves along the wall held rows of books, all paperbacks, many with spartan front covers and 8.5 × 11 inch text pages that had been *typed* by someone (Roberta Ludgate), not *typeset*, and then replicated. Replication distinguishes a book from a manuscript. Soon our new business manager, James Barbat, would collect and stockpile a full set of all *Indonesia* journal issues. The first volume was dated "April 1966," around the time when Suharto was claiming power and establishing a New Order in Indonesia. Those volumes joined the SEAP books on the shelves.

These weighted shelves and cabinets still anchor the Publications niche in the Kahin Center. One might think of them as hearths, since they are well-stoked and quietly long burning.

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The first issue of the *Indonesia* journal that I edited was number 60, and it included contributions from George McT. Kahin, Douglas Kammen, and James T. Siegel. Due to my inexperience, publication was delayed, and number 60 remains the only volume of *Indonesia* to have FEBRUARY—rather than APRIL or OCTOBER—printed on its spine. The next journal issue, number 61, included translated short stories by Pramoedy Ananta Toer, an analysis and translation by Jim Siegel, and contributions from Rudolf Mrázek and Takashi Shiraishi, a Cornell faculty member at that time. SEAP published *Indonesia* 97 in April 2014, the last issue for which I was an editor.

The Mac computer on my desk in 1995 was about the size of a shoebox standing on end; it included a gray screen smaller than most holiday envelopes. Authors at that time still generally expected to review paper printouts of their chapters and articles, to mark them up with pens, then mail them back to us. We saved those manuscripts in our hanging files to insure against the possibility that one day an author might question the published version of a particular footnote or line of text. If a book or journal article included photographs or artwork, those images were mailed to us by the writer, then relayed to the printer with instructions explaining where each picture ought to be placed. Reliable print shops in 1995 were equipped with huge cameras for these jobs.

Over the years, the hanging file folders assigned to each SEAP book and *Indonesia* journal issue grew slimmer as the press's dependence on paper declined. I and our advisors (thank you, Terry Ehling) discussed a host of technological innovations, then slowly adopted many of them. Faxes were exciting (!), but in time the office fax machine fell dormant, as had the IBM Selectrics before it, all replaced by PDFs. By 2014, the many tasks a single editor could accomplish almost immaterially, in solitude, with a screen and a keyboard, using Word, Photoshop, and Adobe, had expanded at warp speed, leaving the congenial round blue world of typists and typesetters far behind.¹

Cornell SEAP Publications is a small, resilient academic enterprise, staunchly defended by its allies who value its independence because they have been gripped by its history. But the press is always vulnerable. When technical advances made it possible to offer copies of *Indonesia* articles online, through subscription services like Project Muse and JSTOR (and with assistance from Cornell technical staff working in DPubs and the Einaudi Center), so that issues of the journal became widely, weightlessly available (the majority free of charge) to an international audience ... well, we were glad and proud. Revenues from institutional online subscriptions to *Indonesia* help maintain the SEAP press.

In my opinion, the publishing and printing industry has undergone more radical changes in the last fifty years than most commercial pursuits. Authors I knew in graduate school stored their irreplaceable hand-typed manuscripts in heavy old (allegedly fireproof) Iowa City refrigerators. If their novels were accepted for publication, literate professional women in New Jersey would copyedit them by hand, the manuscripts would be retyped following the author's review, and, finally, a

¹ Roberta Ludgate typed the doctoral dissertations of many SEAP graduate students. The university required multiple copies of dissertations (five?), so she used carbon paper. I once asked her how she handled typing mistakes. She said she would go in with platens and erase each error on each carbon-copied page. She added, "I learned not to make mistakes." And I thought, "Please, God, never ever send me back to that world."

typesetter would set the pages. Pages of text, newly revised, did not slickly regroup and reshape themselves on a screen and could not be instantly compressed and zip-zapped, as attachments, to one's correspondents. The word "gigabyte" was uncoined then (and, when first introduced, laughable). I still marvel and wonder how Audrey Kahin and Benedict Anderson, former editors of the journal, and their colleagues managed to publish so many issues by corresponding via posted, paper mail with scholars conducting fieldwork in remote locations on the other side of the globe. How would one resolve a final question about a snarly footnote just a few days before the volume was due to be typed and sent to the printer?

Brief note: I trust paper books and journals and am glad that *Indonesia* is still available in hard copies. Material (rather than immaterial) volumes tend to be patiently inert for so long, yet talkative, companionable, even argumentative, when cracked open ... bound with glue along one edge, fluttering and venturesome along the other.

A contemporary academic editor, sitting alone in an office in central New York state, silently answering emails on an iMac, repairing onscreen footnotes, and dispatching edited .doc files to faraway writers with a *click*, can sometimes forget what sort of physical effort originally grounded the composition of the essays in question. *Fieldwork*. The word evokes for me certain attributes that are typical of *fieldworkers* and that have always typified contributors to the journal, *Indonesia*: a researcher's physical courage and fortitude, intellectual curiosity, patience, facility with languages, a ready, adaptable gut, and talents in observation, note-taking, and analysis.

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Indonesia's contributing editors suggested that readers might want to hear about the management and organization of the journal. For the sake of my own self-respect, I wish I could report that we established steely, overarching plans and hung white boards from secure hooks on central walls that registered current and future publication schedules, but, in truth, work on *Indonesia* was managed day by day (at a careful, nitpickers' pace, yet somehow frantically) in bits and pieces. Things happened this way, in large part, because the composition of the journal required cooperation from so many volunteers who, in their off-hours, were busy, peripatetic professional scholar-professors: peer reviewers, contributors, the wide-ranging allies of Cornell SEAP who had studied Indonesia, its history, politics, art and literature, anthropology, religions, languages, and cultures. Also, during most of my term, SEAP Publications relied on just two half-time editors—me, and through the years, three capable and sharp assistant editors: Mary Donnelly, Michael Wakoff, and Fred Conner—to read, line-edit, and format the press's journal as well as its scholarly books. We managed by consulting each other, and we spent a lot of time on email, seeking advice and tracking down generous, qualified individuals to evaluate submissions. We edited the journal—line by line, footnote by footnote—carefully, with a shared impatience for jargon, tangled, blurry academic prose, and dangling modifiers (i.e., "Having triggered World War I, Prof. McNanny argues that the death of Archduke ... ").² Audrey Kahin, our

² I kept a copy of George Orwell's rules for clear writing taped to the wall above my desk. These rules, lifted from the essay "Politics and the English Language" (1946), are: 1) Never use a metaphor, simile, or other figure of speech which you are used to seeing in print. 2) Never use a long word where a short one will do. 3) If it is possible to cut a word out, always cut it out. 4) Never use the passive where you can use the active. 5) Never use a foreign phrase, a scientific word, or a jargon word if you can think of an

multi-lingual, knowledgeable friend, proofread the final versions of all *Indonesia* articles for years. It wasn't always clear where the next issue of the journal would come from. At times, the office was flooded with submissions; at other times, it was not. The patterns seemed almost tidal, yet irregular.

Preparation for a new issue of the journal was most enjoyable (because relatively less suspenseful) when a capable scholar would muster his or her colleagues and help put together an issue or substantial contribution focused on a single topic. Our benefactors included Benedict Anderson (*Indonesia* 66, on violence and the state), Joshua Barker and Johan Lindquist (*Indonesia* 87, "Figures of Indonesian Modernity," a project that would mature into an eponymous book), Eric Tagliacozzo (*Indonesia* 90, on trans-regional Indonesia), David Webster (*Indonesia* 95, on Papua), and Thomas B. Pepinsky and Michele Ford (*Indonesia* 96, on oligarchy).

One hundred issues of *Indonesia* have now been published. The quality of the work has been recognized: the journal earned A*, the highest rating, in the Australian Research Council's 2010 review of over twenty thousand academic periodicals. Many of the authors who contributed to these volumes were and are courageous. They traveled to locations that other people might fear to visit and asked questions about volatile or awful events. Some of the officials or military officers they critiqued, or exposed through research, were powerful and unpredictable. During the nineteen years from 1995 to 2014, Suharto's regime collapsed; anti-Chinese riots broke out in Jakarta; ethnic violence erupted in Sulawesi, Central Kalimantan, and Maluku; and violence was used as a disruptive strategy by the Indonesian government in Timor-Leste, Aceh, and West Papua. Contributors to *Indonesia* investigated these outbreaks and, in addition, studied efforts to reestablish peace. Greg Acciaioli, Lorraine V. Aragon, Edward Aspinall, Jamie Davidson, Christopher R. Duncan, Noorhaidi Hasan, Douglas Kammen, Marcus Mietzner, Octavianus Mote, Jenny Munro, John Roosa (who published his article, "The Indonesian Military's Last Years in East Timor: An Analysis of its Secret Documents," in *Indonesia* 72, under the pseudonym "Samuel Moore" because he couldn't predict how the government in Jakarta would react to the exposure of these papers), Danilyn Rutherford, James T. Siegel, Antonius Made Supriatma, Craig Thorburn, and Gerry van Klinken all contributed analyses of regional post-Suharto disorder and its aftermath. Other contributors (identified as "The Editors") kept track of military officers, their changing assignments, locations, powers, and activities, through the regular feature, "Current Data on the Indonesian Military Elite."

I salute them. Salute also, of course, to those who analyzed and investigated Suharto's tactics while the entrenched regime held power, from 1967 to 1998. See, for example, the authors who published essays in *Indonesia* 66: Noam Chomsky, Joshua Barker, Loren Rytter, James T. Siegel, Vedi R. Hadiz, Geoffrey B. Robinson, and John T. Sidel.

My experiences as a journal editor taught me, first, that it's important for men and women to record abuses by the state and to publish the evidence. My tenure also taught me that Indonesia, the archipelago, is bigger than we can know, more gentle

and generous and inventive and corrupt and resilient and musical and diverse than any person can grasp. The journal articles we published encompassed so many disciplines and topics ... dance, fiction, poetry, music, theater, political and military history, colonial history, maritime history, women's history and gender issues, archaeology, ethnography, communications, Islam, the law and the courts, economics and industry. The wide reach of the journal taught me to recognize, almost with joy, my own ignorance. Perhaps that is the best, most useful (or youthful) lesson I learned from service with the Southeast Asia Program at Cornell.

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My husband, Hugh, and I lived in Yogyakarta for a few months in 2003. We flew there not long after the bombing at Kuta Beach, in Bali, and shortly before the United States invaded Iraq, and we were alert to the prospect of violence because we had chosen to ignore (defy?) the State Department's "Travel Alerts & Warnings," which advised against travel to Indonesia and predicted that "terrorists will seek softer targets." Well, we were pretty soft. The advisory mentioned "unrest," "threats," and urged Americans visiting Indonesia "despite this Travel Warning" to "keep a low profile ... remaining acutely aware of their immediate environment."³

We soon discovered that terrorists seeking Americans in Yogyakarta would find pretty slim pickings, since few of our fellow nationals were visiting there. As a result of the Kuta Beach bomb, Western and Australian tourists had abandoned their former haunts: the silver and batik shops, travel agencies, and restaurants catering to foreigners in Bali, Yogya, and elsewhere throughout Indonesia. They had canceled their vacation plans.

And yet, to our surprise, the American fast-food outlets that satisfied a local taste for imports in Yogyakarta—the palatial, glassed Kentucky Fried Chicken and the Dunkin' Donuts on Jalan Kaliurang, the Pizza Hut by the Monument, the Wendy's and McDonald's in dizzy Malioboro Mall—were full of life, packed with Indonesians who didn't appear concerned about potential terrorist attacks. Walking the streets with Hugh, I looked up at the enormous glass windows of the KFC and thought "soft target, glass target, watch out"! Yogyakartaans did not see it that way. That was one of our first lessons.

"*Kami dari Amerika*" (we are from America) we told strangers who asked about our nationality, since we figured it would be silly to pose as Canadians.

On March 26, six days after the United States began bombing Iraq, one of us added the phrase "*Perang tidak bagus*" (war is not good) in a conversation with two shirtless men and a woman, a soft-drink vendor, who questioned us near the town of Kaliurang. We had encountered each other on an overlook in the national park that flanks Gunung Merapi, the resident volcano. In broken Bahasa Indonesia, my husband and I tried to explain that we had voted for Al Gore, not George W. Bush, and that we disapproved of the war. The significance of that point did not register with anybody ... the word

³ This description of our experiences in Yogyakarta is quoted and paraphrased, here, based on an article published in *The Kyoto Review*. See Deborah Homsher, "Walking on Yogya," *The Kyoto Review* 6 (March 2005), at <http://kyotoreview.org/issue-6/walking-on-yogya/>, accessed August 3, 2015. I thank *The Kyoto Review* for permission to quote from the essay. And I gratefully remember Donna Amoroso, who was editor of *The Kyoto Review* in 2005, as a kind and perceptive advisor.

algore sounded lifeless, bodiless, even to us. We had come to that place to view an internally molten mountain, but it was obscured that day by its usual blanket of clouds. A volcano stood hidden before our eyes, high above our heads.

During our brief stay in Java, we did our best to venture out, to see and listen and learn. We took language lessons in Bahasa Indonesia daily at Puri Bahasa. I imagine fluency in languages to be like an act of flight and the people who are fluent in more than one language to be walking around with wings, tight wings, hidden under their shirts.⁴

Classes at Puri reminded us that a substantial percentage of people in the world speak more than one language with facility. Our teachers spoke Javanese (or Balinese) and Bahasa Indonesia and English. The Europeans in the class spoke English capably; the Dutch used English not only to communicate with us, but to talk to the German girl. We Americans were the poorest of everybody in these accomplishments, and when George Bush appeared on our rented TV in the evenings and talked with such Texan effort, doggishly repeating certain phrases—"The UN will have a *vital role*." Mr. President, what specifically do you mean by a vital role? "I mean what I say. A *vital role*."—I, who had been trying to learn a new tongue, knew just how it felt to hang onto a short phrase like that. It was maddening to watch the man.

After a few weeks, we began to name, and therefore to see, more of the details in everything around us. I figured out how to distinguish between capped bottles of *bensin* (gasoline) for sale on Jalan Colombo and similar bottles, stoppered with banana leaf, that contained an amber liquid: tamarind juice flavored with raw sugar. So I purchased a bottle of dark brown juice from a street vendor and drank it down, feeling like a pirate, thinking, "Well, that ain't gasoline." We rented a motorcycle and with dread merged into the rivers of bikers on the streets, among Indonesians balancing computer monitors on their thighs, cruising with wood cages full of doves strapped to their backs, transporting wives and slender children who hung on acrobatically, comfortably, having been trained to balance in traffic from a young age.

Given these experiences, it soon became obvious to us that Americans, viewed from Yogyakarta, would not appear to be dangerously *exposed* to internal or international terrorist threats. From any lookout point in Java, Americans (we) would appear to be seat-belted, child-safety-seated, safety-capped, uniformly chlorinated, insured, heavily armored, sea shielded, and richly safe.

On March 20, in the afternoon, we learned that American and British troops were driving into Iraq. A hard "click" had sounded after weeks of diplomacy coupled with worldwide protests, now failed, and a green light had snapped on. There is almost some relief when an action you can't control starts. The US stock market rallied—it prefers action to paralysis—and we received confessional emails from friends who were heavily invested in the market and opposed to the war.

During the following weeks of "shock and awe," my husband and I maintained our schedules. We swam laps every day in the Radisson Hotel pool at our usual time, thus failing to vary "times and routes for all required travel," a defensive maneuver

⁴ Sadly, this fancy inclines me to picture Ben Anderson perpetually lofted a few inches above the ground.

recommended by the State Department. We answered emails to assure everybody at home that things seemed safe, that Yogya was *aman*, calm. My mother didn't believe it.

If we kept a generally low profile, it was because we had work to do. I was editing last-minute articles on a laptop for the journal, *Indonesia*, in the company of quick green desk lizards. My husband, a Fulbright scholar, was grading papers and preparing classes on American short stories for graduate students at Universitas Gadjah Mada. As we worked and waited, the tone of the news began to change. American tanks entered Baghdad. Saddam Hussein's Revolutionary Guard troops disappeared, along with the Iraqi information minister and then Saddam Hussein himself. Gone? All gone?

The last journal essay I needed to edit before returning home was titled "Current Data on the Indonesian Military Elite" (*Indonesia* 75), a regular feature, traditionally signed by "The Editors," anonymously. I knew who the writer was. I began to work on the piece without thinking, but after a few pages started to grow nervous.

The introductory essay described endemic corruption in the Indonesian military, reporting that efforts to reform the TNI (Tentara Nasional Indonesia, Indonesian Armed Forces) and reduce its direct influence on national politics had faltered under Megawati's regime. The author explained that the Indonesian military received only about 30 percent of its actual budget from the government. Its territorial units therefore relied on "fundraising" activities, many criminal, that often involved the deliberate instigation of local conflicts to justify the need for military "security services" to intervene, especially to protect multinational extraction industries—Freeport McMoran, Exxon-Mobil—from threat. Freeport McMoran, a mining conglomerate with a poor human-rights record, operates in Papua, Exxon-Mobil in Aceh. Separatist movements had long been active in these two provinces. When the military stirred up trouble in either region, it often blamed separatist *terrorists*; since 9/11, the word *terrorist* had gained political leverage and proved useful for would-be pacifiers in many countries where the governments sought tighter control. The authors noted, "Ironically, security forces are engendering insecurity as a survival strategy ..."

I edited this article quickly, in two long sittings, then shot it back to our server and erased it from my laptop. I wasn't scared for my physical safety, but I was nervous about online surveillance. We had been warned that wire security (credit card, phone, Internet) is pretty loose in much of Southeast Asia, and we knew of Fulbright students from the United States, studying in Yogya, whose VISA bills had been swollen with fraudulent charges from Manila. I calmed myself by recalling my own personal insignificance and by reasoning that Indonesia's surveillance apparatus was surely understaffed because undoubtedly underfunded.

The article concluded by noting that George Bush's administration had "orchestrated intensive antiterrorist campaigns all over the world," and that, through these policies and actions, the United States had contributed to the "growing assertiveness of the military" in Indonesia. America's politicized War on Terror had had far-reaching effects.

In June of 2003, after I had left Indonesia but my husband was still living there to complete his term as a Fulbright instructor, the TNI entered Aceh. Human rights organizations accused both the military and the separatist rebels of violence. As a result, the US State Department issued a new travel warning on June 12 that wasn't

much different from the earlier one, except that it referred to Aceh explicitly and told Americans to get out of there.

That warning scared me. I was afraid for Hugh. How soon the ground recedes! I could recall the independent, bustling realities of Yogya and my own ghostliness in that actual place, but couldn't walk the city anymore to reeducate myself. So the country receded into the distance and wrapped itself in clouds, and grim news reports made the whole archipelago seem hotter than hot, as if all the volcanoes had started erupting and smoke rolling darkly down the streets.

One day an acquaintance mistakenly informed me that Americans were being ordered out of the country. I rushed to email Hugh. The next day he responded, saying essentially "What?" The big news from his location: he'd dined with friends at the restaurant Milas and navigated the rented Honda motorbike all that way, south of Malioboro and back, after dark, successfully. He was happy.

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An article in *Foreign Affairs* earlier this year, titled "The Decline of International Studies: Flying Blind is Dangerous," by Charles King,⁵ reports that in recent years the US Department of State has reduced Title VIII funding for international research. King states that this decision was part of a larger trend: "the scaling back of a long-term national commitment to education and research focused on international affairs." He notes a decline in government and university support for fieldwork that requires "soaking and poking," a phrase coined by a political scientist to sum up the hard work of "studying difficult languages, living in unfamiliar communities, and making sense of complex histories and cultures ..." King adds later in the article:

According to an annual survey conducted by the College of William and Mary, 30 percent of American researchers in the field [international relations] say that they have a working knowledge of no language other than English, and more than half say that they rarely or never cite non-English sources in their work.

Reading this passage a first time, I smiled, thinking, "That's not how *we* operated," and remembered countless interactions with the "soakers and pokers" who contributed to SEAP's journal between 1995 and 2014, Indonesianists who knew their languages and cited non-English sources at length. These authors expected themselves and their friends to venture deep into the territory and to pay acute attention to facts and voices.

I hope that these reports of my brief in-country visit to Java, my intermittent confusion, memories, and education, will help explain why I respect academic fieldworkers profoundly. I marvel at the dedication to research that *Indonesia's* authors have demonstrated. I'm not stupid, not a coward, but I couldn't do it. I thank all our contributors for their gifts. Your discoveries, analyses, collected data, and revelations are in the journal, saved, available on paper and online to an audience that circles the world. Histories have been created and corrected through your efforts.

⁵ Charles King, "The Decline of International Studies: Why Flying Blind Is Dangerous," *Foreign Affairs* (July/August 2015), at <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/united-states/2015-06-16/decline-international-studies>, accessed July 27, 2015.

Over the years I acted as managing editor of SEAP Publications, a number of staff members contributed to our academic press. As noted above, Mary Donnelly, Michael Wakoff, and Fred Conner all helped to edit the journal. They handled responsibility for soliciting and organizing its book reviews. I thank them for their intelligence, their commitment, and their patience. James Barbat, David Stotz, Melanie Moss, Patty Horne, and Cindy Dickinson have variously managed customer service, mailings, and much of the accounting for *Indonesia* and SEAP Publications. Melanie, in addition, supervised our warehouse in the days before we hired Cornell University Press as a distributor, and she personally filled book and journal orders. My sincere thanks to them.

Plus there are the stalwarts, the Indonesianists who guided the journal through the years and frequently contributed to it: Benedict R. O'G. Anderson, Joshua Barker, George McT. Kahin, Audrey Kahin, Daniel Lev, Ruth McVey, Rudolf Mrázek, James T. Siegel, and Eric Tagliacozzo, among many others. Thank you. For a more complete list of authors' names, please see (online and elsewhere in this volume) the index to all *Indonesia* articles published by women and men—workers in the field—throughout these hundred volumes.

