17,000 Islands of Imagination
Indonesia – Guest of Honour at the Frankfurt Book Fair 2015

Press folder for the press conference at the Leipzig Book Fair, March 12, 2015

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Spreading words to the wider world

Indonesia, guest of honour at the Frankfurt Book Fair 2015, introduces itself at the Leipzig Book Fair

LEIPZIG. Indonesia, this year’s guest of honour at the Frankfurt Book Fair, may be the fourth largest country in the world, but when it comes to literature it is still a largely uncharted territory for those of us in Germany. This is something the guest country is hoping to change this year with translations into German of Indonesian works and a comprehensive cultural programme. Under the tagline 17,000 Islands of Imagination it is not only providing insights into its storytelling traditions stretching back over millennia – a literary experience beyond the books – but also into the dynamic and lively literature scene of a land in flux.

The Frankfurt Book Fair Guest of Honour is currently also introducing itself on the Frankfurt Book Fair stand (Hall 4 stand B501) at the Leipzig Book Fair. Around 20 events and 10 authors will provide insights into the country’s culture and literature. The topics range from the role of women under Suharto’s regime to Indonesian politics as portrayed in comics; from poetry to graphic novels and from the performance of lyrical poetry to a cookery book presentation. “Indonesian culture is shaped by thousand-year-old traditions and myths. At the same time Indonesia has a young, forward-looking and tech-savvy population – around 44 percent of Indonesians are under 25 years old. This contrast between tradition and modernity, between preservation and progress, is reflected in Indonesian literature, which addresses both historical themes and current social developments,” says Juergen Boos, Director of the Frankfurt Book Fair. “I am very much looking forward to the exciting discoveries that await us in the coming months.”

“In truth it is not possible to overlook a country with 250 million inhabitants and 17,000 islands,” states Goenawan Mohamad, head of the Indonesian organising committee. “Yet, in spite of all the talk of proximity in the globalised world today, in terms of its literature our country receives very little attention. We would like to spread our words and works to the wider world and enter into a cultural dialogue.” The author and publisher of Indonesia’s most important magazine, Tempo, sees the book fair as an opportunity to create an audience for the voices emerging from the new Indonesia. Under the authoritarian regime of Suharto, which stayed in place until 1998, Goenawan Mohamad and many other authors experienced profound censorship while practising their profession.

New publications in German

This was also true of successful author Ayu Utami (born 1968), whose second novel Larung will be published in German in August (Horlemann Verlag). In terms of content, the story ties in with the first of her books to be published in Germany, Saman (Horlemann Verlag, 2007, new edition 2015). The author once again combines dream sequences and old myths with depictions of the political and social situation in Indonesia, from the attempted coup in 1965 through the progression of globalisation to the fall of Suharto. The novel by well-known author Laksmi Pamuntjak (born 1971) also takes a critical look at this period. Her best-seller, Amba, which will
be published in German with the title *Alle Farben Rot* in September 2015 (Ullstein Verlag), takes the love story from the centuries-old Indonesian national epic *The Mahabharata* and transports it to the period 1965 to 1968. During this period hundreds of thousands of people in Indonesia fell victim to a brutal anti-communist purge following an attempted coup.

As of late, there has been a further book in German translation by Andrea Hirata, one of the most known Indonesian authors in Germany: The novel *Der Träumer* (Hanser Berlin) sketches the life of Ikal, one of the protagonists from the bestseller *Die Regenbogentruppe* (English title: *The Rainbow troop*): It tells a modern tale with strong autobiographic qualities – the story of the twelve year old boy coming from poor circumstances on the island of Belitung, struggling and sleeping rough in the moloch megacity Jakarta in hardship, and finally managing to study in Paris – always dreaming of seeing the world and returning with a good education to change the life conditions in his homeland. This year, the novel *Pasung Jiwa* will be released in Germany from the young author Okky Madasaris (born 1984), part of generation 2000: *Seele in Ketten* (English title: *Bounds*) published by Sujet Verlag is about two young men yearning to break free from social constraints, from sexual orientations not being accepted by many people, from harassment, abuse, escape and crime. For her novel *Maryam* Okky Madasarin has been awarded in 2012 with the prestigious *Khatulistiwa* literature award, being the youngest author to date to receive this price.

**Events in Leipzig**

10 authors will be presenting their literary works over the course of the Leipzig Book Fair. In a talk about *Poetry and Plurality* by Sapardi Djoko Damono, one of the country’s most important poets, will talk about the diversity of languages in Indonesia and the role of literature within the linguistic and cultural plurality (14.3., 4 p.m.). Laksmi Pamuntjak will read from her new book *Alle Farben Rot* (14.3., 3 p.m.). The dedicated author will also take a stance on current topics, taking part in a podium discussion on the theme of freedom of speech (13.3., 3.30 p.m., Mehrzweckfläche 4). Just recently Laksmi, a dedicated Muslim, publicly denounced the attacks on the satirical magazine *Charlie Hebdo* in Paris. Another event will showcase the Indonesian government’s programme to promote translation (12.3., 4 p.m.).

More information

[www.islandsofimagination.id](http://www.islandsofimagination.id)
Indonesian Authors at the Press Conference

Goenawan Mohamad

Goenawan Mohamad was born on 29 July 1941 in Batang/Central Java. Outside Indonesia he is best known as the founder of the weekly magazine *Tempo*, which was banned by the Suharto regime in 1994. However, he is above all a poet, essayist and a playwright. Since the mid-1970s, Goenawan has written *Catatan Pinggir* – which could be described as marginal notes – and short essays on a weekly basis. Ten volumes of these essays are now published, three of which are available in English. The German translation *Am Rande bemerkt* was published by Horlemann in 1993. The list of his published works is varied and extensive and includes plays, libretti and six volumes of poetry. He has been awarded many national prizes, such as the first Professor Teeuw prize, which was conferred to him in 1992 by the University of Leiden. In addition, he was awarded the Louis Lyons Award by Harvard University in 1997 and the Dan David Award by the University of Tel Aviv in 2006. In the same year, the French president honoured him with the *Chevalier de l’Ordre des Arts et des Lettres* and in 2011, the University of California named him a Regents’ Professor. Goenawan Mohamad is head of the organisation committee for the guest of honour appearance.

Laksmi Pamuntjak

Laksmi Pamuntjak was born on 22 December 1971 in Jakarta. Her publications include two poetry collections entitled *Ellipsis* (appeared in the 2005 *Books of the Year* pages of *The Herald UK*) and *The Anagram* (2007), a philosophical excursion based on Homer’s epic *The Iliad* and published as a book with the title *Perang, Langit dan Dua Perempuan* (2006). She has also published a collection of short stories inspired by paintings entitled *The Diary of R.S.: Musings on Art* (2006) and four issues of the Jakarta Good Food Guide. Laksmi’s essays, poems and short stories have appeared in various journals and international literary collections, including *The World Record and Not a Muse*: International Anthology of Women’s Poetry (2007). Today, Laksmi is the Indonesian editor of *Margins*, a cultural journal produced by the Asian American Writers Workshop in New York. Between 2009 and 2012, she was the co-founder of the Aksara bookstore and member of the jury for the Prince Claus Award in Amsterdam. In 2012 Laksmi represented Indonesia at the Poetry Parnassus/Cultural Olympiad as part of the London Olympics. Her novella *Amba*, which was published in October 2012 in Indonesia, became a national best-seller; the German version will be published by Ullstein Verlag in spring 2015 under the title *Alle Farben Rot*. Her second book *Aruna dan Lidahnya* has already been published in Indonesia.

Book in German translation: *Alle Farben Rot* (Ullstein Verlag, Spring 2015)
Sapardi Djoko Damono was born on 20 March 1940 in Solo and is one of the most important poets in Indonesia. He studied English literature in Yogyakarta and was editor of the literary magazines Horizon and Kalam. Although he has already entered into retirement, the Professor of the University of Indonesia still gives lessons and supports students at the Kesenian Jakarta Institute and the Universitas Diponegoro. He is also active in the cultural department at the University of Indonesia.

Sapardi Djoko Damono has composed poems since his schooldays, but his first book entitled duka-Mu abadi was only published in 1969. Other volumes of poems and stories followed, which were later published as Trilogi Soekram. Sapardi has not produced any fictional works since 1978. His poems have been translated into several languages, including Arabic, Chinese, Japanese, Korean, Thai, French, English, Dutch, German and Italian. Between 1998 and 2012, his poems appeared in the English language under the titles Watercolor Poems, Suddenly the Night and Before Dawn. Sapardi has also translated many works of literature from English into Indonesian, including The Old Man and the Sea (Ernest Hemingway), Daisy Miller (Henry James) and The Grapes of Wrath (John Steinbeck). Sapardi has received a number of awards: in 2012 he was presented with an award from the Akademi Jakarta for his cultural achievements, in 2003 a similar award from the Freedom Institute, in 1986 the Thai S.E.A Write Award, in 1984 the Malaysian Hadiah Puisi Putera and in 1978 the Cultural Award from the Australian government.

The Dutch literary critic A. Teeuw said of Sapardi: "... he has brought a new genre into Indonesian literature, for which there is still no suitable name... As a poet he is original and creative, and in spite of their simplicity, his experiments and innovations are surprising..."

Translations of the poems of Sapardi Djoko Damono are included in the anthology Gebt mir Indonesien zurück! (Horlemann-Verlag) and in Orientierungen. Zeitschrift zur Kultur Asiens, edited by Berthold Damshäuser and Wolfgang Kubin.
Ahmad Tohari

Ahmad Tohari was born on 13 June 1948 in Banyumas/Central Java. He has written eleven novellas, three anthologies of political and religious essays and many short stories. Ahmad Tohari is primarily known for his moving descriptions of village life. He took part in the International Writers Program at the University of Iowa in 1990 and received the Southeast Asian Writers Award in 1995. His most famous work entitled Ronggeng Dukuh Paruk is the first book in a trilogy. It served as the basis for the film Sang Penari (The Dancer) and has been translated into Japanese, Chinese, Dutch, German and English. Ahmad Tohari has received various national and international prizes, including the Southeast Asian Writers Award (1995) and the Rancage Award (2007) for his works composed in Banyumasan Javanese. Tohari has written various articles for the Indonesian newspaper Suara Merdeka and the weekly magazine Tempo. From 1986 until 1993, he published Amanah, a magazine focusing on politics and religion. Religion is an important theme for Ahmad Tohari: brought up with a deep religious conviction and a high degree of tolerance he now lives according to a progressive interpretation of Indonesian Islam and describes himself as a “progressive religious intellectual”.

Books in German translation:

Die Tänzerin von Dukuh Paruk (Horlemann Verlag, 1996)
Komet in der Dämmerung (Horlemann Verlag, 1997)

Nirwan Dewanto

Nirwan Dewanto was born on 28 September 1961 in Surabaya/ East Java, and is a poet, essayist, literary editor and art curator. He was awarded the Hadiah Sastra Khatulistiwa literature prize for his works entitled Jantung Lebah Ratu (2008) and Buli-Buli Lima Kaki (2010). His poems have been translated into several foreign languages. He manages the literary pages in the Sunday edition of the newspaper Koran Tempo, where many new poets present their works. In his essays, he discusses literary works and issues in literature, theatre, art and culture in general. He co-founded Komunitas Salihara, a private art centre in South Jakarta. In recent years, he has worked as a curator for various art exhibitions. As a writer, he has taken part in many international programmes, including the International Writing Program at the University of Iowa and the House of Literature in Paros (Greece) and at the University of Wisconsin in Madison. A collection of his poems will soon be available in English in a book entitled The Origin of Happiness. He also writes lyrics for popular musical genres such as jazz and for the traditional Indonesian musical style of Keroncong.
**Facts and Figures**

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**The Book Market in Indonesia**

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<th>Description</th>
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<tr>
<td>Number of inhabitants of Indonesia</td>
<td>250 million</td>
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| Annual number of titles published in Indonesia | 2014: 32,000  
2013: 19,000  
2012: 30,000 |
| Annual number of printed books in Indonesia | 72 million |
| Size of the book market (sales) | 2014: IDR 9,000,000,000,000 (= about 634 mill. €)*  
2013: IDR 7,000,000,000,000 (= about 493 mill. €)* |
| Translated titles in Indonesia | 50% of books published in Indonesia are translated – mainly from English, Arabic, Chinese, Korean, Japanese |
| Copyright sales (export) | IDR: 2,000,000,000 / year (= about 140,000 €)* |
| Book sales (export) | IDR: 10,000,000,000 / year (= about 705,000 €)* |
| Destination countries (export) | Malaysia, Vietnam, Türkei, Korea, Italien, Deutschland, Australien, USA |
| Number of publishers | Approximately 1,400 |
| Largest publishers in Indonesia | Gramedia, Mizan, Agromedia, Erlangga, Penebar |
| Members of Indonesia’s Publishers’ Association (IKAPI) | 2013: 1,219 |

*Specification in EUR at the conversion rate of March 2015: 1000 IDR = 0,07 €
Indonesian Literature – A long story

Like the country itself with its 17,000 islands, the great diversity of peoples, languages and religions in the Indonesian archipelago has also left its mark on Indonesia’s literature. This means there is not just a single literature, but a dozen different writing traditions, including Malay (Indonesian), Balinese, Sundanese and Javanese. Poetry has always played a significant role in the cultures of Indonesia and the country is distinguished by a very long oral tradition. Poems, fairy tales and sagas have been passed down by word of mouth, since time immemorial – often accompanied by music and performed in groups.

The roots of Indonesia’s written traditions stretch back 2,000 years – further back in time than most Western literatures. Some of the earliest known examples are the stone inscriptions of Kutai, in western Kalimantan (Borneo), dating from around 400 AD, and the Talang Tuwo stone, dating from 648, which was found in Palembang (South Sumatra), the 7th century capital city of the old kingdom of Srivijaya. Already at that time, the site was an important centre for the study of Buddhism with an extensive library and more than 1,000 scholars from near and far.

Hindu-Javanese literature began to develop from the 10th century, as Hindu-influenced states emerged on what is today Indonesian soil. To begin with, verse adaptations of Indian classics and mythology were mainly produced in Kawi, a linguistic mix of Javanese and Sanskrit. Mpu Sindok (928–950) became famous for his creative interpretations of Indian epics (e.g. the Mahabhharata and the Ramayana). New Javanese literature began with the Nagarakretagama by Rakawi Prapañca, which is a song of praise to King Hayam Wuruk (1350–89) of Majapahit. This also marked the emergence of a new literary form, the Kidung, which dealt predominantly with Javanese material, recounting both history and sagas in free verse.

La Galigo, an ancient epic in the old Bugis language of Sulawesi, evolved between the 13th and 15th centuries. It has been passed down to us in numerous manuscripts, and has now been listed by UNESCO in its Memory of the World Register. With around 300,000 stanzas stretching across 6,000 pages, La Galigo is one of the longest literary works ever produced – some 20 times longer than Homer’s Odyssey.

As more and more Muslim traders visited Indonesia from the 13th century onward and Islam started spreading there more widely, the next chapter in this history began: Islamic-Malay literature. By now, Malay had established itself as the lingua franca across south-eastern Asia, being the primary language of trade on the seas and in the markets of the multi-ethnic archipelago. A form of Malay literature now began to develop which would familiarise the region with the fairytales, sagas and mythology of the Arabian and Persian cultures. Numerous Koranic stories and tales of the prophet were also published, alongside an extensive body of Islamic theological literature. In Malay poetry, the pantun emerged, a verse form which later became popular among poets in France, England and Germany in the 19th century.

History and historical novels were particularly significant for prose writing in Malay. For instance, important 15th century texts, such as the Sejarah Melayu (Malay Chronicle), provide us with extensive insights into the life of the Sultan’s court. While Malay increasingly became the language of Muslims, Javanese saw the development of a more mystical kind of literature; with its
multifariously illustrated manuscripts, it was indeed a significant art form. By the end of the 19th century, more and more writers of all ethnicities were consciously choosing to write in Malay, so they could share their ideas with the world.

In 1928 nationalist leaders declared Malay to be the official language of the nascent nation and its name was changed to Indonesian, thereby laying an important foundation for the country’s independence almost two decades later. At around the same time, modern Indonesian literature began to emerge. European literary forms, such as the novel and the sonnet, were introduced. The author now entered the spotlight as a critical voice and self-aware individual, while literature increasingly became a weapon in the fight against injustice and suppression. In the 1920s, writers like Mas Marco Kartodiromo (1890–1932) and Soemantri (1899–1971) described their visions of a nation freed of colonialism while later, in the 1930s, others, such as Sutan Takdir Alisjahbana (1908–1994), stated the case for Western values, including the rights of women. The era of cultural criticism began with the publication of the literary-cultural magazine *Pujangga Baru* (New Poet), in 1933. At that time, cultural critics were divided into two camps: the first consisted of those who called for the unquestioning assimilation of Western ideologies and the rejection of antiquated customs (Sutan Takdir Alisjahbana), while the second defended the traditional values of Indonesian culture (Armijn Pané, 1908–1970).

Alongside the fight for national independence, the need to overcome social problems also came to the fore. The literary group Angkatan 45 (Generation of 1945) focused on topics like universality and humanity, while orienting themselves on the works of the poet Chairil Anwar (1922–1949). They were followed by Angkatan 66 (Generation of 1966), whose members protested against the Sukarno regime and composed combative poems about truth, justice and freedom (Taufiq Ismail, *1937*).

This politically and socially aware literature was superseded by a literary current that preferred experimental forms of poetry. The most important exponent of this was *Rendra* (1935–2009), one of the best-known Indonesian authors of the 20th century. Rendra, whose influences included Brecht, Shakespeare and Beckett, also used his theatre work to provide a new setting for older forms of music and language. A selection of his poems was published in German translation under the title “*Weltliche Gesänge und Pamphlete*” (Horlemann, 1991;  *Secular Songs and Pamphlets*). *Pramoedya Ananta Toer* (1925–2006) was nominated for the Nobel Prize in Literature several times was – and still is – perhaps the most famous Indonesian writer internationally. He wrote about 40 works, which have been translated into around 40 different languages. Toer spent many years in prison for his political views, where he continued to write surreptitiously, producing his most famous work, the four novels of his Buru Quartet (consisting of “This Earth of Mankind”, “Child of All Nations”, “House of Glass” and “Footsteps”). In this row of important authors *Mochtar Lubis* (1922–2004) has to be mentioned, too.

Among Indonesia’s older contemporary authors are Toeti Heraty (*1933*), Sapardi Joko Damono (*1940*), Goenawan Mohamad (*1941*), Damanto (*1942*) and Putu Wijaya (*1944*). Besides criticism of social and political shortcomings and attempts to address the problems of existence, these writers’ themes include the search for God, the conflict between tradition and modernity, and the place of the individual in the inhuman world of the megacity.
During the change in transition from an authoritarian to a democratic state, starting in 1998 with the resignation of Indonesia’s strongman-leader, Soeharto, a whole new generation of Indonesian writers have appeared – many of them women: Ayu Utami, Dewi Lestari, Leila S. Chudori, and Laksmi Pamuntjak to name just four. Indonesia’s younger writers are much more confrontational in their approach to writing and not averse to airing their views on subjects such as homosexuality, abortion, religious tolerance, and women’s rights, subjects that in previous years had rarely been spoken about publicly. Recent novels by Ayu Utami, Leila Chudori, and Laksmi Pamuntjak are scheduled for rerelease in German this year.