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# THE RIPPLE EFFECT

MARGOT COHEN

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AMINEF  
FULBRIGHT

EXPERIENCE  
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# THE RIPPLE EFFECT



EXPERIENCE  
CONTRIBUTE  
INSPIRE



# THE RIPPLE EFFECT

HOW FULBRIGHT ALUMNI ARE MAKING THEIR MARK ON THE WORLD

MARGOT COHEN



EXPERIENCE  
CONTRIBUTE  
INSPIRE

A SERIES OF PUBLICATIONS COMMEMORATING  
THE 25<sup>th</sup> ANNIVERSARY OF AMINEF &  
THE 65<sup>th</sup> ANNIVERSARY OF FULBRIGHT IN INDONESIA

1. Margot Cohen, *The Ripple Effect: How Fulbright Alumni Are Making Their Mark on the World*
2. Thomas Pepinsky, *Fulbright in Indonesia: Area Studies in an Uncertain World*
3. Fadjar Thufail, *The Impact of Fulbright on the Development of Social Science in Indonesia*

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*Photo courtesy U.S. Embassy Jakarta*

# FOREWORD

by Ambassador Joseph R. Donovan Jr

As honorary co-chairman of the American Indonesia Exchange Foundation (AMINEF) Board of Trustees with H.E. Minister Mohamad Nasir, I am pleased to celebrate the 65th anniversary of the Fulbright program in Indonesia and the 25th anniversary of AMINEF as the binational Fulbright Commission. I commend the dedicated AMINEF staff for their ongoing work and commitment to international educational exchange.

We all know international educational exchange transforms lives. It transforms the lives of Fulbright students, teachers and scholars. It transforms the lives of those with whom they collaborate. And it transforms the lives of communities.



Fulbright alumni are innovators, activists, policymakers, researchers, and teachers. They pursue groundbreaking work in science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) fields, social sciences and the arts. In the first week of October this year, two more Fulbrighters were added to the already impressive list of 57 Nobel laureates in medicine and physics. Fulbright alumni also include 37 current or former heads of state, 82 Pulitzer Prize winners, 70 MacArthur Foundation “genius award” winners, and 16 U.S. Presidential Medal of Freedom recipients.

AMINEF manages one of the largest Fulbright programs in the Asia Pacific region. In 2017, we welcomed 191 Indonesian grantees in the United States, and 52 American grantees to Indonesia. Over the last 65 years, more than 3,000 Indonesians and 1,200 Americans have contributed to our bilateral relationship as Fulbright Scholars. The Fulbright program’s commitment to bring Indonesians and Americans together to share our histories and our ideas, our beliefs and our differences, strengthens our U.S. – Indonesia partnership.

This anniversary publication highlights a long and inspiring history of the Fulbright Program in Indonesia and points to an equally impressive future. The essays showcase the depth and breadth of our partnership from marine biodiversity research to English language instruction. I am proud of the Fulbright program’s accomplishments, here and around the world in 180 countries.

Now more than ever, we believe that Senator Fulbright’s intent in setting up the flagship exchange program that bears his name remains essential today. As he wrote in 1967, “Creative leadership and liberal education, which in fact go together, are the first requirements for a hopeful future for humankind. Fostering these—leadership, learning, and empathy between cultures—was and remains the purpose of the international scholarship program.”

Congratulations, AMINEF and all of our Fulbright partners!

*Joseph R. Donovan Jr*

*Ambassador of the United States of America to Indonesia*



*Photo courtesy of RISTEK DIKTI*

# FOREWORD

by Minister Mohamad Nasir

On behalf of the Republic of Indonesia's Ministry of Research, Technology, and Higher Education (abbreviated in Indonesian as RISTEK-DIKTI), and as a member of AMINEF's Trustees, I am delighted that the AMINEF Board of Management and Secretariat have decided to celebrate the 65th anniversary of Fulbright in Indonesia and the 25th anniversary of AMINEF as the binational foundation managing Fulbright, by publishing this series of books and through other public activities that highlight the work and careers of Indonesian and American Fulbright alumni.





The metaphor of the title of this first volume in the series, *The Ripple Effect*, is apt. Dropping a pebble into a pond and seeing the spreading ripples of the water by extension refers to the continuing and spreading results of an event or action. High-achieving Indonesian scientists and humanists, like those who obtain Fulbright grants, return home and inspire their students, colleagues, and those in their communities. They expand knowledge and teach others what they've learned in their fields while abroad. But, since they have also learned about the social context of another, highly multicultural country, the United States, they also bring back the knowledge and tolerance for diversity that they have internalized during years of study there. That, too, influences those around them in concentric circles, like ripples in a pond: their families, their colleagues and students, their communities, and ultimately, Indonesia itself.

As the late Indonesian Foreign Minister Ali Alatas wrote on Fulbright's 40th anniversary in Indonesia: "The influence of the Fulbright program has surely extended well beyond academic learning. Indonesians and Americans awarded Fulbright grants return home with a far deeper understanding of another culture. Mutual understanding among our nations has been well served by these exchanges."

The Directorate General of Higher Education (DIKTI) from the former Ministry of Education and Culture, which in October 2014 joined the Ministry of Research and Technology, thus creating the Ministry of Research, Technology and Higher Education, has long had a vision of improving the environment of higher education in Indonesia and raising competency in science, technology and innovation in order to improve national competitiveness.

For many years, our Ministry and AMINEF have worked closely together to carry out collaborative programs to send Indonesians to the United States for degree study, research, or teaching, and to invite American scholars, both graduate students and doctoral-level experts, to do research or to teach in Indonesia. We are proud of this long association, and together we will continue to explore co-funding alternatives, particularly to support lecturers at Indonesian universities for the Fulbright-RISTEK-DIKTI PhD program and for the Fulbright-RISTEK-DIKTI Visiting Scholar program.

We at the Ministry are quite aware of the need to expand the horizons of Indonesian lecturers, and we are eager to have visiting scholars and researchers in our midst, too, as collaborators, as educators, and as colleagues with whom we can share and develop innovative ideas.

The Fulbright program, one of the oldest and most prestigious exchange programs in the world, is an example for other, newer exchange programs, and many have been modeled after it. I personally hope to see the Fulbright program managed by AMINEF strengthen and grow, and the Ministry I lead is committed to helping that to happen.

We salute the anniversaries of Fulbright and AMINEF and look forward to many more in the future.

*Prof. H. Mohamad Nasir, PhD, Ak.*

*RI Minister of Research, Technology and Higher Education*







## EDITOR'S PREFACE

In 2017, AMINEF, the American Indonesian Exchange Foundation, celebrates its 25th anniversary as the binational Fulbright Commission managing the Fulbright Program in Indonesia, which in turn is celebrating its 65th anniversary. To mark these auspicious anniversaries and to generally make better known the history and accomplishments of this most prestigious of educational exchange programs between Indonesia and the United States, we at AMINEF have undertaken a number of activities.

Among them was to commission three authors to write three volumes, the first of which is the one in your hands. It was written by Margot Cohen, a freelance journalist with many years' experience in Asia, including Indonesia, and provides short, lively portraits of twelve Fulbright alumni.



Increasingly, donors, foundation boards, government appropriation committees, taxpayers, and the general public want to know what are the demonstrable “returns” on philanthropic “investments” such as giving grants to individuals for study or research.<sup>1</sup> The challenge in explaining or documenting the impact of such a program is to go beyond individuals’ stories, however compelling, to try to understand what the grants add up to in the aggregate.

And while the individual voices of those who have received Fulbright grants – so-called “Fulbrighters” – best give the sense of how the grants transformed their own lives and changed their careers, as in the wonderful set of interviews published for the 20/60 anniversary AMINEF/Fulbright volume, *Across the Archipelago from Sea to Shining Sea: Commemorating the 60/20 Anniversary of Fulbright Indonesia and AMINEF*, it is hard to go from the individual story to document in quantitative and graphic form “social impact,” as donors, boards, taxpayers, et al., more and more seem to require.

The three volumes in this series may not be able to provide that quantitative evidence, but we encouraged the three authors to think about the three main impacts of Fulbright over the years in Indonesia:

- the extraordinary stories of individual alumni and the people they have benefited, benefited from, or interacted with;
- the actual work that Fulbrighters have produced from their grants, the important issues they have grappled with, the knowledge, analysis, and perspectives they have added to thinking about and solving such issues;
- the hard-to-measure, but no less important, lasting connections, collaborations and personal and intellectual networks that Fulbrighters inevitably develop, helping as personal “cultural ambassadors” to improve mutual understanding between our two countries, and extending beyond.

I will introduce briefly the first two volumes and describe the research for the third which is still underway.

*The Ripple Effect: How Fulbright Alumni Are Making Their Mark* includes portraits of twelve Fulbright alumni. They are diverse in various ways: there are six Americans and six Indonesians; the Indonesians undertook various Fulbright or other exchange programs, some to do MA or PhD degree

<sup>1</sup> A recently returned Indonesian Fulbright grantee, Dr. Budi Waluyo, did research published in his dissertation from Lehigh University on the very topic of how to measure the impact of an international individual grant program focused on social justice. AMINEF and the Ford Foundation collaborated in a public forum to discuss the results in August 2017.

study in the US or to undertake short-term study opportunities or research fellowships, and the American students and senior scholars carried out field research or taught in Indonesian high schools or universities. They represent several generations and they come from diverse parts of the US and of Indonesia. Thus, the portraits give a sense of the diversity of AMINEF's programs, including the core Fulbright programs and others supported by funds from the US State Department and the Indonesian Ministry of Research, Technology, and Higher Education (RISTEK-DIKTI), and the diversity of our alumni.

Each portrait is based on interviews Cohen carried out with the alumni themselves, but also with others that they have encountered, benefited, or benefited from during the course of their exchange experiences. Thus, the portraits allow the alumni themselves to speak, but also let us hear from others in their communities or people with whom they interacted.

The reader will certainly find their stories of interest, and they are often moving and inspiring. Fulbrighters tend to be high achievers, to be natural leaders, and to be deeply engaged in social issues affecting their communities and fields. And the connections they have made across national boundaries are long-lasting and have led to other connections being made – hence, the “ripple effect.”

What comes out of their portraits, too, is that their Fulbright experiences were not only transformational for them personally and not only advanced their own careers, but also that the work they are doing and have done is important, the issues they are grappling with are of social import, and the influence of that work is far-reaching in both countries and beyond.

- For example, Ricardo Tapilatu's work on preserving the leatherback turtle and its habitat, and his work on “ocean health” is important more broadly for preservation of Indonesian marine biodiversity, and involves several international collaborations.
- Jim Hoesterey's Fulbright-Hays-funded dissertation field work examined the “anxieties and aspirations” of Indonesia's middle-class Muslims, and his return visit as an assistant professor of religion at Emory University focused on definitions of “moderate Islam” in Indonesia and how that concept is exportable to other countries. Indonesian mass Islamic organizations and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs have shown



a great interest in his work and he is frequently invited back as public speaker and collaborator.

- Baskara Wardaya's core interest in "probing the relations between the United States and Indonesia to yield a fuller understanding of the geopolitics behind the cataclysmic shift in power from President Sukarno to President Suharto in 1965-1966," is clearly an important topic for Indonesian historians and Indonesians in general to come to grips with.
- Dr. Syafaatun is someone who naturally likes to cross borders: a professor of Islamic studies who has studied Sufi mysticism in medieval Spain and Catholic mysticism in medieval Germany, she holds two doctorates from the US, one from Catholic Theological Union, the other from the Lutheran School of Theology. She actively embodies and teaches interreligious understanding both in Indonesia and, last year, as a visiting Fulbright lecturer at Eastern Mennonite University in the US.
- After three years in Indonesia, two as a Fulbright English Teaching Assistant, ETA, and one coordinating the ETA program for AMINEF, Grace Wivell left behind valuable research on effective approaches to extracurricular English teaching and left her students with important lessons on the diversity of Americans.
- The artist-scholars Jen Shyu and Anne Rasmussen also did important and impactful work: the one exemplifying the importance of respecting and taking seriously the teachings of indigenous traditional musicians; the latter "bringing deep knowledge of Arab musical practice to bear on field study of Islamic music in Indonesia." Their connections to Indonesia are long-lasting and ongoing.

Finally, Fulbrighters are often thought of as cultural ambassadors and as exemplars of invaluable people-to-people soft diplomacy. The ability to learn cross-culturally and to form bonds with those very different from oneself comes out vividly in the portraits of this small subset of 12 alumni – 12 out of more than 4,000, please remember. Dr. Yoda Rante Patta is noted by her colleagues at Sampoerna University for having learned to take up the useful American characteristic of forthrightness, saying what she means – so useful in cutting through normally deferential academic discourse in Indonesian universities. Novi Dimara, a firefighter working for Freeport in Papua, came back from Virginia "more positive and sure of herself," and found a role model in the form of an African-American 911 emergency operator

whose tendency to “speak with authority” impressed her greatly. Taiwanese-American ETA Jessica Peng helped her students realize that Americans don’t all look alike and “bonded with them over hip-hop music and other aspects of global youth culture.” Jim Hoesterey proved a consummate ethnographer by “ensconcing himself” in the “devout entourage” of famed TV Muslim evangelist, Aa Gym, and a market consultant was so taken with Jim’s ability to “inhabit Aa Gym’s world,” that he hired him to help his staff learn ethnographic techniques. Hoesterey himself talked about the role of Fulbrighters as diplomats:

Fulbright is the best program of public diplomacy ever created in the United States. It gives that chance for connection, people-to-people. If I see any hope in global diplomacy, it’s not just through diplomats in expensive hotel rooms—it’s through Americans doing projects in the villages and Americans trying to understand arts and culture. This is a necessary part of a broader diplomatic effort.

The second volume in our 25/65 anniversary series is a pamphlet containing an essay by Thomas Pepinsky, a former Fulbright-Hays awardee to Indonesia and now associate professor of government at Cornell University, entitled *Fulbright in Indonesia: The Value of Area Studies in an Uncertain World*. Pepinsky argues convincingly for the US Congress’s continued support for the Department of State’s Fulbright Program and other exchange programs, and for related programs under the Department of Education, such as Fulbright-Hays, the Title VI programs for foreign language study, for National Research Centers, and for American Overseas Research Centers, as crucial to attracting, training, and supporting the research of American experts on Indonesia and Southeast Asia. This is apt in a year in which the Fulbright Association, a membership organization representing hundreds of thousands of US Fulbright alumni, noted an “existential threat” to the Fulbright Program when the Administration proposed severe cuts in the program and other exchange programs at both US Department of State and Department of Education.<sup>2</sup> Among other conclusions, Pepinsky notes that almost all of the well-known Indonesian experts in US universities, in foundations, government service, and the private sector have at one time been enabled to spend time in Indonesia through a Fulbright grant. And that applies across several generations. The implication is that without Fulbright, the lack of the crucial fieldwork experience in the social sciences and humanities would cripple the training of future American Indonesianists. The Pepinsky volume

<sup>2</sup> It would seem the threat has passed with both House and Senate appropriations committees reinstating the funds the administration proposed to cut, though at the time of writing the fate of the Fulbright-Hays Doctoral Dissertation Research Abroad (DDRA) grants still hung in the balance.



also contains lists of the American Fulbright research alumni from the mid 1960s through 2017.

The third volume will present the results of a research project led by Dr. Fadjar Thufail of LIPI, himself also a Fulbright alumnus, to look at the *Impact of Fulbright on the Development of Social Science in Indonesia*. Some of the founding “fathers” and “mothers” of Indonesian social science – Koentjaraningrat, Parsudi Suparlan, Tapi Omas Ihromi, Saparinah Sadli, Juwono Sudarsono, Mayling Oey-Gardiner, Taufik Abdullah, Mochtar Buchori, Sofian Effendi, Umar Kayam, Usman Pelly, Harsya Bachtiar, W.S. Napitupulu, Rizal Mallarangeng, Suzie Sudarman, Saiful Mujani, Philips Vermonte – have been American-trained Fulbrighters or associated with the program in Indonesia from its founding. How have American paradigms influenced the various fields of social science in Indonesia? Has the steady stream of Fulbright-supported American anthropologists, ethnomusicologists, political scientists, and economists had a noticeable and continuing influence? With many more opportunities now than in the 1950s for study abroad, is the American influence still discernible? And what can we learn from these 65 years in terms of recalibrating the scholarship grants program – are we meeting the needs, focusing correctly? This research, currently ongoing, is expected to be published in the first quarter of 2018.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This series involved the participation, support, and hard work of many, and I would like to mention several of them by name here. From the initial brainstorming meetings last year, we have had the benefit of the institutional memories of former AMINEF Deputy Director Piet Hendrardjo and former AMINEF senior program officer in charge of grants to Americans, and currently special consultant, Cornelia (Nellie) Paliama. In the face of incomplete written records, both have helped fill in the gaps. Both are remembered fondly by Indonesian and American Fulbrighters and maintain contacts with many, many alumni, which again has been very useful in designing these anniversary activities.

The AMINEF Managers and Trustees were helpful in overseeing and making useful suggestions early on. We were reminded that anniversary volumes and undertakings should not only be retrospective and stress the past, but should also look forward positively to the future. This we emphasized to all the authors, and it comes through in the words of the alumni and their beneficiaries interviewed by Cohen, in the eloquent advocacy of Pepinsky, and will in future appear in the analysis and advice from Fadjar Thufail, his colleagues, and interviewees.

We thank both Honorary Co-chairmen of the AMINEF Trustees, US Ambassador Joseph R. Donovan Jr., and Minister of RISTEK-DIKTI Prof. Dr. Mohamad Nasir, for their willingness to provide forewords to this work and to support our anniversary plans in various ways. Their staffs, especially Susan Shultz, Karen Schinnerer, and Rakesh Surampudi from the US Embassy, and Secretary-General Prof. Ainun Na'im, Ms. Nada Marsudi, and Prof. dr. Ali Ghufon Mukti from the RISTEK-DIKTI Ministry, were always ready to help with advice and needed materials.

We thank our three authors, Margot Cohen, Thomas Pepinsky, and Fadjar Thufail, for their eagerness to take on the responsibilities thrust upon them. Cohen was aided by proofreader Prasanna Chandrasekharan. Indonesian translations were provided by Anton Kurnia and Budhi Wangsa for the Cohen and Pepinsky volumes respectively. Evi Mariani Sofian, a Humphrey Fellowship alumna, helped us with checking and proofreading the Indonesian versions.

We thank the 12 interviewees and others interviewed in the process of the Cohen book for their willingness to share their stories, to identify and put the author in touch with their beneficiaries or those who were crucial in their Fulbright experiences, and to provide graphic material when asked.

Former Fulbrighter Ismiaji Cahyono and his talented team at SUNVisual helped with the design of the books and made useful contributions throughout the brainstorming, planning, and execution processes. Staff of Edelman Indonesia also made useful comments, including helping us arrive at the anniversary year catchwords, “Experience – Contribute – Inspire.”

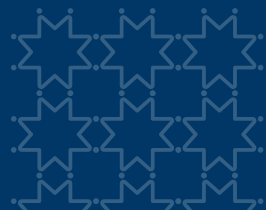
The new Communications Team at AMINEF led by Maya Purbo, with alumni expert Miftahul (Mita) Mardiyah, and helpers Monika Fatmawaty, Lolen Windra, and Anita Dewi, have made these publications possible as well as other activities associated with the 25/65 anniversary. And without the input, advice, and data from the two program teams – the American Program led by Astrid Lim and the Indonesian Program led by Adeline Widyastuti – this project, like any other at AMINEF, would not have been possible. I thank them all, as I do the other AMINEF Secretariat staff who I cannot name one by one here, but whose names are listed at the end of this volume.

Finally, I should thank my predecessors at AMINEF, those admirable people both Indonesian and American, who have held the position of Executive Director here over the last 25 years, and have laid the groundwork for the excellent program that I inherited. I sincerely hope it will continue to grow and flourish, under the outstanding auspices of the AMINEF Trustees and Managers, with the crucial support of the US and Indonesian governments, represented by the US Embassy here and the State Department’s Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs in Washington, and by the two Indonesian ministries concerned with education, the Ministry of Education and Culture and the Ministry of Research, Technology, and Higher Education.

*Alan H. Feinstein*  
*Executive Director, AMINEF*



*Rick completed his dissertation in 2014, producing a conservation blueprint at once scholarly and practical. He also forged some strong transpacific bonds.*





# I Dr. Ricardo Tapilatu

## Ocean of Love

*If you're going to fall in love with a turtle, you might as well choose the biggest, fastest, and most ravenous creature around.*

That's what happened to Ricardo Tapilatu, the jovial marine biologist whose work to conserve the endangered Western Pacific leatherback turtle has captured hearts across Indonesia and America. The leatherback, known to swim more than 5,000 nautical miles all the way from West Papua to California, plays a pivotal role in marine ecology due to its insatiable appetite for jellyfish. This turtle won't hesitate to deep dive for gelatinous, low-calorie snacks. Rather hefty at 2,000 pounds (around 900 kg), it builds momentum for long voyages with paddle-shaped flippers.



The 51-year-old scientist does share one trait with his favorite reptile: perseverance. Back in 2007, as a lecturer at the remote Manokwari branch of the State University of Papua, he didn't think he had a prayer of winning a Fulbright award to work on his PhD. Coaxed by his family, he eventually filled out the application and met with success. So in 2008, he packed his bags for the University of Alabama, cheerfully introduced himself to his new Southern friends as "Rick," and put in long hours at the lab and the library.

He traveled back and forth to Papua, testing his theories with field research. There, he groomed a team of young graduates to ensure that more turtle eggs would hatch safely under leafy shelters. Meanwhile, he huddled with scholars at turtle conferences in Australia, the United States, and Mexico. He combed over the data analysis. Ultimately, Rick completed his dissertation in 2014, producing a conservation blueprint at once scholarly and practical.

He also forged some strong transpacific bonds. In 2016, he invited University of Alabama graduate student Amy Bonka to visit some leatherback nesting sites on the beaches of Bird's Head Peninsula in West Papua. A veteran of turtle studies in Mexico, she was dazzled by the scenery and the human warmth of the place. Rick's circle of eight protégés "treated me like family," she says. "It doesn't take very long in interacting with Rick's research team to understand the respect they have for Rick, or their love for the work they do—his team eats, sleeps and lives leatherback conservation."

Such devotion could be crucial, given that the numbers of Western Pacific leatherback turtles have dropped by 80 percent over the last three generations, according to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration in the United States. They are already extinct in Malaysia. And their counterparts, known as Eastern Pacific leatherbacks, are dwindling rapidly in Costa Rica and Mexico. The repercussions for the ecosystem are dire. "If we lose them, then there is no natural predator for the jellyfish," warns Rick.

Extinction would affect not only Indonesia, but the whole planet. And so the impact of the Fulbright-funded research reaches far beyond Papua. "Without his local site-level research, this species conservation at the global level would be impossible," attests Victor Nikijuluw, marine director at Conservation International Indonesia.

Like many love stories, this one also started on the beach. Rick's parents introduced him to a peripatetic coastal life. With a mixed heritage spanning Larantuka, Ambon, and the Netherlands, his mother and father left Jakarta to work as civil servants for the Irian Barat administration after the territory ceased to be a Dutch colony. Assigned to the Bureau of Logistics (BULOG)—the unit responsible for food logistics and food security—the parents moved their growing family around Manokwari (where Rick was born), Jayapura, Fakfak, Wamena, and Sorong. As the eldest of four siblings, Rick led the irrepressible pack in spearfishing and frolicking on the sand.

The beaches were so enticing that the children were loath to return home for naps. After playing in the surf, they jumped into bed just before their parents returned to check on them. "We didn't have time to wash our feet and dry off," Rick recalls. Their sandy toes did not escape the notice of their father, who meted out punishment to little avail.

As a teenager in the early 1980s, Rick accompanied his mother to the market in Sorong. He was amazed to see an array of large turtle eggs, the size of billiard balls. He learned that these eggs were particularly prized as aphrodisiacs, given the turtles' known stamina for long hours of copulation. When cooked, however, they bore no resemblance to hard-boiled chicken eggs. Instead, the insides turned slimy and aficionados would break the shell and slurp.

The sheer volume of the wares on display sparked Rick's imagination. At that time, one wooden boat could fetch as many as 10,000 to 15,000 eggs per trip, leading him to wonder how many turtles might be out there in the wild. But it was not until 2004, when he was already working as the head of the marine laboratory at the State University of Papua, when he got the chance to observe a primary nesting site at Bird's Head. "I was fascinated," Rick recounts.

Over the years, though, he also learned that the beach is not the idyllic playground tucked away in his childhood memories. Protecting the leatherback hatchlings is hard work, due to a variety of ominous local conditions. His research team has to contend with feral pigs that emerge from nearby forests and rush to gobble the eggs. Predators also include dogs and monitor lizards. Crocodiles have been known to bite off the heads of female turtles.





*“I won’t be able to see the impact of my work in my lifetime,” he says. “But I believe my kids will see the impact of my work.”*

And, due to climate change, sand temperatures are rising, leading to eggs getting cooked even before the embryos can develop.

Countering such problems requires the participation of local communities. For example, villagers can trap the pigs, dry the pork, and sell it in the market in Sorong. They can join patrols and ward off other predators. Yet, Rick and others concede that this process has been par-

ticularly challenging because local landowners have demanded large sums of money in exchange for conservationists’ getting access to the beaches. As elsewhere in Indonesia, decentralization in the post-Suharto period has often led to accelerated natural resource exploitation by local officials and landowners.

When villagers grew heated during discussions, Rick “didn’t lose hope. He always looked for solutions,” says William Geif Iwanggin, a 31-year-old marine science graduate and team member. Having studied under Rick at university, he remembered his lecturer as a strict disciplinarian, demanding punctuality and focus from his students. But after Rick returned from his arduous academic program in the United States, his protégés noticed that he seemed a bit more “humble,” and more willing to listen to others. The impasse at Bird’s Head was partly overcome in 2017 with the help of the Arkansas-based Walton Family Foundation, which made more funds available.

In addition to promoting hard science, Rick seizes opportunities to raise public awareness about the environment. In March 2017, Rick was a prime whistle-blower following a tragic event at the gorgeous island chain of Raja Ampat in West Papua, where the cruise ship *Caledonian Sky* rammed into a coral reef and damaged at least 13,000 square meters. (According to the environmental website Mongabay.com, the cruise liner apologized and pledged its cooperation to work with the Indonesian government toward a “fair and realistic” settlement.)

Rick also spoke with local reporters recently to publicize his discovery that leatherback eggs are not harmless aphrodisiacs but actually bad for human health, due to deposits of mercury, arsenic, and other harmful elements.

Back in the United States, Rick enjoyed a regular healthy diet of fresh tuna, thanks to the kindness of his thesis adviser, Thane Wibbels. The University of Alabama professor made sure to bring him fish every week, in addition to advising him on his research and lending him lab equipment. Rick also developed a fondness for Mexican tacos, and enjoyed playing American-style football, a sport that initially baffled him.

In August 2017, he returned to the United States for another year-long chapter in his career. This time, as a Fulbright Visiting Scholar, Rick is looking beyond his beloved turtles and thinking more broadly about the health of the oceans. Based in the Arlington, Virginia office of Conservation International, Rick is working on a conceptual framework to help Indonesia conform to the Ocean Health Index, a global measure that relies on such parameters as biodiversity, pollution, and livelihood opportunities.

It's a project that requires long-term vision. Rick, a father of three, knows that ancient mariners can't expect instant gratification. "I won't be able to see the impact of my work in my lifetime," he says. "But I believe my kids will see the impact of my work."





*Ben uncovers “the secret lives of individual words and phrases,” in order to demonstrate how “even seemingly non-descript items of our vocabulary have culturally rich stories to tell.”*



2

## Ben Zimmer

### Word Sleuth

*Fans of Sherlock Holmes never cease to admire the fictional detective's eye for the subtlest clues: a speck of gunpowder, a dusting of cigar ashes, or even the faint scrapes on a muddy shoe.*

The detective work of a linguist can be equally impressive. Ben Zimmer, a Fulbright grantee who began his career by unlocking the mysteries of Sundanese wordplay in West Java, has emerged as one of America's top word sleuths. In popular columns for the *Wall Street Journal*, the *New York Times*, and a range of digital outlets, Ben uncovers "the secret lives of individual words and phrases," in order to demonstrate how "even seemingly nondescript items of our vocabulary have culturally rich stories to tell."



Want to know how the term “mealy-mouthed” entered the modern lexicon? Rely on Ben to dig up a reference to a German volume published in 1566, in which followers of the Protestant reformer Martin Luther immortalized his use of the German idiom *Mehl im Maule behalten*, literally to carry meal—edible cereal grains—in one’s mouth. Luther used the term “to describe those who were less than forthcoming in their views about the Reformation,” as Ben wrote in an August 2017 column for the *Wall Street Journal*. And 451 years after the German publication, journalists used the same term to criticize a man who didn’t go far enough in denouncing white supremacist movements in the United States.

Many readers appreciate Ben’s ability to express his erudition with clear, communicative prose. “The way most linguists write is only intelligible to other linguists, while most popular writers on language in the general press tend to send linguists screaming in horror,” notes Uri Tadmor, a Boston-based linguist and publishing director for Brill, an international academic publisher. “Ben’s articles and lectures are among those precious few that capture the interest of both specialists and laymen.”

As a child growing up in New Jersey, Ben got a kick out of words, perusing a 1930s edition of *Webster’s New International Dictionary*. As an undergraduate at Yale University, Ben’s “laidback demeanor didn’t obscure his talent,” recalls linguistic anthropologist Joseph Errington.

But the 46-year-old columnist credits his experience in Indonesia in the 1990s as the springboard for real insight into the power of language. In a country consumed by a bureaucratic mania for acronyms and jargon, word-play had become a potent weapon of the weak.

During his first Fulbright-supported stint in Bandung, it was “eye-opening to see how such playing with words could serve deeper purposes, whether for mystical exegesis or political subversion,” says Ben. “Doing my initial research at the tail end of the Suharto era gave me a good sense of how linguistic play could slyly undermine official New Order discourse.” After returning to the United States, Ben relied on internet channels to follow events leading to Suharto’s fall in 1998. “I saw the same kind of subversive wordplay that I had studied in the Sundanese context, now blowing up on the national stage,” he recalls.

For example, student activists seized on the acronym SDSB—a standard

reference to a national lottery—and turned it into *Suharto Dalang Segala Bencana*, indicating that Suharto was the puppet-master of disaster. (To appreciate such turns of phrase, Ben refers readers to Mikhail Bakhtin’s study on François Rabelais’s talent for medieval parody.) Again, with Fulbright’s help, Ben returned to Indonesia for research in 1999–2000.

At first, the archipelago was barely on his radar. During Ben’s sophomore year at Yale, he thought he might sample various non-European languages, perhaps Persian or Swahili. He decided to focus on Indonesian after an inspiring introductory lecture by Joseph Errington, and attended classes taught by Tinuk Yampolsky, a native speaker and fiction writer. An intensive intermediate language course at Cornell University, in the summer of 1990, led to an advanced course in Malang, East Java, the following year. “After that first trip to Indonesia, I was really hooked and knew I wanted to come back after I graduated,” Ben says.

However, many researchers had already tackled the evolution of Indonesian and the intricacies of Javanese. Ben wanted to do something different. As he recalls, his Yale professor Joseph Errington steered him toward one of the most understudied languages on the planet, relative to its size: Sundanese, spoken by approximately 30 million people.

Given the rarity of foreigners’ efforts to master Sundanese, it was hard to find a decent textbook. Ben eventually wrote an article for *Jurnal Sastra* (published by Padjadjaran University in Bandung) pointing out the need for better pedagogical materials, other than books typically used by primary school students in Bandung. “The ability of a 6-year old Sundanese child is usually far beyond that of a foreigner who is already an adult!” he wrote.

Ben also chafed at the tendency to initiate foreigners into the most elevated and polite form of Sundanese, known as *basa lemes*, before wading into the more intimate, everyday sounds of *basa kasar/loma*. This made it difficult to converse with new friends of the same age, or gain an understanding of a broad range of creative arts, including short stories, pop song lyrics, and *wayang golek*, a traditional form of wooden puppetry imbued with philosophical meaning.

Fortunately, Ben found a variety of teachers, musicians, *pesantren* students, and others who supported his efforts to absorb their vocabulary and its cultural context. The fact that a foreigner could achieve fluency “reminded



*But [Ben] credits his experience in Indonesia in the 1990s as the springboard for real insight into the power of language. In a country consumed by a bureaucratic mania for acronyms and jargon, wordplay had become a potent weapon of the weak.*

Sundanese people of the importance of maintaining and preserving their language,” remarks Cece Sobarna, a literature professor at Padjadjaran University.

“I was very impressed that with Ben’s expansive educational background and the virtually unlimited choices he had, he wanted to study Sundanese linguistics,” recalls Frances Affandy, a cultural anthropologist based in Bandung. “His personal interest and expertise exalted my estimation of its worth, and that was valuable for me.”

At the dinner table, Ben delighted in sharing his discovery of various plays on Sundanese words. For example, the way to admit you were “flat broke” was *tongpés*, a compression of the two words *kantong kempés*, literally

meaning “empty pocket.” To criticize a politician, you could say *kongrés*, shorthand for *ngawangkong teu bérés-bérés*, meaning “talking emptily and getting nothing done.”

During his fieldwork, Ben often extended help to fellow researchers. “Ben invited me to accompany him on a two-day excursion to visit the superstar *dalang* of *wayang golek*, Cecep Supriadi, and his superstar singer wife, Idjah Hadidjah,” recalls Henry Spiller, now an ethnomusicologist based at the University of California, Davis. “These two amazing individuals (whom I was unlikely to meet otherwise) were rich resources for my research.”

In discussions with Uri Tadmor, who was then studying the Betawi Malay language in Jakarta, Ben showed him “that certain features of Betawi, including specific intonation patterns, actually came from Sundanese.” Ben’s interest in verbal mixtures also led him to deduce that Bandung inhabitants often dropped Sundanese words into their flow of Indonesian to “convey emotions or sensations, a domain where Indonesian is often felt by Sundanese speakers to be lacking.” Such insights helped Cece Subarna conceptualize an academic article titled “*Basa Karedok* (Language Salad),” about the tendency of young people to mix Sundanese with Indonesian and foreign languages.

Ben's generosity was not limited to sharing ideas. When a financial crisis hit Indonesia in 1998, after Ben had returned to America, he called Cece with a question. Did his family have enough to eat? He promptly sent funds to tide them over. "It was extraordinary," says Cece.

Ultimately, Ben decided that he was not cut out for a career in teaching. He wanted a broader readership for his work, not just the members of his PhD committee at the University of Chicago. Sure enough, the wider world proved very welcoming. For example, Ben chaired the New Words Committee for the American Dialect Society, presiding over a debate on whether "nom," a noun meaning yummy food, coined by the Cookie Monster on the TV show *Sesame Street*, should be selected as Word of the Year. (Nope—the linguists crowned the word "app" instead.)

Over the years, Ben has worked as an editor of American dictionaries at Oxford University Press, took over William Safire's column for a year at the *New York Times*, and developed online tools that could help people navigate the world of words. At Thinkmap, Inc., a New York-based start-up, Ben served as the in-house lexicographer behind Vocabulary.com and Visual-Thesaurus.com. "Compared to their print counterparts, online dictionaries promise to deliver more and better data," vows Ben.

Last year he left Thinkmap to devote more time to his own writing, including an upcoming book on how new technologies are transforming language.

But old patterns of childhood can be just as significant as those new techie twists. For example, when US president Barack Obama visited his childhood turf in Indonesia in 2010, Ben was invited to appear on a WNYC radio show to parse the president's use of Indonesian. Ben praised Obama's ease with phrases like *baik-baik*, meaning "fine." The show's American host, Brian Lehrer, asked tentatively about the pronunciation: "Like bicycle? Bike, bike?" Ben went on to assure listeners that Obama "did a great job of connecting with his audience" during a speech at the University of Indonesia.

Ben enjoys connecting with his own readers, braving a blizzard of tweets, blog posts, and emails. He seems to be a steady presence in a fickle online world, where "instant reversibility is now an inescapable facet of our digitized life."



*Without question, her experience at MIT—supported by a Fulbright Visiting Student scholarship—has been essential to shaping her ideas of academic achievement, and recruiting other faculty to the cause.*



### 3

## Dr. Yoda Rante Patta

### Raising the Bar

*Sometimes all you need to explain the universe is a handful of marshmallows.*

This revelation emerged during an innovative class assignment at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), where Yoda Rante Patta was honing her teaching skills. In 2011, she asked students enrolled in a course called Microstructural Evolution in Materials to use colored marshmallows to make dioramas illustrating how atoms relate to each other. The students approached the task with relish, molding some very sticky electrons in the process.



Now Yoda's task is to mold a fresh cohort of scientists and engineers emerging from Sampoerna University, a new private institution accredited in 2013 in Jakarta. At the surprisingly young age of 32, she was appointed dean of the Faculty of Engineering and Technology. And after just two years on the job, her dedication to expansive modes of learning has come to be widely admired. Without question, her experience at MIT—supported by a Fulbright Visiting Student scholarship—has been essential to shaping her ideas of academic achievement, and recruiting other faculty to the cause.

No one can cross the threshold of the dean's office without seeing the "Pledge of Academic Integrity" placed high on a glass panel. "Private universities can have a huge impact on meeting unmet needs. But it needs to be done right, with integrity and high academic standards," 34-year-old Yoda maintains. "The students are not customers. They are here to gain knowledge and skills."

Those essential skills include fluency in English. That's the medium of instruction in all courses at Sampoerna, where an engineering degree leads to a diploma endorsed by Louisiana State University in the United States. (Most Indonesian universities rely on the national language, Indonesian, as the medium of instruction.) Yoda must straddle two worlds, as she strives to fulfill the requirements of Indonesia's Ministry of Research, Technology, and Higher Education while negotiating with her counterparts in Louisiana. This makes her an academic pioneer, in a world where Indonesian youth must scramble to get up to speed with international standards.

Yoda values her hybrid existence. "I feel I'm always a little bit foreign wherever I am. I learn to embrace it," she says.

Indonesian colleagues appreciate Yoda's penchant for forthright communication, as they often feel stymied by the indirect dialogue long accepted as a cultural norm. "She has a strong voice and makes strong arguments for our curriculum," observes Soepriyatna, vice rector for academic and student affairs at Sampoerna University. In some meetings, he has relied on Yoda to articulate his own disagreements on various issues. "It works!" says Soepriyatna, with a snap of his fingers.

Today Yoda speaks perfect English, but that was not always the case. Born in Bandung, she was whisked off to the United States as a four-year-old

child, while her father worked on a master's degree in urban studies. She returned to Indonesia for primary school, mostly forgetting whatever English she had soaked up earlier. When her family decided to move back to the United States, Yoda landed in the 8th grade in Somerset County, New Jersey, with hardly any English at her disposal.

She felt a fierce ambition to prove herself. Before long, she catapulted from ESL (English as a Second Language) classes, to poring over encyclopedias, to writing a sophisticated paper on antimatter for a chemistry class. Having skipped a couple of grades, she entered Rutgers University in New Jersey at the dewy age of 16. Again, she excelled. Stephen Danforth, then chairman of Rutgers's Department of Ceramic and Materials Engineering, called her "the best undergraduate student I have seen in the past 26 years," in a recommendation letter.

And although Yoda was compelled to work three part-time jobs to help finance her education, she still found time to organize myriad trips, cultural shows, and orientation sessions as president of the International Students Association. "She has the energy and enthusiasm of ten students," noted Marcy Cohen, then the director for the Center for International Faculty and Student Services at Rutgers.

She had just one more year to go at Rutgers, well on her way to graduating with distinction, when, suddenly, she changed course. It hit her that she missed Indonesia. She didn't want to sacrifice the deep friendships that could be forged during college years in her native environment. So she started all over again, at age 19, at the Bandung Institute of Technology. Working on nanostructures, she felt the excitement that comes from a successful lab experiment. "The best part was just to feel Indonesian again, and feel like I belonged," Yoda recalls.

Graduate studies took her back to the United States in 2005, thanks to a Fulbright grant. At MIT, she found not only a bunch of equally driven nerds, but individuals who wanted to improve the world in some way. Under the aegis of MIT's Technology and Culture Forum, Yoda sought to raise awareness about violence against women and later integrated that interest with lab work on reducing scar formation in women who had been attacked. In addition to a master's thesis related to superconductors, she raised funds for the international aid group Doctors Without Borders. For her



*She tries to encourage women staffers to believe in their potential.*

PhD degree in materials science and engineering, she changed directions again, throwing herself into efforts to devise a biomedical device for brain cancer patients. Yoda describes MIT as “a place that encourages critical questioning, and allowed me to find myself.” But she always planned to return to Indonesia, where she thought she could have the maximum impact.

She found most consistent satisfaction in teaching—first as a teaching assistant, then as a lecturer. During classroom sessions and one-on-one tutoring, she became aware of many different approaches to learning, including those that appealed to minds more artistic than mathematically oriented. Marshmallows were just the beginning. In Jakarta, and in recent lectures in Australia, Yoda has become a champion of integrating the arts into STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) studies, expanding the acronym to STEAM. She still teaches up to two classes each academic semester.

Not surprisingly, she has also backed efforts to encourage more young women to earn engineering degrees—and use them. Yoda notes the problem of many women unable to put their diplomas to work, due to the strictures of academia. During Open House days at Sampoerna, she makes sure that plenty of young women serve as student ambassadors at the engineering and technology booth, and Yoda herself enjoys mingling with the wide-eyed high schoolers who drop in with questions.

She does have some experience with men who don’t take her seriously. On occasion, Yoda’s petite frame (barely exceeding five feet) and friendly demeanor belie the gravitas of her position. One witless job applicant prattled on, ultimately asking, “When will I get to meet the dean?” (He didn’t get the job, Yoda recalls with a chuckle.)

Women comprise about 30 percent of Sampoerna’s engineering and technology faculty, which may sound good compared to faculty statistics in other countries, but not sufficient in Yoda’s eyes. She tries to encourage women staffers to believe in their potential. Shinta Dewi, a graduate of the University of Gadjah Mada (UGM), says she is grateful to have Yoda as a role model. Now working as a science lab coordinator at Sampoerna, she is striving to improve her English. Yoda has encouraged her to “surpass

her limits,” and explore the possibility of graduate school overseas. “I am rather introverted and sometimes lack confidence,” 26-year-old Shinta admits. “Dr. Yoda always challenges me.”

Yoda’s blue-chip MIT pedigree has also been a magnet for faculty hires. Ammar Aamer, a native of Yemen, capped his academic training in the United States with a PhD in industrial engineering at the University of Tennessee. Instead of remaining in America, or heading back to a country engulfed by civil war, he opted to relocate his family to Jakarta and join Sampoerna. “Knowing that she was a graduate of MIT, that was one of the triggers for me to work here,” he says. “She was very welcoming, and very comforting.” Soepriyatna adds, “People will rely on her judgment because she graduated from MIT.”

Actually, Yoda herself landed at Sampoerna after a detour into the corporate sector. Following a year of postdoctoral research at Stanford University, she accepted a consulting job in Jakarta with the Boston Consulting Group (BCG). It wasn’t a good fit. Luckily, a BCG partner introduced her to the Sampoerna team. And, when it came to devise a new method for financial projections, Yoda found that the corporate job had given her the right tools to guide her academic colleagues in creating their spreadsheets to meet the deadline.

Attempts to provide American-style education on Indonesian shores entail long hours and some frenzied multitasking. It’s all a learning process. For Yoda, however, a sudden look of comprehension on a student’s face can be the sweetest reward of all.



*Now an assistant professor at Emory University in Atlanta, Jim explains that one of his main goals in dissecting Aa Gym's influence was to examine the "anxieties and aspirations" of middle-class Muslims in Indonesia.*



## 4 Dr. James Hoesterey

### Among the Believers

*Cultural anthropologist James Hoesterey found himself in a delicate position in January 2006.*

He was traveling by car from Bandung to Jakarta alongside Kyai Haji Abdullah Gymnastiar, famed Islamic self-help guru. At the height of his popularity, the Indonesian cleric known as Aa Gym had preached to crowds of some 20,000 and owned more than 20 companies, exuding considerable influence through televised sermons and pop-psychology seminars. (The term “Aa” denotes “elder brother” in Sundanese.) The American scholar had been researching this phenomenon since 2005—becoming such a steady presence that the cleric often joked they had become a rhyming pair, “Aa Gym” (hard g) and “Aa Jim.”



On this particular road trip, however, Aa Gym was buffeted by one of the most tumultuous periods of his life. He faced a public backlash following the sensational revelation that he had secretly married again. The episode revived a long-standing debate over polygamy in Indonesia. The cleric turned to Jim and popped a question. Did the American scholar think he could make a comeback? The answer was discreet. “Who am I to predict anything? Perhaps only God knows our fate,” the Fulbright-Hays grantee replied.

Jim’s knack for diplomacy kept the channels of communication open. He continued his research periodically through August 2014, and went on to write *Rebranding Islam: Piety, Prosperity and a Self-help Guru*, contributing to the burgeoning study of the social and political dynamics of contemporary Islam. The book eschews harsh judgments in favor of detailed descriptions. Now an assistant professor at Emory University in Atlanta, Jim explains that one of his main goals in dissecting Aa Gym’s influence was to examine the “anxieties and aspirations” of middle-class Muslims in Indonesia.

Decades ago, an anthropologist was expected to hang his hat in a remote village and report from the hinterlands. Those days are over. As Jim’s work shows, there is also much to be learned in the towns and the cities. “The anthropologists should not just allow the political scientists to study the political and religious elite,” says the 42-year-old scholar. Pulling strands from the various fields of media studies, pop culture, and sociology, *Rebranding Islam* also has a hybrid texture.

“Students can definitely learn a lot from this powerful book, not only in Indonesia but also in [other parts of] Asia,” says Dadi Darmadi, senior researcher at the Center for the Study of Islam and Society (PPIM) in Jakarta. The book shows “how the media is extremely influential in shaping the face of a major religion, even before the advent of social media as we know it today,” he adds. It already figures on assigned reading lists at the University of Michigan and Northern Illinois University, among others.

Rather than produce a dry academic tome, Jim sought to incorporate techniques of narrative nonfiction. He wanted to make the book accessible to undergraduates enrolled in courses like Introduction to Islam. But he also aimed for a style that might appeal to his mother’s book club, along with other general readers. For example, his main character is catapulted from

“the proud moments of national celebrity to the dark and difficult days of public humiliation.” In the last pages, he also traces Aa Gym’s rebound in a more conservative direction—a phenomenon that has produced sharply mixed reactions in Indonesia.

Rather than posit Islam as a force remote from the West, Jim highlights the links. He points out that Aa Gym’s personal reading list included American best sellers like *Chicken Soup for the Soul*, *Emotional Intelligence*, and *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*. Aa Gym’s seminars combined Western pop psychology and corporate models of human resource training. As for dispelling stereotypes, many Indonesians’ dismay (or in some cases, revulsion) at the cleric’s second marriage should tip off American readers that Muslims around the world do not uniformly approve of polygamy.

Long intrigued by psychology, Jim believes that humans have many things in common, no matter what their religion or geographical locale. Raised in Dallas, Texas, he initially yearned to become a child psychologist. After volunteering to work at a summer camp for children with muscular dystrophy, he learned that one of his former high school teachers was organizing a group trip to Papua. He jumped at the chance to go.

He was awed by the scenery, and even more overwhelmed by his conversations with the Dani people who worked as porters for the group. (One of them spoke Indonesian, making translated conversations a bit easier.) One porter asked Jim and his friends about something strange they had heard from other travelers. Was it true that foreigners sent their parents away when they became old? The Americans figured out that the Dani were referring to nursing homes for the elderly, and confirmed that this did happen in some cases. As Jim recalls, the man’s eyes filled with tears as he responded, “How could you do that to your parents?”

Thus began Jim’s quest to learn more about cross-cultural expressions of emotion. Noting the difficulties in obtaining a research permit to return to Papua, he switched his focus to the Minangkabau people in West Sumatra province. For his master’s thesis, he studied the role of *rindu*, a certain longing for home typical of young men who had followed tradition in leaving their province and seeking business or study opportunities elsewhere in Indonesia.



*In 2015, Jim obtained a post-doctoral US Fulbright Scholar grant to do research on various efforts by the Indonesian government and local Islamic groups to promote the country as a hub of “moderate” Islam and a successful Muslim-majority democracy.*

Later, a timely profile of Aa Gym in the *New York Times* provided a spark for his PhD work. Jim saw a way to combine his fascination with anthropology, psychology, religion, and marketing. But he knew that access would be essential. Polite, respectful, and displaying a sincere interest in learning more about Islam, he swiftly ensconced himself in the cleric’s devout entourage in Bandung.

Some Indonesians were startled by this feat. Hermawan Kartajaya, founder and chairman of the Jakarta-based marketing consultancy MarkPlus, Inc., met Jim while arranging a book deal and talk show with the cleric. He could hardly believe that this strapping American from Texas could inhabit Aa Gym’s world. “He explained the true, deep meaning of *Alhamdulillah*,” attests Her-

mawan, a Catholic raised in Surabaya. While Jim did not convert to Islam, he studied the precepts and rituals of the religion. Hermawan ended up hiring Jim to help his staff weave ethnographic concepts into their marketing methodology. He was also recruited to speak at several marketing seminars in May 2007, mixing Indonesian, Sundanese, and various jokes in his speeches.

In fact, Jim was no stranger to hands-on marketing exercises. While waiting for acceptance into a PhD program at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, he supported himself with marketing gigs for the National Basketball Association and Major League Baseball. His salary helped subsidize his return trips to Lake Maninjau, where he practiced his Indonesian and learned more about Minangkabau culture.

Now he is pursuing a fresh topic that combines marketing and diplomacy. In 2015, Jim obtained a post-doctoral US Fulbright Scholar grant to do research on various efforts by the Indonesian government and local Islamic groups to promote the country as a hub of “moderate” Islam and a successful Muslim-majority democracy. The research looks at the proliferation of conflicting definitions of “moderate,” as used by such groups as the Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), and Muhammadiyah, as well as the Indonesian ministries of foreign affairs and religion. It also looks at how Islamic ethics and ideals play a role in public diplomacy. For example, Jim observed

a human resources training seminar to propagate the NU concept of “Islam Nusantara.”

At this stage, Jim concedes that such efforts probably won’t change the minds of some deeply conservative figures in the Middle East. But the Indonesian government-backed recognition of “moderate” Islam may yield significant domestic dividends, he argues. “I see a tremendous value,” he says, pointing to the pride that comes from contributing a vision to the world.

In July 2017, he shared his initial findings with academic colleagues at a Jakarta seminar. The feedback was encouraging. Known as a lively speaker, Jim also received kudos for the relevance of his research topic. His paper was deemed “both interesting and timely in the age of terror on the one hand, and Islamophobia on the other hand,” says Muhamad Ali, the director of the Middle East and Islamic Studies program at the University of California at Riverside. It is necessary to “explain how and why the elite constructed an idea and implemented a program they think crucial for the nation.”

As Jim continues to explore Islam in Indonesia, he draws deep nourishment from his friendships. “Fulbright is the best program of public diplomacy ever created in the United States,” he maintains. “It gives that chance for connection, people-to-people. If I see any hope in global diplomacy, it’s not just through diplomats in expensive hotel rooms—it’s through Americans doing projects in the villages and Americans trying to understand arts and culture. This is a necessary part of a broader diplomatic effort.”

*“You can broaden your mind through stories from other people,” he reasoned.*





## 5 Dr. Baskara T. Wardaya, S.J.

### Healing the Past

*On the edge of Chuuk Lagoon, a sandy atoll in Micronesia, a young Jesuit was summoned to a remote school house.*

He was told that the school's history teacher, an American volunteer, had gone home to Iowa. Would the seminarian from Java put aside his other duties and accept this new assignment? Baskara Wardaya swiftly agreed. History could transport him to many new places, even if Chuuk was in the middle of nowhere. "You can broaden your mind through stories from other people," he reasoned.



In pivoting toward history, he found a second vocation. After completing his assignment in Chuuk in 1989, he returned to Indonesia and was ordained a priest in 1992. He went on to earn a PhD in history in 2001. Today, the cleric and scholar known as Romo (“Father”) Baskara plays a vital role in encouraging Indonesians to reexamine their nation’s past with both critical thinking and empathy.

With support from Fulbright, the 56-year-old historian has pursued his core interest: probing the relations between the United States and Indonesia to yield a fuller understanding of the geopolitics behind the cataclysmic shift in power from President Sukarno to President Suharto in 1965–1966. A Fulbright grant in 2004–2005 gave him access to primary sources in the library of former US president Lyndon B. Johnson, and to other materials collected at the University of Wisconsin-Madison.

He sought to comprehend the killings of six Indonesian generals in the early morning of October 1, 1965, and the subsequent massacre of accused leftists that claimed up to half a million lives—which left a miasma of fear lingering for half a century. Romo Baskara believes that open discussion of this painful and controversial period is necessary for healing at the grass-roots level.

“Most young people are ready for reconciliation,” observes Romo Baskara, head of the Center for History and Political Ethics at Sanata Dharma University in Yogyakarta. In his view, however, many individuals among the older generations—citizens who were 15 years old or more in 1965—are “not quite ready” to reconcile with their neighbors, due in part to a dogmatic historical narrative imposed by Suharto’s New Order government, which branded the banned Communist Party of Indonesia as an insidious force that could rise again at any moment. Suharto was toppled in 1998, providing an opening for books, films, and magazine articles that challenged this version of history. Yet, paramilitary groups continue to rail against a renewed “communist threat,” their warnings conveyed through marches, banners, and ominous phone calls.

Despite this charged political atmosphere, Romo Baskara has calmly and consistently led discussions on the tangled geopolitics of the 1960s and their human cost. In venues ranging from small towns in Java to major university campuses in the United States, he shares his findings from books

that he has either written or edited, including *Membongkar Super-semar*—now in its fourth printing—*Bung Karno Menggugat*, and *Suara di Balik Prahara*, which was released in English translation in 2013 as *Truth Will Out*. His writing is noted for its communicative style, which appeals to a youthful readership.

Romo Baskara extols the use of oral history as an “alternative to the grand, official narratives that are produced and reproduced by those in power.” *Truth Will Out* includes firsthand accounts from both witnesses and victims of the bloodletting, and describes reactions from the local Catholic Church hierarchy. Anticipating his critics, Romo Baskara writes that the book is not intended to be a “whitewash,” and assures readers that they need not accept all these accounts at face value. Memories can take many forms. The author also suggests that readers need not be “dumbstruck or paralyzed in despair, but rather take steps forward with hope.”

As a priest attuned to human suffering, Romo Baskara brings the same message to personal encounters with Indonesians aching to overcome the stigma of 1965. In meeting them one-to-one or in small groups, he urges them to keep their spirits up, and to make friends by attending meetings of their neighborhood associations (RT/RW) or joining self-help groups (*gotong royong*). Such modest steps toward community reconciliation can make a big difference, the cleric believes. “Romo has charisma, and when he uses the word ‘hope,’ it is powerful,” says Winarso, coordinator of Sekretariat Bersama ’65, a group in Central Java aimed at helping former prisoners and their families.

Many of the group’s members are Muslim, and Winarso makes it clear that Romo Baskara does not spend his time proselytizing for Catholicism. Recently, in seeking unity, the Jesuit priest persuaded members of the Yogyakarta sultanate to meet with elderly women who were formerly imprisoned, resulting in promises of health benefits.

To find ways to generate more public interest in history, particularly among the youth, Romo Baskara has interacted with comic book artists, novelists, and painters. “What’s very specific about Romo Baskara is his persistence in pursuing this topic,” observes Amrih Widodo, an honorary senior lecturer at Australian National University in Canberra. “Not only is the production of knowledge important, but the circulation and repetition of that knowledge



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is also important.”

In November 2015, for example, Romo Baskara supported an initiative by fellow Sanata Dharma historian Yerry Wirawan and others to mount an exhibition called Museum Bergerak 1965. Held at the University of Gadjah Mada (UGM) in Yogyakarta, the display included cooking vessels and shoes belonging to former political prisoners who did forced labor on Buru Island. The exhibition drew many young visitors, and no one tried to shut it down.

The topic can stir deep emotion. In June 2015, Romo Baskara followed a filmmaking team to Buru Island, and the trip moved him to tears, recounts researcher Ita Nadia.

Raised in a village near Purwodadi, Central Java, Baskara knew his father to be a staunch supporter of Sukarno

and an avid reader of nationalist tomes like *Di Bawah Bendera Revolusi*, a collection of Sukarno’s speeches. He was a schoolmaster, married to a hardworking woman who raised seven children and got up before dawn to cook for agricultural workers who harvested crops on the family’s land—rice, cassava, peanuts, corn, and soybeans. They were both Catholics. Their village, Rejosari, escaped the violence of 1965. But in 1969, a massacre was carried out in Purwodadi, along with many arrests of alleged leftists. Seven Catholic teachers were reportedly among those detained. The historian says his own family was not affected.

Education was a road out of Rejosari. The Jesuits had always been strong on philosophy and mathematics. But they needed more historians to teach in high schools and universities. In 1993, Romo Baskara left for the United States, with Jesuit funding to pursue a PhD at Marquette University in Wisconsin. He was quickly drawn into a dialogue with Cornell University professors and other academics who vigorously countered Suharto’s version of events. This stoked his motivation to learn more.

For his PhD dissertation, he focused on the administration of former US president Harry Truman, whose fleeting support for Dutch moves to reconquer Indonesia infuriated nationalists. The research resulted in a book, *Cold War Shadow: United States Policy toward Indonesia, 1953–1963*. A 2004

Fulbright grant enabled him to move on to the Johnson years, from 1963 to 1969. Romo Baskara concluded that the American president, along with officials from the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), held a distorted view of Sukarno's leftist stance, ignoring his Javanese bent toward unity between conflicting political forces. They considered him a "pro-communist, pro-Soviet Union demagogue," who would not only oppose US economic interests in Indonesia, but would ignite global anti-American sentiment among newly independent nations.

Johnson's predecessor, President John F. Kennedy, had shown a friendlier face to Sukarno, promising increased economic aid. But his assassination gave the upper hand to players eager to see Sukarno ousted. Much of the 1965 carnage was hushed up domestically and abroad; Johnson and his subordinates took satisfaction in knowing that the Communist Party was eviscerated and a more pro-American leader had seized control, the Jesuit cleric learned.

Under the guidance of University of Wisconsin-Madison historian Alfred McCoy, an expert in CIA history in Southeast Asia, Romo Baskara pored through memos and other intelligence sources. Seven years later, thanks to a second Fulbright grant in 2011–2012, he broadened his knowledge of political conflicts and colonial legacies elsewhere in the region and taught classes in Southeast Asian history at the University of California, Riverside. This also assured him proximity to the libraries of former US presidents Richard Nixon and Ronald Reagan.

Romo Baskara has yet to discover who, exactly, bears the lion's share of responsibility for the 1965–1966 violence in Indonesia. No library has yielded the ultimate "smoking gun," he concedes. Along with many fellow historians, he eagerly awaits online access to a cache of US government documents newly declassified in Washington, DC.

At this stage, however, he is inclined to point to multiple sources of violence, rather than focus on a sole mastermind. Choosing a metaphor for 1965, he refers to the Hudson River near Columbia University in New York—the university where he serves on a steering committee for the Alliance for Historical Dialogue and Accountability. "Where does this big Hudson River come from?" asks Romo Baskara. "Not just one source. There are tributaries." Given so many stories and so many players, this historian predicts that the truth won't be simple.

*[Jen] has apprenticed herself to indigenous musicians in Java, Kalimantan, Timor-Leste, South Korea, Japan, and beyond. Fulbright was instrumental in funding Jen's deep-dive into Indonesia in 2011–2012. There, she encountered masters who were generous in spirit, and exacting in their standards.*

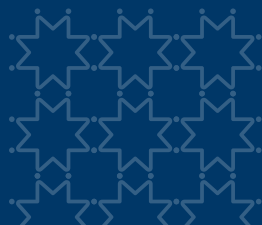




Photo courtesy of Lynn Lane

## 6 Jen Shyu

### Notes Across Continents

*On the 2015 album Sounds and Cries of the World, Jen Shyu's voice glides beyond parochial borders.*

Consider the song “Mother of Time”: Jen sings a Javanese melody, layered with English lyrics that were inspired by a Taiwanese poem, and concludes with a Korean prayer.

On stage, the 39-year-old performance artist can shift genres in the blink of an eye, akin to cinematic montage. Accompanying herself on instruments ranging from a Korean zither to a grand piano to Vietnamese percussion sticks, she believes her music conveys “the essence of traditions” in contemporary form. She dislikes the label “fusion”—noting that this has often been applied to compositions stitched together in a superficial manner. For Jen, depth of emotion and rigorous study of craft flow into each performance.



She has apprenticed herself to indigenous musicians in Java, Kalimantan, Timor-Leste, South Korea, Japan, and beyond. Fulbright was instrumental in funding Jen's deep-dive into Indonesia in 2011–2012. There, she encountered masters who were generous in spirit, and exacting in their standards. "The more earnest you are, and the harder you work, the more they want to give you," she notes. Her work involved concentrated hours of practice, assiduous note-taking, and an intuitive human connection that can be felt without words.

Today, even if listeners can't instantly grasp the literal meaning of all of her lyrics, Jen hopes they will respond intuitively to the moods and the melodies.

Music "works on the body—it gets to what we all have in common," observes Vijay Iyer, a celebrated composer and curator, who chose Jen to perform at the Ojai Music Festival in California in June 2017, in addition to other venues. "I think that Jen's in-depth cross-cultural explorations have put her in touch with some essential realities about the human condition—particularly issues facing women around the world. She has a beautiful, versatile voice with tremendous depth and range, and she brings forth expressions from the edges of human experience."

Versatility has been the hallmark of Jen's life, from an early age. Growing up in Peoria, Illinois, she studied piano, violin, voice, and ballet. Teachers recognized her flourishing talent. At age 13, she wore a puff-sleeved dress as she sat down at the piano to play Tchaikovsky's Piano Concerto No. 1 in B Flat Minor with the Peoria Symphony Orchestra—a far cry from the sleek sarong and strapless black top that she dons for her latest performance piece, "Nine Doors," which premiered in New York in June 2017.

From Western classical music, Jen switched to jazz, gliding to a new range of prestigious collaborations in jazz circles on both the east and west coasts of the United States. But she was restless. Her thoughts kept returning to her ancestry. Her father was raised in Taiwan, and her mother was the child of Hakka Chinese who had settled in East Timor (now the independent nation of Timor-Leste). After meeting at Syracuse University, her parents forged a new life in the American Midwest, which didn't entirely suit their daughter. Jen's friends in the jazz scene encouraged her to wander further afield, and avoid being pigeonholed as "just a Chinese-looking girl singing like Sarah Vaughan."

She began in Taiwan, where a cousin nicknamed “Acid” (due to her devotion to acid rock music) told her about the 1970s folk icon Chen Da, a slender singer known for strumming a traditional Taiwanese moon lute. Glimpsing the lute’s beauty and storytelling possibilities, Jen adopted it as one of her signature instruments. A subsequent three-month stint in Timor-Leste put her in touch with singers whose stirring voices had been almost buried under a legacy of war and neglect. With Indonesia right next door, she made up her mind to make a brief visit—and that one week in Yogyakarta in 2010 marked a profound change in her life.

Just a few lessons in the complex Javanese vocal art of *sindhenan* convinced her to apply for a Fulbright grant to enrich her repertoire in Solo, Central Java. “How do I get my voice to approach that unforced clarity that can cut through the whole gamelan?” she wondered.

The story of Jen’s musical evolution in Solo in 2011–2012 offers a vivid illustration of Fulbright’s ripple effect. It’s a tale of artists influencing other artists, both in their creative directions and their access to a vibrant international network. For example, after collaborating with Jen in Central Java, Indonesian jazz composer Djaduk Ferianto secured a grant to visit New York and was embraced by Jen’s avant-garde jazz circles. That sojourn also taught him something about the value of systematic planning in an artistic career, he says. Jen’s recommendations also helped several other talented Javanese artists come to the notice of overseas patrons.

Moreover, her story also shows how a “foreign” artist can act as a bridge to connect local artists, inspiring everyone in the process. Prior to her departure for Indonesia, Jen spent some time in New York with gamelan director I. M. Harjito, who praised a *sindhen* known as Nyi Ngatirah. A legend in her prime, the elderly Ngatirah was still eking out a living in Semarang, performing weekly with a *wayang orang* troupe. It was a two-hour trip from Solo, but Jen visited her about six times, requesting vocal guidance and making recordings for later study. She collected donations to ease Ngatirah’s difficult living conditions, and arranged for her to travel to Solo to interact with younger musicians who had never met the aging virtuoso.

With a dash of humor, the senior *sindhen* urged Jen to enunciate properly. “She would say, ‘I’m missing teeth, and I can still sing more clearly than these young singers,’” the Fulbright grantee recalls. Once Jen started learning *kromo*, the most polite form of the Javanese language, her *sindhen* skills



*“You’re going to learn so much more if you are patient, and take on one thing at a time,” she observes. This philosophy also helped her to emulate some of the glacial movements of Javanese court dance.*

improved. One of her new friends, the outstanding vocalist Peni Candra Rini, decided to come along to Semarang. She had grown up listening to Ngatirah’s voice on the radio. From a seemingly distant idol, Ngatirah became a charismatic force for Peni’s work. “Her energy was really important for me, to touch the reality,” observes Peni, trained at the Institut Seni Indonesia Surakarta (ISI).

Tackling the difficulties of the *slendro* pentatonic scale, Jen studied with ISI guru Darsono. “I never wrote out things in Western notation to memorize these melodies. I just did it by ear,” Jen says. Aware of her talent,

Darsono was equally struck by Jen’s deferential treatment. “I felt like her parent,” he says, noting that she would always supply the food and drink of his choice during private lessons. He gladly sang at her Javanese house-warming ceremony, sloshing through the mud as he circled the house three times.

As someone who always felt a great urgency to inhale new languages and art forms, Jen learned how to slow down. “You’re going to learn so much more if you are patient, and take on one thing at a time,” she observes. This philosophy also helped her to emulate some of the glacial movements of Javanese court dance.

Jen also approached intrepid director Garin Nugroho, whose work she admired in the film *Opera Jawa*, a surreal musical extravaganza. Garin agreed to direct Jen in “Solo Rites: Seven Breaths.” Jen became more comfortable with audiences, mingling for some banter akin to a *goro-goro* interlude in shadow puppetry. She also got some lessons in dramatic timing. On Garin’s suggestion, in a charged final scene, she holds a pair of scissors to her throat and then cuts off a fistful of hair as a symbolic detachment from the baggage of the past.

For the first time, Garin recognized his own affinity for solo work, which he says can truly showcase talent and focus on the body of an individual artist. He directed a solo for Javanese dancer Rianto in 2016. And he plans to work with Jen again in 2018 on a piece titled “Zero.” That title partly refers to the landscape flattened by the vicious tsunami that struck Aceh province in 2004, leaving some 170,000 people dead. “Technology is developing

strongly, but the ability of people to understand nature decreases until zero,” Garin observes.

Memories of the dead play a dominant role in “Nine Doors.” The work conveys Jen’s grief over a fatal accident involving Sri Joko Raharjo, a lithe and promising young composer and puppeteer, who was a constant companion for Jen and Peni at ISI. In June 2014, a truck slammed into a car containing the sleeping figures of Joko, his wife, and two children. Only his daughter Nala, then six years old, survived.

In one sequence, Jen summons those moments just after the crash, imagining Nala to feel dazed and alone. Jen plucks at her *gayageum* (the Korean zither) and then bends over the piano. In *sindhen* tradition, she sings a Javanese melody actually composed by Joko at ISI. The music is overlaid with wisps of memory: a recording of the bright mingled chatter of Peni, Joko, and Nala. Then come verses in Indonesian, stressing the need to “keep going” despite the loss.

Much of Jen’s music and her encounters across the world seem interwoven with her Chinese name, *Qiu Yan*, translated as Autumn Goose. As portrayed in ancient poetry, Jen learned, this fowl embodies “the cycle of departure and return, the inevitability of both, and the longing that accompanies the one leaving and the one left behind.”

*Her encounters with divergent viewpoints include analysis of liberation theology in contemporary Latin America, Sufi mysticism in medieval Spain, and Catholic mysticism in medieval Germany. To cap her expertise in comparative religion, Syafa became the first Muslim to emerge with a doctorate from the Catholic Theological Union in Chicago in 2008—and remarkably, earned another doctorate simultaneously at the Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago.*





7

## Dr. Syafaatun Almirzanah

### Beauty in Diversity

*Walking together with 15,000 Buddhist monks, nuns, and lay-believers, Syafaatun Almirzanah joined a moonlight procession from the ninth-century Mendut temple to the pristine stupas of Borobudur.*

It was not the first time the devout Muslim scholar had made this three-kilometer journey in Central Java, marking the anniversary of the Buddha's first sermon in India. In fact, she had often engaged in discussions with Sri Pannavaro Mahathera, a senior monk at the monastery in Mendut, comparing the precepts of Buddhism and Islam. Such talks inspired a series of local television programs, which also covered other religions such as Hinduism and Catholicism.



But this year, Syafa brought along a newcomer to Mendut. Also joining the July 8, 2017 procession was R. Scott Appleby, a University of Notre Dame history professor, who studies the role of global religions in conflict and peacemaking. Calling the procession “a highlight of my life,” he points to Syafa’s sincere commitment to interfaith understanding. She brings “a willingness to listen and learn, with great respect for the integrity of the traditions and their practitioners,” he observes. “This is absolutely crucial to her influence.”

For the 54-year-old scholar, tolerance began at home. Syafa had firsthand experience of many shades of Islam. Her father’s side of the family sprung from Nahdlatul Ulama, while her mother’s side favored Masyumi. While raising the family in Purwokerto, Central Java, her parents were united in encouraging academic achievement without discriminating between sons and daughters. As a child, she was drilled in English, Arabic, and knowledge of the Qur’an. At age 12, Syafa was enrolled in a modern *pesantren* in Pabelan, Central Java, founded by an alumnus of Pondok Modern Darussalam Gontor, a leading Islamic boarding school noted for its spirit of broad-mindedness and academic inquiry.

These days, one of Syafa’s favorite quotations comes from the Harper Lee novel, *To Kill a Mockingbird*, where Atticus says, “You never really understand a person until you consider things from his point of view . . . until you climb into his skin and walk around in it.”

By that measure, she has logged great distances. Her encounters with divergent viewpoints include analysis of liberation theology in contemporary Latin America, Sufi mysticism in medieval Spain, and Catholic mysticism in medieval Germany. To cap her expertise in comparative religion, Syafa became the first Muslim to emerge with a doctorate from the Catholic Theological Union in Chicago in 2008—and remarkably, earned another doctorate simultaneously at the Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago.

One of the main insights of her work in comparative mysticism is the role of humility in fostering interfaith understanding. Both the Sufi mystic Ibn ‘Arabī and the German mystic Meister Eckhart taught that God lies beyond human comprehension. So, while each religion may assert certain ideas about God, believers should remain humble in acknowledging the vast range of interpretations involved in worship. “I think you can have a

dialogue if you have humility. If you don't have that, you will not learn anything," says Syafa, who teaches at the Sunan Kalijaga State Islamic University (UIN) in Yogyakarta and conducts research at the Center for Bioethics and Medical Humanities at the University of Gadjah Mada (UGM).

Rather than regard mystics as some sort of eccentric spiritual fringe, she joins other scholars in perceiving "a profound relevancy to the efforts of mainstream believers to integrate the challenges of pluralism into their own religious identities."

Such ideas could easily be accepted in Chicago, where Syafa grew accustomed to a cosmopolitan circle of thinkers. She also encountered a variety of liberal viewpoints in Washington, DC, during a teaching stint at Georgetown University in 2011–2012.

But her willingness to spend a year as a Fulbright Scholar-in-Residence at Eastern Mennonite University in rural Harrisonburg, Virginia, in 2016–2017 led to a different experience altogether.

There, she encountered students raised in a more conservative environment. She needed to emphasize that understanding other religions did not imply a move to convert. It meant moving away from stereotypes, and diving more deeply into the study of their own religious traditions. Within Christianity, for example, she explained that there were multiple interpretations of the biblical account of Eve being created from Adam's rib.

Muslims on campus were scarce. Syafa answered a volley of questions about her choice to wear a head scarf, and about Muslim attitudes toward polygamy and the treatment of women. She showed videos on Iran, Saudi Arabia, and Indonesia that displayed variations in Islamic practice. And she encouraged students to take a more active approach to learning, referring them to a nearby Turkish mosque as well as a Buddhist temple to observe different methods of worship.

She did have a few students whose parents feared they would be "contaminated" by such outings, Syafa recalls. But she persisted, and asked them to write about "your encounter with another religion" for a final paper. On occasion, she also advised students to embrace the "spirituality of reconciliation," urging forgiveness in a family context.



*“She tries to show that the imperative of being Muslim lies not only in prayer, but putting it into action—especially in dealing with non-Muslims in daily life,” observes Sanata Dharma University theology professor Heru Prakosa*

The Fulbright grant allowed her to travel to other campuses, as well. In February 2017, for example, she visited Wake Forest University in North Carolina for classroom discussions and two public lectures: one on interreligious cooperation and another on Islamic bioethics (a topic that she is currently researching for a book). “All the talks were very well-received and we had vivid discussions about issues such as organ transplants and IVF [in vitro fertilization],” recalls Nelly van Doorn-Harder, a professor of Islamic Studies.

Syafa returned to Indonesia in June 2017. In her home country, she is particularly known for her critical edge in discussions about Islam. For example, in her 2014 book *When Mecca Becomes Las Vegas: Religion, Politics and Ideology*, she deplores the expansion of pilgrimage infrastructure at the expense of historical sites and deeper spiritual fulfillment. In public forums and newspaper op-eds, she speaks out against hate speech aimed at non-Muslims. “She is influential among her students and lecturers in her field,” says philosopher M. Amin Abdullah, former rector of UIN Sunan Kalijaga. Though outnumbered by male colleagues, she has secured a respected place as a woman, he adds.

“She tries to show that the imperative of being Muslim lies not only in prayer, but putting it into action—especially in dealing with non-Muslims in daily life,” observes Sanata Dharma University theology professor Heru Prakosa, a Jesuit priest who wrote his PhD dissertation on the Iranian Sunni Muslim theologian Fakhruddin Razi. The Jesuit has invited Syafa several times to speak to candidates for priesthood about comparative mysticism, among other topics. She has also invited him to address students in her classrooms.

Fresh from her latest stint in the United States, Syafa says that she is still mulling what the “Real America” might be. Certainly, for her, it remains a land of intriguing coexistence. For example, she managed to spend six days during the Ramadan fasting month in Las Vegas (jumping from the metaphor used in her 2014 book title to the reality on the ground). “People say that Las Vegas is just casinos and gambling, but it’s not!” she says. Syafaatun was intrigued by the rapid growth of Pentecostal churches in the

area, as well as the substantial Muslim presence—with at least six mosques that count an estimated 12,000 followers. During the trip, she marveled at how some Muslims managed to make an honest living in the midst of such garish excess.

In Las Vegas, she also noted the tolerance shown to people who might otherwise simply be branded “sinners.” With a little help from Fulbright, it was another chance to relish the diverse spectrum of humanity.





*Two Fulbright US Scholar grants—one in 1999 and another in 2017—have allowed her to delve into the Islamic sounds of the archipelago.*



8

## Dr. Anne Rasmussen

### Sacred Sounds

*In early July 2017, Anne Rasmussen found herself in an Indonesian recording studio in Ciputat. On her lap she held a smooth, pear-shaped lute—known in the Arab world as an oud.*

That might seem an unusual instrument to be toted around by an American woman of Scandinavian and German ancestry. But together with her close friend Qaria'ah Hajjah Maria Ulfah, Anne leaned into a microphone for renditions of *sholawat* and *tawasih*, two different genres of Islamic song with Arabic text.

The *oud* has opened many doors for Anne over the years, leading to deep friendships across Indonesia, the United States, and the Arabian Gulf. Performance and scholarship are closely linked in her work as an ethnomusicologist. Sound clarifies intellectual insights.



When she picks up her instrument and joins other musicians, such collaborations lead to “creative intimacy,” 58-year-old Anne explains. “Making music really expands your relationships and your world.”

She began playing the *oud* and interviewing Arab American musicians in the mid-1980s as a graduate student in California, and much later she conducted fieldwork in Oman. Initially, she never guessed that her musical path would extend to Indonesia. Two Fulbright US Scholar grants—one in 1999 and another in 2017—have allowed her to delve into the Islamic sounds of the archipelago. Bringing her *oud* to a variety of encounters, Anne found warm acceptance at Islamic boarding schools and prayer gatherings. She paid close attention to the patterns of Arab music incorporated into Qur’anic recitation in public competitions and televised performances.

She is forthright in her conclusion that women in Indonesia play a far more active role in reciting the Qur’an than women in the Middle East. In contrast to places like Egypt and Saudi Arabia, Anne finds that women’s voices in Indonesia are considered “neither shameful nor defective,” and they “represent neither temptation nor danger.” In fact, Indonesia’s female champions are considered among the best reciters in the world, and their vocal artistry is in no way inferior to that of men, Anne asserts.

Her cross-cultural work has won respect for its pioneering qualities. “No other musicologist has been able to bring such knowledge of Arab practice to bear on field observation of Islamic music in Indonesia,” says Philip Yampolsky, who recorded, edited, and annotated a series of 20 albums for the *Music of Indonesia* series, published by Smithsonian Folkways Recordings. While a bevy of scholars have focused on the intricacies of Javanese and Balinese gamelan music, Anne’s work “reveals the richness and seriousness of a wholly different tradition in Indonesia,” he adds.

Her seminal book *Women, the Recited Qur’an, and Islamic Music in Indonesia* was published in 2010. According to Andrew Weintraub, a professor of music at the University of Pittsburgh, it represents “one of the few studies of Indonesian music to focus on women, another lacuna in Indonesian music studies.” A volume that Anne subsequently coedited with David Harnish in 2011, *Divine Inspirations: Music and Islam in Indonesia*, exposes readers to a wider variety of Indonesian sounds, including *dangdut*, a pop culture staple, and *orkes gambus*, which features an Indonesian variety of *oud* music.

Anne straddles various platforms to disseminate her ideas. She teaches at the College of William & Mary in Williamsburg, Virginia, where she serves as a professor of music and ethnomusicology. “I think my work is a bit of a myth-buster. Westerners think that Islam is a faith where women get the short end of the stick,” Anne observes. She also took the reins as president of the Society for Ethnomusicology in 2015–2017, urging her colleagues to do their utmost in sharing the fruits of their research. For example, Anne is collaborating with the Mizan Group, a Jakarta-based publishing house, on a forthcoming Indonesian translation of her 2010 book.

During her stint as a US Fulbright Scholar in 2017, she got involved in 17 workshops and seminars in Java and Sumatra, where music was not the only subject at hand. Students and faculty asked questions about Muslim life in the United States and about the obstacles faced by women in politics and academia.

Fulbright has given Anne “a fundamental experience in global citizenship that I’m not sure I could acquire by just sitting at home and reading the *New York Times*,” she observes. “It’s a huge bundle of life lessons, which I hope will trickle down in my teaching and writing.”

Raised in Massachusetts, Anne initially applied herself to learning classical music for the piano and cello. Long hours of practice augured a lonely existence. So she decided to plunge into musical theater. She had fun, but didn’t envision a promising future. Then, while enrolled at Northwestern University in Illinois, she took lessons in jazz—leading to some exuberant gigs in Paris nightclubs.

She loved the improvisation integral to jazz. And that’s exactly what spurred her affection for Arab and Turkish music, in all its improvised ornamentation. Under the tutelage of A. J. Racy, an accomplished Lebanese musician who teaches ethnomusicology at the University of California, Los Angeles, she gravitated to the *oud*. She also discovered that Arab American musicians were happy to welcome her on stage.

Her first experience in Indonesia was the result of some personal improvisation. In 1995, her husband got a job in Jakarta and she decided to accompany him. From her window, she could hear strains of Arab melodies and curiosity led her further afield. At Festival Istiqlal, held at an iconic mosque in Jakarta, she was introduced to the woman who would play a particularly





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influential role in her life: Qaria’ah Hajjah Maria Ulfah, a champion reciter of the Qur’an and a driving force behind the Institut Ilmu al-Qur’an (IIQ).

Thus began her quest to understand the social, political, and aesthetic parameters of Qur’anic recitation. From the 1700s to the 1900s, recitation was transmitted by Muslim traders who settled in coastal areas, or by Indonesian pilgrims to Mecca. After Indonesian independence, famous reciters from the Arab world visited Indonesia and much later, during the Suharto era, studying the Qur’an was encouraged as a spiritual and civic duty, Anne explains.

Maria Ulfah and her pulmonologist husband, Mukhtar Ikhsan, were struck by Anne’s diligence in musical research. When in Jakarta, their home is her “base camp.” Even at meal time she has a pen and notebook at hand, continually raising questions about context and technique. In a culture heavily reliant on oral tradition, they had never encountered such zeal for documentation. Anne could replicate a melody with ease, even after ten years had passed from the time she first learned a particular passage. “It was exactly what I had taught,” marvels the IIQ scholar born in Lamongan, East Java.

The professors and students were well aware that Anne was not Muslim. But this did not prove to be a barrier. “The Qaris (reciters) were fascinated by her presence,” recalls Dadi Darmadi, who assisted her with interviews at IIQ in 1999, the year she returned on a Fulbright grant. Now a senior researcher at the Center for the Study of Islam and Society (PPIM), he says he benefited from lengthy discussions with her, replete with intellectual depth and empathy.

Anne was influential in arranging a prestigious college tour in the United States for Maria Ulfah and her husband in 1999 and again in 2016, and continues to conduct joint presentations with her. In November 2016, Maria Ulfah recited a passage from the Qur’an as part of an inauguration ceremony at an ethnomusicology conference in Washington, DC. And beneath photographs of reggae icon Bob Marley on the walls of the Ciputat recording studio, Anne cut those Arabic tracks with her IIQ confidante, who now seems convinced of the crucial role of documentation.

Anne has also enjoyed a longtime association with cultural activist Emha Ainun Nadjib, leader of the music ensemble Kiai Kanjeng. She has performed on her *oud* with the group more than a dozen times over the years, noting the “staying power” of the ensemble, which keeps up a vigorous schedule in the small towns of Java and beyond. She enjoys the improvisational atmosphere, with its mix of motivational speeches, humor, and music infused with spiritual meaning.

A life in music tends to be unpredictable. Sudden invitations often lead in new directions. But traces remain. After listening to Anne’s July 3, 2017, presentation in Jakarta, the director of the Graduate School at the Syarif Hidayatullah State Islamic University Jakarta spoke up. “I will support our students to do research in music,” declared Masykuri Abdillah. Now he wants to do his part to ensure that more Indonesians understand the value of music, beyond its power to entertain.

*[In Washington, DC], Evi focused on interviewing youth in two troubled wards where drug deals, murders, and mental illness wreaked havoc on family life... She was struck by how many American teenagers and young adults in their twenties ended up on the streets, after being shunted through an ineffective foster care system.*





## 9 Evi Mariani Sofian

### Both Sides Now

*In a quiet alley hemming the Ciliwung River, an editorial meeting begins.*

There are no desks, no computers—just an orange tarp spread over raw concrete. Sitting in a circle, seasoned editor Evi Mariani fields questions in a gentle voice. She knows this particular group will need extra reassurance to get on the right track.

Their aim: to go online and provide fresh insight into Jakarta communities abruptly dislocated by development projects. “Should we be writing about the origins of the kampong, or telling stories about the people who now live in the kampong?” asks a recruit. “Usually a journalist asks about everything, and then chooses what to include,” explains 41-year-old Evi. “Get as much information as you can, first, and later we can decide what we find to be the most interesting.”



They don't mind starting from the ground up. These novice reporters mostly make a living as vendors, motorcycle drivers, and security guards, and have all seen their neighborhoods riven by resettlement controversies. "I am really happy to see that someone from the outside wants to help us," says Haris, who sells plastic watches in nearby Fatahillah Square.

During Evi's tenure as a reporter and city editor at the *Jakarta Post*, she relished her role in shaping coverage of urban evictions. Yet she also believes that individuals from affected communities should play a greater role in crafting the narrative. If she helps them to create their own website, they might have a shot at dissuading the mainstream media—and thus, the public—from assuming that evictions only affect an underclass of thugs, prostitutes, and drug addicts. "The journalist we trust is *mbak* [sister] Evi," says Gugun Muhammad, advocacy coordinator for the Urban Poor Consortium, an NGO supporter of this initiative. "She sees that poor people are not garbage."

The July meeting brought back vivid memories of Evi's experiences in the United States, where she traveled in 2011–2012 on a Hubert H. Humphrey Fellowship Program for mid-career professionals. The fellowship falls under the umbrella of programs linked to Fulbright. In the batch of ten fellows, she was the only one to volunteer for a four-month internship at *Street Sense*, a Washington, DC-based newspaper devoted to exploring the dynamics of homelessness. The editors were generous with contacts and encouraged her to write.

There, Evi focused on interviewing youth in two troubled wards where drug deals, murders, and mental illness wreaked havoc on family life. Despite Evi's far more sheltered upbringing in Bandung, West Java—where she attended strict Catholic schools—she offered a sympathetic ear. She was struck by how many American teenagers and young adults in their twenties ended up on the streets, after being shunted through an ineffective foster care system. "I talked with three or four girls, who were 16 and 17 years old. During foster care, they were moved around to 12 different houses. They complained that other girls were mean, people stole their belongings, and the places were filthy," Evi recalls.

Those reporting experiences brought tangible confirmation of an uncomfortable truth. "Inequality is everywhere. It's a global issue. And I really

believe that the press should be active in narrowing the inequality,” she maintains. That’s another reason she chose to include an ethics course as part of her academic work at the Philip Merrill College of Journalism at the University of Maryland.

Evi also had pragmatic reasons in applying for the Humphrey Fellowship. “I needed some leverage in my career,” she recalls. Even though she already had a master’s degree in urban studies from the Netherlands, she noticed that other newsroom colleagues who had moved up the ladder had completed overseas journalism courses and internships. In fact, the *Jakarta Post* has been one of the most steadfast allies of the Humphrey program, with editors convinced of its merit in polishing English language skills and providing international exposure. This paper is one of the few Indonesian media outlets that disburse salaries and hold jobs during the fellow’s stint overseas.

In Evi’s case, the *Jakarta Post* also gained valuable knowledge on how to handle the difficult transition from being a print dinosaur to becoming a nimble media outlet competing for online readers. “She became more aware, not only about the problems that newspapers are facing with the onslaught of digital media, but also the solutions,” observes Endy Bayuni, editor-in-chief of the *Jakarta Post*, who has known Evi since she joined the paper as cub reporter in 2003 and watched her evolve into a feisty editor. He credits Evi with putting together an effective flowchart for the new online newsroom. To maximize human resources, Evi recalls her sustained efforts to integrate the reporters who were previously segregated into print and online teams.

However, Evi readily concedes that she did not enter the United States with such a gung-ho approach to digital media. At that time, she was still a firm believer that quality journalism, including investigative reporting, was best showcased in print. But a course in multimedia journalism and an additional internship at the *Washington Post* changed her mind. She was impressed by the editors’ “upbeat” approach to the digital landscape, and paid attention to how they transformed the interior design of the newsroom to accommodate the news flow. “The *Washington Post* did not compromise on quality,” says Evi. “Clearly, digital was the future.”

Upon her return, Evi also worked closely with younger colleagues at the



*“She became more aware, not only about the problems that newspapers are facing with the onslaught of digital media, but also the solutions,” observes Endy Bayuni, editor-in-chief of the Jakarta Post*

*Jakarta Post.* “She always pushed us to think further and dig deeper in every subject,” observes reporter Corry Elyda. Even when the material gathered from the field seemed lackluster, Evi brainstormed to find a significant angle. In career development, she has also been a mentor. “She encouraged me to move to other desks, so I could get broader perspectives. She also supported me to study again,” the young reporter adds.

Five years after the Humphrey Fellowship, and after assisting the *Jakarta Post* with its transition, Evi decided to make a big transition in her own career. In mid-2017, she left the newspaper and joined a small team to launch Indonesia’s version of The Conversation, a website that started in Australia, and which aims to promote more well-informed debate in the public sphere. The online portal spurs academics to write for general audiences on their areas of expertise, including science, public health, the environment, and urban planning. Evi will be editing in both Indonesian and English.

Ideally, clarity should not be compromised by the complexity of the topics. “The challenge is to edit so that an educated 16-year-old can understand the piece,” she says, in her new avatar as politics and society editor. Meanwhile, in a volunteer capacity, she is still assisting those novice reporters in creating their own website on urban dislocation.

True to her interests, at The Conversation Evi is hoping to showcase some of the debate surrounding major Jakarta development projects, such as the Giant Sea Wall, a 32-kilometer-wide dike aimed at improving flood control in Jakarta. While Evi says she is not personally convinced that the multibillion dollar megaproject is the correct response to the capital’s watery woes, she wishes to spotlight the views of scientists who are both pro and contra.

Political polarization over urban development has been particularly harsh in Jakarta lately, dividing friends and former allies. Yet Evi continues to believe that a healthy debate, informed by science, remains possible in Indonesia. She has long been intrigued by contrasting viewpoints. For her original thesis project during her undergraduate studies in the 1990s at the University of Gadjah Mada (UGM) in Yogyakarta, she attempted to analyze the diver-

gent editorials published in four different newspapers from the 1950s. (That brief turned out to be a little too ambitious, so she narrowed her focus.)

Back in the mid-1990s, Evi was one of the few Chinese Indonesian students who chose to study “*sospol*” (social and political sciences) at UGM, and ultimately completed a degree in mass communications. She expresses the hope that more Chinese Indonesian youth will venture into journalism, where she feels she has not faced any racial barriers in doing her work. “I would love to see more Chinese Indonesian reporters,” she says.

For his part, urban poor advocate Gugun knows that Evi’s background is different from that of the recruits sitting cross-legged on the orange tarp. But he doesn’t care. What counts, says Gugun, is her commitment. “*Mbak* Evi wants to reach out and help,” he says. “There are not many journalists like that.”



*"I love the energy of my students, which sometimes does need some reining in, but honestly is the reason I show up to work every day," she wrote in a blog that chronicled her three years in Indonesia*



IO

## Grace Wivell

### Igniting Minds

*Instead of condemning students to a dry grammar lesson on the conditional tense, English teacher Grace Wivell had a better idea.*

She cranked up the volume of the song “Perfect” by British rocker Emma Blackery and suggested that the class make a video. The gleeful teenagers in Malang, East Java, scribbled signs to wave at the camera, such as “I wish I were a zombie,” and “I wish I were brave.” They also wrote about their strengths, as the song underscores self-acceptance. A grinning student in glasses hoisted the message “I am perfectly imperfect.”

Grace edited the video and posted it on YouTube. In a flash, the rock star tweeted the link to her fans across Europe, thrilling the students in East Java.



That 2015 experience at the SMAN 10 (Public High School 10) in Malang was just another reminder of Grace's uncanny ability to harness enthusiasm. "I love the energy of my students, which sometimes does need some reining in, but honestly is the reason I show up to work every day," she wrote in a blog that chronicled her three years in Indonesia—first, as a teacher in Malang, then in Gorontalo, Sulawesi, and finally as a Jakarta-based coordinator of the 2016–2017 batch of US Fulbright English Teaching Assistants (ETAs) dispatched across the archipelago by the American Indonesian Exchange Foundation (AMINEF).

It was an extended stint, leaving a long trail of appreciation. In Sulawesi, an Indonesian colleague who co-taught English alongside Grace credited her with reviving a sense of fun and engagement in the classroom. "Before, I used to go straight to the lesson plan. But now I try to combine the lessons with interesting games that have some relevance to the material we are teaching," says Miswarty Ayub, who teaches at the Madrasah Aliyah Negeri 1 (National Islamic School 1) in Gorontalo.

Outside the classroom, Grace's unstinting support for rookie ETAs was also praised. Not just in times of difficulty, but also in sharing the sense of discovery that comes with a new posting. Julius Tsai, a former ETA in Magelang, Central Java, recalls a favorite moment when Grace turned up for a site visit and they sat in a grassy plaza to eat *kupat tahu*, a sweet and garlicky tofu specialty. He was struck by her curiosity to "to learn about the rich (and delicious) parts of Indonesian culture."

She was also the kind of teacher who would bake apple crisps for Indonesian 10th-graders after parsing a story on Johnny Appleseed, recalls Malang-based English teacher Tri Luhpalupi. On another occasion, Grace bought watermelons (instead of pumpkins) for a Halloween event, and taught the students how to carve them.

She tried to make the best of small adversities in the countryside, such as electricity shortages. A black-out "forces you to unplug, slow down, to step outside. It is endearing in that way," she wrote in her blog.

Grace was an emissary from the American rural heartland. The 25-year-old teacher grew up on a series of dairy farms, with her family settling

in the upstate New York hamlet of Deansboro, population 1,300. During high school, she opted for three years of homeschooling to give herself more time to participate in 4-H, a network of youth organizations founded in 1902 that offers activities related to agriculture and livestock, among other topics. In a series of Dairy Quiz Bowls and Skill-a-Thons, she waltzed through quizzes on cows, judged the quality of hay, and paraded goats.

One of the main attractions was the opportunity to travel to places like Kentucky and Pennsylvania for competitions. Aside from learning a variety of farming practices in the United States, she also interacted with some international experts from Russia, Germany, and Argentina. It was the first glimmer of a wider world. A beloved great-aunt, who once served as a nurse in the US Navy, also recounted tales of her travels in South Korea and Eastern Europe.

In her teenage years, Grace didn't have much luck in learning foreign languages. She dabbled in French, German, and Latin, but the words didn't stick. Finally, when she got to Ithaca College, she encountered a Spanish teacher who changed her attitude to learning. He urged his pupils to watch films, listen to music, read newspaper articles, and find other creative ways to absorb new vocabulary. His message: stop being scared, and do it the way it works for you.

As an English major and a budding poet, Grace applied those ideas to teaching English as a foreign language in the United States. Her students in 2014 included refugees from North Korea, along with young people from Russia, Spain, and China. She also participated in a teacher certification program for grades 7–12. Professors noted that she was a hard worker, completing hundreds of hours' service in local schools and community centers, in excess of the requirements.

Ultimately, Grace carried her Spanish teacher's credo to Indonesia, both in her own efforts to learn Indonesian on the ground and teach English in Malang and Gorontalo. "It was a matter of not being scared, and not worrying," she says. "Just talk, and try to communicate."

She arrived in Indonesia with far more teaching experience than most of the other ETAs. While all of those selected have distinguished themselves in





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various ways, including leadership and community service, a degree in teaching is not a prerequisite. Mindful of their need for quick and practical grounding, Grace worked to revamp the orientation session and midyear enrichment conference in her role as ETA coordinator.

For example, she passed on some techniques in classroom management. It can be as simple as clapping to get students' attention, or saying "all eyes on me." In an ambitious initiative, she and an American teacher posted in Kalimantan canvassed alumni of the ETA program and compiled a large database of lessons from years past. Easy access came via Google Drive. "I think this is one of the most valuable resources that ETAs have," says Mackenzie Findlay, who worked together with Grace on the project after she completed her posting in Palangkaraya, Central Kalimantan, moving on to teach a second year in Kendari in Southeast Sulawesi.

"Along with the other ETAs, I was very grateful to have it

as we prepared our lessons throughout the year."

In some ways, the typical ETA's lack of experience and Indonesian-language skills can also be seen as an advantage, especially during extracurricular activities. When students see that the teacher is "perfectly imperfect" (as in the tweeted video), they can also loosen up. It may reduce the fear factor in learning English when the student can sense that the ETA is also straining to learn Indonesian.

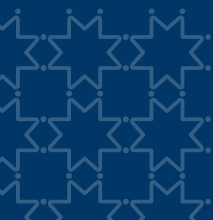
Reflecting on interactions with students who initially seemed daunted, other ETAs often told Grace, "Suddenly they can speak English when they want to teach me Indonesian!" That prompted an idea for a new series of videos, called "The Bahasa Project," in which Grace asked her students to take words like *rajin* and *sopan* and provide the meaning in English by acting out little scripts. Grace hopes that future ETAs will continue along this line.

Back in the classroom, Grace also made an effort to introduce diversity. As a white American, she knew that she was just what her students anticipated. So she tried to broaden their outlook by discussing the legacy of inspiring

leaders during Black History month, and by assigning Native American folktales. The students seemed to warm to animal characters that acted like people. “‘Rainbow Crow’ is always a hit,” she recalls.

Grace decided to pursue graduate studies in applied linguistics at Stony Brook University in New York in 2017. She still wants to be a teacher. Before her own classes started in August, she could be found at the Waterville Public Library, arranging a display of handwoven textiles she had collected from East Nusa Tenggara, Sumatra, Sulawesi, and Java. In the classic Fulbright mold of cultural ambassador, she pledges to keep finding ways to “share my experience, so it doesn’t just benefit me.”

*The Indonesian children who watch  
34-year-old Novi enter their classroom—  
dressed in her puffy yellow uniform, red  
helmet, and heavy boots—also absorb  
another lesson: a woman can become a  
firefighter too, just like a man.*





## II

# Novi Dimara

## To the Rescue

*When Novi Dimara visits schoolchildren in Papua, she tells them to remember three important words: stop, drop, and roll.*

Those three words have the power to save lives when a fire breaks out. Novi learned that key phrase in the United States in 2014, when she grabbed the chance to join the squad at Arlington County Fire Station 9 and study fire science and technology at Northern Virginia Community College. Today, the Indonesian children who watch 34-year-old Novi enter their classroom—dressed in her puffy yellow uniform, red helmet, and heavy boots—also absorb another lesson: a woman can become a firefighter too, just like a man.



Her employers at PT Freeport Indonesia subsidized Novi's stint in Virginia as a fellow in the State Department's Community College Initiative Program (CCIP), which is managed in Indonesia by the American Indonesian Exchange Foundation (AMINEF). When she returned, "she was more positive and sure of herself," reports Jeff Simpkins, the company's technical advisor on safety. Thereafter, a newly confident Novi persuaded Freeport to investigate each emergency call by dispatching commanders to assess the situation in the field, prior to declaring any incident as a "false alarm." Before this, a quick phone call might have sufficed.

Born in Jayapura, Novi spent some formative years of her childhood in the remote district of Unurum Guay, where her father served as a police officer. At that time, in the early 1990s, a journey from the city meant riding in a truck for seven hours over terrible roads, then stopping at a bridge and crossing rivers and forests on foot for another seven hours. There was no electricity.

Growing up, she played the same games as the boys did. Together with four brothers, she raced after soccer balls, and batted around tennis balls during *kasti*, an Indonesian form of softball. Novi also became a strong swimmer, wary of the river's current. Unlike her cousins, who yearned to become civil servants, Novi settled on a more pragmatic goal. She enrolled in a vocational school to become an electrician, wishing to help villagers enjoy a more comfortable life.

However, climbing tall electrical towers did not come naturally. She was afraid of heights. But she forced herself to keep climbing, 20 meters above ground. With practice, she made it—an early lesson in building courage. Novi applied to Freeport fresh out of school. The company put her to work as a fire technician, as investigations into blazes often involved electrical wiring. But the job did not stop there. Novi was also trained to join an emergency rescue team, and her life took a particularly dramatic turn after 2007.

She rode around in helicopters, lowering herself down on a rope and a sling to rescue climbers lost in the jungle. She helped deliver five babies for women stranded in isolated hamlets. She wrenched off the door of a crushed vehicle and pulled a man to safety after a car accident in a mining area. She didn't even hesitate to enter a burning house to rescue the pet dog of a Freeport employee.

“When you go to help other people, you have to act like a man, but keep in mind that you are a woman,” Novi says. “It’s important to make the victim feel comfortable.”

A combination of empathy and toughness proved crucial during a tragic episode in Freeport’s history. On the morning of May 14, 2013, the Big Gossan underground tunnel collapsed, about 550 yards from the entrance of the Grasberg gold and copper mine. Thirty-eight employees had been undergoing a training session in the tunnel. With evacuation efforts underway, Novi took calls from distraught relatives at the command center.

Novi handled one call from a sobbing wife, who pelted her with questions: “Can my husband survive? Is it cold there? Will my husband get water to drink?” Novi also found herself in tears. But she forced herself to control her emotions, and spoke slowly and steadily. She told the caller that the company was trying to evacuate the victims as soon as possible, “and asked her to support us in prayers because we would not be successful without the wisdom and blessing of God.” The wife paused, and then told Novi that she would pray for the team.

Ultimately, ten Freeport employees survived the accident, and twenty-eight died. The following year, Novi found some new role models when she went to Virginia. She met two women firefighters at Station 9, and was impressed by their physical strength. She watched one of them hoist a ladder and a fire hose simultaneously, a feat that Novi herself could not manage. That spurred her to request Freeport to install some fitness equipment inside the fire station, so the Papua team could pump iron during downtime.

During an internship at a 911 call center, Novi also admired her boss, an African American woman who “spoke with authority.” She found the call center a more high-tech environment than what she knew back in Papua. Instead of scribbling down information, for example, employees used a keyboard and relied on codes to quickly convey the nature of the emergency.

In her classes at community college, Novi was the only female student. At the start, her language skills lagged behind. Words like “grip”—essential for firefighters—were new to her. But she accepted the suggestion of one professor to improve her English by reading *The No. 1 Ladies’ Detective Agency* by Alexander McCall Smith, and to put her Indonesian/English dictionary aside in favor of a more comprehensive English/English one. Meanwhile,

*As for CCIP, she dishes out advice all year round. “I keep telling everyone, especially my Papuans, this is the big opportunity that you have to take. The world is not that small.”*

her husband provided plenty of moral support, during frequent Skype calls.

After her return to Papua, Novi decided to name her third child in honor of her US adventure. Aneela Alexandria Virginia was born on January 4, 2016, and her wardrobe includes a tiny gray Tembagapura T-shirt, just like Mom’s.

Freeport colleagues note that Novi displays a special commitment to children and their safety. Together with other graduates of the Community College Initiative Program, she participates in a social service group called Look At Me Papua (LAMP). In December 2015, for example, LAMP organized a Christmas gift drive and collected a variety of toys and school supplies. But due to a tribal conflict, a group of 100 children couldn’t venture outdoors to go to school and collect their gifts. Novi got special permission to hold the event at her fire station, even though it took some effort to cut through the red tape, according to Bobby Yulianto Yomaki, a leadership instructor at Freeport.

Novi asked the male firefighters to clean and decorate the station, which they did without complaint. It was more evidence of the respect that Novi has earned from her male colleagues. “It’s the way they speak to her, and treat her. I can see that they don’t look down upon her,” he adds. The team escorted the children to the venue, and home again. Hopefully, none of them will ever need to drop to the ground and roll to safety through menacing flames.

Another Freeport employee, Frits Worabay, says that he finds Novi’s “professionalism and caring” quite inspiring. Her success in obtaining a fellowship motivated him to keep studying, he says, and thus he had the chance to attend Northampton Community College in Pennsylvania in 2016–2017 under a CCIP grant.

Recalling her substantial Thanksgiving dinner in Arlington, Novi now likes to celebrate the holiday with her colleagues at Freeport. As for CCIP, she dishes out advice all year round. “I keep telling everyone, especially my Papuans, this is the big opportunity that you have to take. The world is not that small.”





*Choosing to major in international studies, Jessica wasn't quite sure of her future path. But a Fulbright English Teaching Assistantship (ETA) assignment in Kupang in 2011–2012, in the less-developed eastern region of Indonesia, proved to be a turning point.*



I2

## Jessica Peng

### Expanding the Circle

*When she was nine years old, Jessica Peng had to learn English on the double.*

Her family had just moved from Taiwan to the United States, and she needed to work hard to catch up with the rest of the 4th grade in Syosset, New York.

Fortunately, Jessica didn't have to struggle alone. In class, her primary school teachers paired her with bright students who made her feel welcome. At home, her mother relied on extra copies of textbooks to go over homework assignments—teamwork that helped both of them progress in the language. Early morning classes in English as a Second Language (ESL) boosted her confidence to speak up and branch out from her native Mandarin. Before long, she was fluent in English. And, by the time Jessica hit 18, she won admission to Vassar College, gaining access to top-notch education in America.



Choosing to major in international studies, Jessica wasn't quite sure of her future path. But a Fulbright English Teaching Assistantship (ETA) assignment in Kupang in 2011–2012, in the less-developed eastern region of Indonesia, proved to be a turning point. Her buoyant high school students introduced her to the cultural diversity of Eastern Indonesia, including its music, such as the tunes played on the *sasando*, a zither-like stringed instrument crafted from a bamboo tube and palmyra leaves. She, in turn, became interested in their aspirations for higher education, mostly on the island of Java.

Mindful of her own early experiences with migration—and the importance of cultivating a sense of belonging—Jessica wondered how such students might adapt to their new university lives, away from their families and cozy island traditions. Some students were apprehensive about their potential to fit in and succeed. A Vassar Maguire Fellowship allowed Jessica to teach English at two different campuses for a year in Yogyakarta, where she listened to the frustrations voiced by students from Flores, Sumba, Kalimantan, West Timor, and Papua. Ultimately, Jessica decided to specialize in the anthropology of education.

“I appreciate the pragmatism of the field of education. People see that problems get solved in real, tangible ways,” says the 28-year-old student, now in her second year of a PhD program at the University of Pennsylvania. She spent a large chunk of her summer in 2017 speaking to education experts in Indonesia, sussing out trends in educational development so that her upcoming thesis topic will be relevant to enhancing inclusion and opportunity.

She spent some of her time at Vassar in proactive efforts to interact with minority students and make them feel welcome. As a multicultural recruitment intern at Vassar's Office of Admission, she spoke to prospective freshmen by telephone and organized overnight visits. To ease their transition, she formed an advocacy group that included first-generation college students, along with those from disadvantaged socioeconomic backgrounds. In Muslim-majority Indonesia, Jessica was assigned to SMA Kristen Mercusuar in Kupang, where many of her students were Christians. Accustomed to watching movies and TV shows filled with white faces, they were not expecting a young Chinese woman to arrive as their English teacher from America. But it didn't take long for Jessica to bond with them over popu-

lar music and other aspects of global youth culture. Some students spoke openly about beauty standards for skin color, reminding Jessica of her own teenage years.

Ariyani Manu, an English teacher at Mercusuar, admired Jessica for making the classroom a fun place for interactive learning. Jessica brought a toaster into the classroom, explaining how to make toasted peanut butter and jelly sandwiches and then chomping on the sandwiches with the students at the end of the lesson. “She always showed the students something new,” recalls Ariyani. “I learned a lot about American culture from her.”

Jessica also urged the Indonesians to explore their own roots. Each pupil was asked to complete a short oral history of his or her family. For the WORDS competition, an annual highlight of the American Indonesian Exchange Foundation (AMINEF) calendar, she worked closely with student Glenn Saudale on polishing his speech about the history of Rote Island, where his parents work as doctors. Glenn punctuated his tale by strumming the *sasando*, impressing the judges in Jakarta. Today he is studying medicine, and his improved English comes in handy in his training.

In Yogyakarta, Jessica came to know Ria Ongabelle, a student from Flores enrolled at Sanata Dharma University. As Ria recalls, “The most memorable moment was when she asked us to prepare a presentation about how we saw ourselves, and what we love to do that others did not notice. It was so hard to talk about ourselves, but she encouraged us.”

Jessica also coaxed Ria into applying to a US State Department program managed by AMINEF called Global UGRAD, which provides one-semester scholarships for study and cultural enrichment in the US. Ria was initially reluctant, believing her English to be less fluent than that of many of her peers. But her teacher from America “said I was brave and she loved the way I was being active in the classroom,” Ria recalls. “She said, ‘You can do this, Ria. Don’t be afraid.’”

Ria did win the scholarship in 2013. She was placed in Bennett College, a private liberal arts college in Greensboro, North Carolina, with a historical commitment to educate young African American women. She says she was fascinated by the focus on African American life. “I could experience their history, their culture, their daily life, and [see] how those are different from





*Accustomed to watching movies and TV shows filled with white faces, [Jessica's students in Kupang] were not expecting a young Chinese woman to arrive as their English teacher from America. But it didn't take long for Jessica to bond with them over hip-hop music and other aspects of global youth culture.*

white Americans," she says. Ria was subsequently chosen to speak about her unusual experience at the Global UGRAD Workshop in Washington, DC, and managed to visit Jessica in New York at Thanksgiving. She is now working in Jakarta as an English teacher for BPK PENABUR, a network of private Protestant schools.

Unfortunately, students from eastern Indonesia constitute only a tiny minority of the student body at Indonesia's best universities. In an academic paper, Jessica cited a World Bank study showing that only 2.24 percent of all students admitted in 2007 to the top five public universities hailed from Eastern Indonesia. Competition is intense. In 2010, for example, there were only 80,000 seats available in public universities, compared to the 447,000 students who sat for the National University Entrance Exam. While private universities are trying to fill the gap, the costs can be prohibitive.

This has hampered the dreams of many students from Eastern Indonesia, as Jessica has observed. Some have to leave campus and work when their families exhaust their resources, and try to resume their studies later. Beyond economic considerations, however, they often feel that they face discrimination in student housing (known as private *kos*) and can be ostracized by Javanese classmates.

Jessica recounts that in one of her classes in Yogyakarta, "the only Eastern Indonesian student was regularly singled out and teased in skits and other classroom activities." She says it was common to see Eastern Indonesian students sit together in the back of the classroom, and appear reluctant to speak in class.

As Indonesia looks ahead to more rapid development in the east, the challenge of leveling the educational playing field has become more urgent. As Jessica observes, the post-Suharto decentralization requires a more sophisticated cadre of indigenous civil servants. More opportunities are also opening up for vocational education, particularly in places like Papua and Sulawesi.

In 2015, after completing a master's degree at the University of Pennsylvania, Jessica covered more ground in Indonesian education. She worked on a monitoring and evaluation team for Chemonics, a Washington-based development consultancy, which was implementing a five-year project called Higher Education Leadership & Management (HELM) for the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). Jessica delved into issues including women's leadership in higher education, and industry/classroom partnerships to foster skills in entrepreneurship. A final report in 2016 indicated that 68 percent of institutions participating in HELM managed to improve their standard operating procedures in finance.

Gaps in the education system were also identified, including top-down teaching methods, poor technology, and "entrenched leadership cultures that cast out women and first-generation students from minority back-grounds," according to the Chemonics report.

Many countries face similar challenges. In continuing her research, Jessica might have her pick of new territories to explore. She has already worked in both Vietnam and South Africa, and recently spent time in Nepal. Yet she keeps circling back to Indonesia, and its warm reservoir of teamwork.

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