

Pramoedya and the Comfort Women of Buru A Textual Analysis of *Perawan Remaja dalam Cengkeraman Militer* (Teenage Virgins in the Grasp of the Military)¹⁾

「インドネシア文学者プラムディヤ・アナンタ・トゥールと
ブル島の慰安婦：『日本軍占領下の少女たち』についての
テキスト分析」

William Bradley Horton[†]

インドネシアに於ける今日の慰安婦言説は、1990年代前半日本の弁護士がインドネシアに赴き、インドネシア法律扶助協会(LBH)に、元慰安婦に関する調査を依頼したことを機に始まったと言っても過言ではない。このような動きは、補償という噂や期待をインドネシアに膨らませ、他のアジアの動きと連携し政治的言説を紡がせるようになった。その後、名乗り出てきた慰安婦の記憶を中心に、類似した語りが何度となく繰り返され今日に至っている。

インドネシア慰安婦の画一的な語りの中、プラムディヤ・アナンタ・トゥールの『日本軍占領下の少女たち』は、政治的慰安婦言説とオーラルヒストリーの史料性という二つの異なる性質を併せ持ち、プラムディヤ作品としては異質なものとして2001年に登場した。あたかも二人の作家がいるかのように、文体にも内容にも大きな違いが在るこの作品の特質は、出版にいたった経緯に由来すると考えられる。

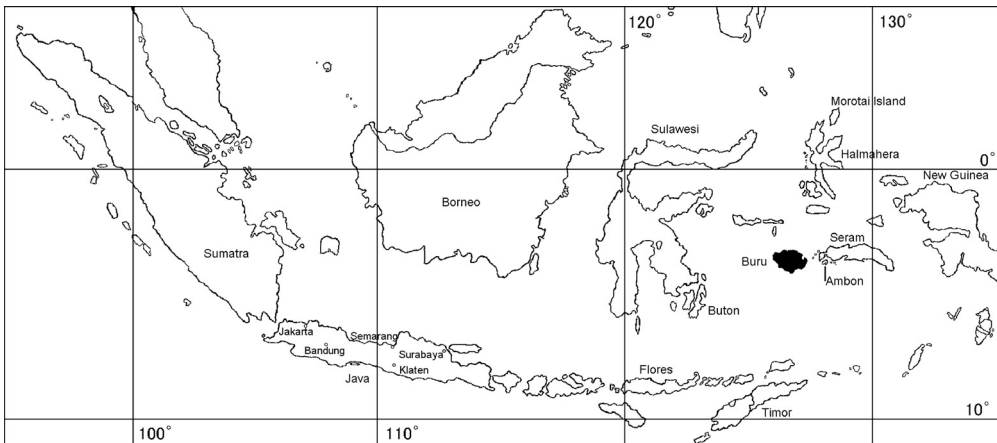
作品は、1970年代、プラムディヤ自身流刑されていたブル島で知り合った政治犯の「同士たち」が、同地で出会ったジャワ人女性たち——第2次世界大戦中にブル島へ連れてこられた——に行った面接調査の内容を、プラムディヤが聞き書きした記録を基にしている。書き溜めた記録は、プラムディヤの手で纏め上げることはできず、長い間放置されていた。しかし、2000年9月、彼が福岡賞受賞のため日本へ出発する前日、KPG出版社に手渡し、手直しし出版するようにと依頼したらしい。おりしも、同年12月には、東京で慰安婦に対する日本の責任と補償を問う市民法廷が開かれ、インドネシアの慰安婦も参加している。このような時代背景のためか、翌年3月に出版された同書は、前半部に市民法廷の主催者であるVAWW-NETの主張と呼応する文章が見え隠れしている。さらに、第2次世界大戦中の日本とインドネシアの関係を、あたかも加害者と被害者の関係のように単純化して語り、日本の占領を、インドネシアに対して行った抑圧と搾取、また暴力行為とし、日本の反省を促している。このような、直接的表現方法およびインドネシア国外のみに対する厳しい内容は、過去のプラムディヤ作品とは大きな隔たりを見せている。

一方、同書の後半部は、一転してブル島に住み続けているジャワ人女性に、流刑政治犯たちが行った面接聞き取り調査の記録を使い、彼女たちの「不幸な」人生の詳細を綴っている。そこからは、戦中の日本やインドネシア政府に対してだけでなく、女性を抑圧しているブル島の地域社会に対する批判が行間からも読み取れ、暗に、これらの社会状況を、女性たちがジャワ島に戻れなかった元凶と論じている。後半部の記述は、丁寧に読み解くことにより、第2次世界大戦中のジャワ社会、戦後のインドネシア政府と社会、またブル島における女性の状況などを解明する可能性も秘めている。当論文では、このような二面性を持つ『日本軍占領下の少女たち』の中でも、現代の慰安婦言説の影響が少なく歴史研究により高い史料的价值を持つ後半部に焦点をあて、第2次世界大戦当時および戦後のブル島の状況を検証している。

[†] Research Fellow, Institute of Asia-Pacific Studies, Waseda University.

On September 11, 2000, one day before he left Indonesia to receive the Fukuoka prize in Japan for his intellectual and humanitarian contributions, the Indonesian novelist Pramoedya Ananta Toer delivered a fascinating manuscript to the office of the publisher KPG (Kepustakaan Populer Gramedia). The manuscript was a typescript dated June 14, 1979, with repetitions and numerous unreadable words. The contents related to Javanese women who remained on the mountainous island of Buru in Eastern Indonesia at the end of World War II.²

Most works related to the comfort women of Indonesia appeared in the 1990s, after rumors of large compensation payments spread throughout Indonesia and both international and domestic demand for sensational news stories blossomed. With their recycled stories, many works have long ceased being surprising to their readers, except perhaps to young audiences. This manuscript eventually became one of the more unusual publications, *Perawan Remaja dalam Cengkeraman Militer* [Teenage Virgins in the Grasp of the Military]. Although published at the end of the comfort women “boom,” the book was constructed on the basis of information compiled while Pramoedya was a political internee on the island of Buru in the 1970s, with a small amount of supplemental information obtained after his return to Java in the 1980s and 1990s.³ As a manuscript produced in an earlier period, focusing on women living far from the political center of Java, this is a potentially important work.



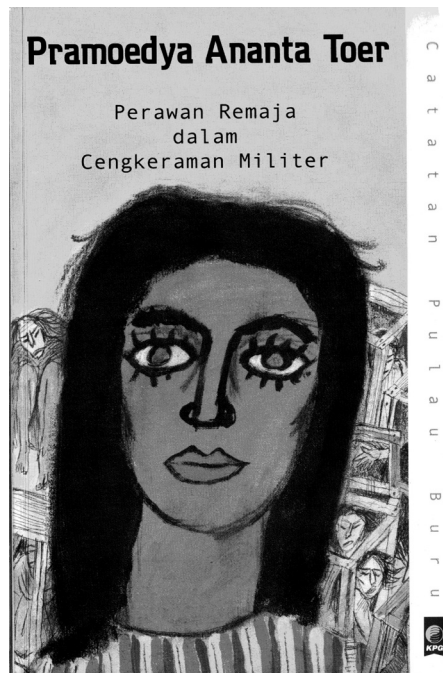
Indonesian Archipelago

The Book and the Author

The editors wrote that Pramoedya’s “health condition prevents him from wrestling with the world of writing in an intensive manner,” something that Pramoedya was quite open about from at least the early 1990s.⁴ This meant that the KPG editors had to somehow turn the old manuscript into a publishable manuscript, with limited participation of the author himself. This neither excludes the possibility of Pramoedya’s involvement in the reframing and editing, nor does it suggest his involvement. In this context, the remarkable difference between the first four chapters and forward on the one hand, and the last four chapters on the other, is particularly significant.

The book was apparently composed by Pramoedya as he received the reports of a number of the [male] Javanese exiles who met the women involved. Pramoedya did not go out in search of these women, and rarely if ever met the women in question. In fact, as Pramoedya notes in one section, the Tapol [*tahanan politik* or political prisoners] were not allowed to interact with the local people, and were themselves engaged in a struggle to survive (p. 65). The narrator of most passages is the individual who met the women, and who provided notes or described the meeting allowing Pramoedya to later compose a narrative.⁵

The first chapters present the book's conclusions in extremely straightforward language, with conclusions even enumerated for the reader. Mixing autobiographical details, information about other young women gleaned from their male acquaintances who were subsequently exiled to Buru with the author, his own memories, perhaps a bit of imagination, and additional information compiled at a late date about individuals who did not become comfort women, in these early chapters Pramoedya tries to present a simple, moving picture of the recruitment of young women on Java and the fate of those women during the Japanese occupation, one which is comfortingly familiar to Indonesians today, focusing entirely on a foreign evil which they have learned about in textbooks and in other media produced during the past 20 years.⁶



Cover of the original Indonesian publication.

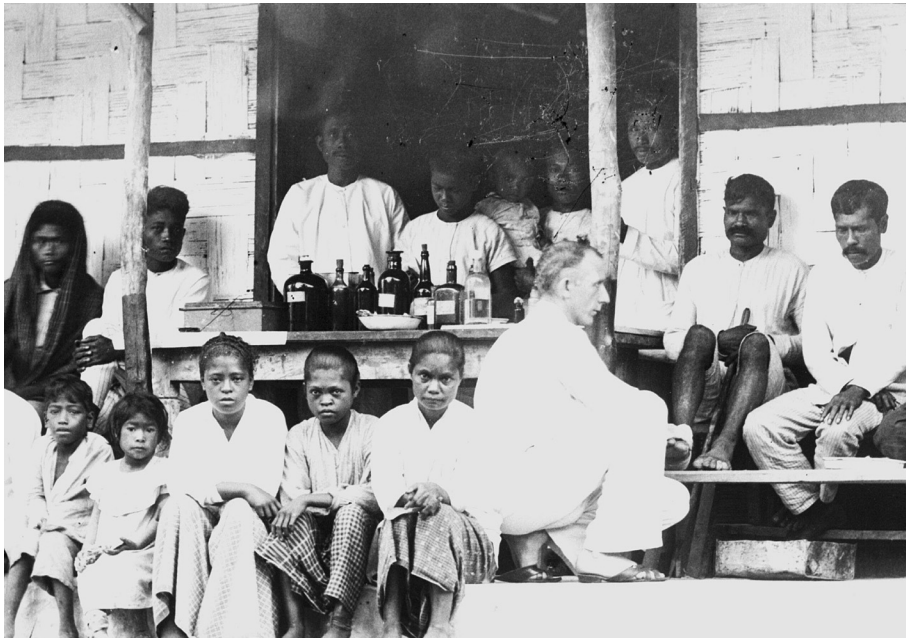
Rather than simply presenting information about these women one by one, or a summary conclusion about these women's experiences, the book offers increasingly long "adventure" narratives, showing the struggle to reach these women, and describing the obstacles in obtaining their stories. Here Pramoedya explicitly follows the genre of

Minggat dari Digoel [Escape from Digoel] from the 1930s.⁷ The longest of the narratives, a narrative on the search for Ibu Mulyati from Klaten, covers more than half of the book (pp. 99–214), but ultimately includes no information about this woman's experiences other than the narrator's own conclusion that he had met the right woman but that she was bound by oaths to remain silent. The sections related to the women on Buru island convey a sense of a dark, frightening environment where neither nature nor the natives can be trusted, evoking a powerful image similar to E. M. Forster's colonial era India.⁸

Historical Information of the Main Body

The first somewhat detailed information about individual *ianfu* appears in Chapter 5. Pramoedya opens the chapter by describing the political prisoners' departure from Java and arrival in Buru in August 1969, drawing a parallel with the earlier wave of Javanese transported to Buru, Javanese comfort women during WWII. Providing the context of meetings in 1972–76 in the villages and fields of the Wae Apo river basin on Buru, Pramoedya tries to carefully relate who met who, when, and the information obtained at that meeting. Apparently recorded by Pramoedya 2–5 years later, this carefully constructed chapter covers the meetings over the first years in Buru, describing in the first person a number of quite casual meetings, along with the growing shadow of angry husbands armed and ready to defend themselves and their wives. Initial contact was sometimes very easy, as some of the women did occasionally come to the coastal communities to obtain cloth or salt, but these visits were not only rare, they frequently were the final visit for these women.

In one of the earliest chance meetings with these women, in September or October of 1972, a *tapol* named Rodius Sutanto met two women from Central Java who claimed

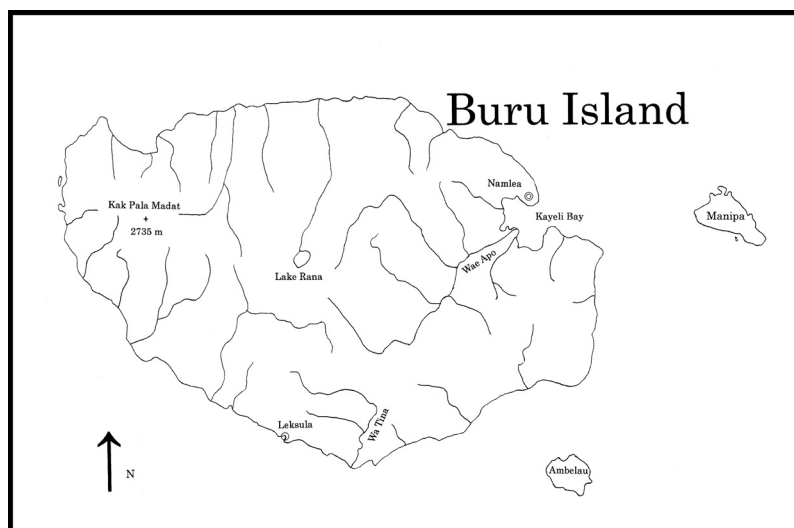


A polyclinic in Leksula (South Buru). Courtesy of the Netherlands Institute for War Documentation.

to have come to Buru in 1944, having intended to continue their studies in Japan, and who never returned to Java because they were ashamed (*malu*).⁹ Although they lived “far away,” two or three months later they were met by another *tapol* and seem to have been seeking out Javanese. The narrator notes that Rodius Sutanto had heard that some girls had been sent to school in Tokyo during the war, and in fact one acquaintance in the first grade of a girls middle school had been prepared to go, but presumably did not go since he saw her in Semarang in 1950.

A month or two earlier, a *tapol* named Suyud was introduced by a local resident to a woman looking for *tapol* from Semarang. Following him to the village of Kampung Wai Grending, he met Sutinah, the daughter of the Sleko Gas Factory director in Semarang, and older sister of one of his middle school classmates at SMP Kanisius Semarang.¹⁰ She had been recruited for schooling in Japan, but was taken to Namlea in Buru instead, where she was made into a prostitute for the Japanese soldiers there.¹¹ Along with two friends, she eventually escaped thanks to an Alfuru youth whom she married, and who eventually became the Kepala Soa [village head of] Wai Tina.¹² She clearly expressed her desire to return to Java to see her family when the *tapol* returned.

In 1973, a *tapol* living in Wanasurya was able to speak with a woman who identified herself as Sulastri of Sompok, Semarang.¹³ In 1944, she departed “for school in Tokyo,” but her parents had not been willing to let her go with the “Japanese officer” until warned that they were being disloyal to the Emperor. After some (unexplained) humiliations and cruelties in military bars established for the amusement of Japanese soldiers, she was sent out on a ship with 228 girls, 22 of whom were from Semarang, and landed on Buru Island in early 1945. After Japan surrendered, “they” had to fend for themselves and Sulastri became involved in local society.¹⁴ As a woman, she became the property of a man (her husband) and a village (*soa*) in the Gunung Biru-Biru/Wai Tina Dara valley. Her husband did not allow her to speak with strangers, especially in other languages, and conversation was cut short by her spear-toting husband on more than



Buru Island.

one occasion. After two meetings she stopped appearing.

In February 1976, a woman called Kartini related to Soeprihono Koeswadi that she had been told by her father, a local Javanese civil servant (*narapraja*) that she would go to school in Tokyo.¹⁵ She was picked up from her home in Sukorejo and taken by a Japanese man in a *montor keblak* (motorcycle sidecar) to Kendal where she joined other girls. In Kendal, she was warned by the Javanese woman (Mbok Setro) who took care of the girls to wear her waist scarf tightly (*bersetagen yang kencang*) on the ship, possibly a warning to protect herself against the Japanese men. Indeed, on the ship, the man who had counted the girls in Kendal brought her to a room on the Buru-bound ship and raped her repeatedly. Once landed, she became the “property” of four more polite Japanese, who called her “cook” or “boy” and with whom she had to sleep at night. After a Javanese-speaking Japanese man took two women to Morotai, and another girl died, Kartini was responsible for all the Japanese guards of the *romusha* working on moving rocks on the beach until some Chinese girls arrived. Being frequently sick, she was not closely watched and was able to escape, after which she met an Alfuru man who helped her.

In late 1974, Tristuti Rahmadi Suryoputro met a woman from Wonogiri, the daughter of a *kamitua* or village police officer.¹⁶ In 1943, she was promised “by the Japanese government” training as a midwife (*bidan*) and then work in Ambon Hospital; her parents consented. She was taken to Semarang and put in a dorm with 40 other 14 year olds, and guarded by *heiho* or Japanese soldiers. She was taken to Seram, where she began “to understand what in fact was befalling them: raped, made into toy dolls for Japanese officers.”¹⁷ She was later taken to Manipah Island near Buru and kept in a building guarded by *heiho*. At the end of the war they were left by the Japanese, and everyone had to look out for themselves. She was subsequently taken by a man to Buru.

Sutikno W.S. described to Pramoedya a meeting of Ma’at and Sudadi with Suwarti from Kampung Jurnatan, Semarang.¹⁸ Her father worked at the Sleko Gas Factory. She was recruited for continuing education in a school in Tokyo, and had heard the



Namlea Harbor in Kayeli Bay, 1949. Photograph by C. J. Taillie. Tropenmuseum of the Royal Tropical Institute (KIT), obtained via Wikimedia Commons. See note below.



Barracks of the Dutch East Indies army in Namlea, 1949. Photograph by C. J. Taillie. Tropenmuseum of the Royal Tropical Institute (KIT), obtained via Wikimedia Commons. See note below.

propaganda at school as well through local officials like the *gunchō* (*wedana*), *sonchō* (*camat*), *kuchō*, and *kumichō* (*kepala R.T.*). She remembers that they were told that it was for the greatness and victory in the Great East Asia War. She was taken to a dorm for preparations, and then sent on a ship with 228 girls, and later kept in an underground fortress in Buru until the end of the war when she and the others were left behind.

There were several other women mentioned in this chapter, but with even less detail. However brief, these meetings seem to have provided motivation for the renewed search for the Javanese women in 1978. These three new cases were discussed in the three subsequent chapters which provide very detailed narratives about the investigation of the women's pasts and ethnographic information about their current context. In the discussion of the first two cases, those of Siti F. and Bolansar, there is a significant amount of information about their experiences in the war.

Siti Fatimah¹⁹

The first of the women discussed in detail was first discovered by the *tapols* because her behavior was different than that of the local Alfuru residents. A resident of a village not far from one of the *tapol* villages, she eventually asked about a certain "Kosasih" from West Java, so Pramoedya and his friends concluded she must be a woman brought by the Japanese. Sarony interviewed her, claiming to be looking for a relative who "left Java with her." He thus obtained information that that Siti F. was taken from the Kewedanan in Subang to Bandung, and then by train, probably to Tanjung Priok, the port of Jakarta, whereupon she was taken by ship to the village of Kisar on Flores.²⁰ She



The arrival of the Allied war crimes investigation team in Namlea, headed by Australian Maj. Arnott (standing left), October 1945. Courtesy of the Netherlands Institute for War Documentation.

was later taken to Namlea on Buru. According to Sarony, she said that the commander *on* the ship was “Atacuka-san,” and on Flores it was “Wataki-san,” but from the context it seems that “Atacuka-san” was with her and the other two (?) girls until they were placed by him in a “stone house” in Namlea, and “Wataki-san” brought her to the house next door.²¹ According to her testimony, there were ten Japanese in Namlea. The wife of a policeman, Ibu Pandung, “bathed and fed” her.

Later, Harun Rosidi who lived in a neighboring village compiled notes about Siti F., but the most important information came from Daswian, also called Oking, who discovered in August 1978 that she was his aunt. The printed dialog contains information establishing their relationship, and not much more, but Pramoedya later compiled information from Oking and Siti F.’s son Selang. According to this explanation, the daughter of an Assiten Wedana of Singadikarta in Subang, she was in middle school when her parents agreed to allow her to continue to school in Tokyo. Four girls left Subang, and departed with hundreds of other girls from Tanjung Priok, and was taken to Flores and then Buru. At the end of the war, the demands of the girls to return to Java were refused and instead they were closely guarded.²² Siti F. ran away into the interior. She married a fisherman from Buton, and after his death she married a local Alfuru man.

Unfortunately, the final set of information which largely derived from Selang or Oking is difficult to interpret, since it does not show how the information was compiled, and in some cases may include embellishments, such as the claim that she departed from Tanjung Priok with several hundred other girls, which did not appear in her original statements to Sarony and is unlikely to be known by Selang. Other questions inevitably appear in reading this chapter. When she was first recruited is never stated, but it is critical as 1942 is very different from 1944, nor is it clear why her parents would have consented in any case. Was the argument about school so very convincing, or was it

also accompanied by other more important types of “persuasion?” Was she placed in a brothel or comfort station in Flores or Buru, or was she the mistress of one Japanese for all or part of the time? It seems likely she meant to imply the latter, but it is very much unclear. When discussing the end of the war, it also seems odd to refer to girls (plural form), as she claimed there were only 10 Japanese in Namlea, although there could be a variety of reasons for this statement.

Bolansar (Bu Lanjar)²³

The second woman discussed in detail was known locally as Bolansar, a corruption of Bu Lanjar, and to the *tapol* as Muka Jawa (Javanese Face). In 1978, several times she came to Permukiman Giripura to buy salt, but she also would watch *wayang* and listen to *gamelan*. Based on brief conversations, the *tapol* guessed that she was from Pemalang in Central Java.

Three *tapol* men, Rony, Satusa, and Wai Durat decided to go to her village loaded with supplies. Once in the village, Wai Durat was delegated to locate Bolansar, while the others made coffee for the residents of this tiny community and tried to ensure smooth relations. The narrator, Rony, saw the wife of the traditional leader (Kepala Adat Wiranlaheng), who never spoke, and concluded that she must be Javanese based on her appearance. Bolansar was eventually found and engaged in private conversation. According to her statements, because she was asked embarrassing questions in front of [her?] children when she had gone to the coastal villages, she was sworn to not say anything that might damage those around her. Specifically if the women were to leave the villages and take their children with them, then the tiny village communities would be irreparably damaged.²⁴ The narrator acknowledged that she probably had to move again as a result of their meeting, and may have been punished for talking to them.

Perhaps more important than the information about the war, it is clear that the very process of obtaining information about her experiences in the war was damaging at least in terms of her position in society, but also possibly emotionally, as she refers to her “hati” being hurt in the *tapol* villages. It is also clear in the case of each of these women that a dramatic “freeing” of these women from their oppression and allowing them to return to Java would result in the collapse of the local communities and their tradition.

Historical Information and the Discourse on *Ianfu*

While the historical data in *Perawan Remaja* was compiled in a place and time where our discourse on comfort women did not exist, it was edited and published during the boom in publications about comfort women, and during the peak of NGO activity. Not surprisingly, publication of this book was feted by KPG, the Koalisi Perempuan [Women’s Coalition], and the Aksara Bookstore in Kemang with a discussion of the book entitled “Demanding Justice for the Jugun Ianfu” on 19 April 2001, featuring Antarini Arna of the Koalisi Perempuan and Maria Hartiningsih of Kompas. In line with common practice in comfort women related events, a former comfort woman, Ibu Suhana, offered her “testimony”; some kind of film testimony was also shown. The event closed with a film showing the process of the VAWW-NET “trial” in Tokyo which had taken place several months earlier.²⁵

Through the introduction, the editor situated the book in a strikingly familiar political discourse related to comfort women, rather than a literary discourse. “KPG is publishing this book because it is aware that there are still few historical notes about the sexual slavery of Indonesian females by the Japanese military. More than that, many judge that the aforementioned actions by the Japanese military are one of the greatest humanitarian tragedies of the 20th century, after the killings of those of Jewish descent by Nazi Germany and the killing of the members and sympathizers of the PKI in Indonesia. It is estimated that 200,000 females from Asian countries which had been occupied by Japan, like South Korea, Taiwan, Indonesia, the Philippines, and Burma, including females from Japan itself, were made into sexual slaves.”²⁶ It then covers the “refusal” of the Japanese government to “take legal responsibility,” the activities of the Asian Women’s Fund, the arguments of the NGOs, and the “people’s court” held in Tokyo in December 2000 in the following three paragraphs.

After briefly framing his narrative with a short timeline of events, Pramoedya addresses an audience of young women through a letter, imploring them not to take their security for granted and to imagine the fate of other girls like themselves at the beginning of the war.²⁷ Blending his own experiences and recollections of the war with those of fellow exiles in Buru, Pramoedya makes a series of claims about the occupation. One key assertion was that if during the colonial period the Javanese bureaucracy (*pangreh praja*) was dominant, during the Japanese occupation the propaganda ministry (*Sendenbu*) was all powerful. While he notes that there was no official government decree about schooling in Tokyo, and that neither he nor his friends remember ever typing news stories about the subject, he heard rumors and was very cynical about such offers. Pramoedya thus speculates that the *Sendenbu* ordered or encouraged the Javanese civil servants to recruit women, who were persuaded in part by their parents. He notes a predominance of children of Javanese officials who were recruited, effectively demonstrating their innocence and victimization.

In Chapter 3, Pramoedya argues that the girls were picked up at their homes and taken to permanently established points, and that large numbers of the girls destined to “study in Tokyo” were kept in compounds which were visited by car after car of Japanese officers. In some cases, Pramoedya does note that they were taken directly to the ship. In constructing his narrative, Pramoedya utilized a variety of sources, but in the context of the scattered evidence (different times and places by different witnesses), the fact that nearly all evidence is speculation by individuals outside the fence and without personal contact, and that in some well-documented cases buildings were used only temporarily to collect women, the existence of a system of permanent collecting points seems a little far-fetched.²⁸ By taking one piece of incomplete evidence and juxtaposing it with incomplete evidence from another context, Pramoedya creates a picture which *might* be accurate in those times and places, or even in general. However, given the holistic assertion that the picture presented is *the truth*, this weakly supported picture seems troublingly similar to longstanding popular images.

Chapter 4 describes the exile of the women, blending information found in later chapters with information from *tapol* into a narrative which reaches its emotional crescendo here. Curiously, some of the most emotional language, that most closely fitting to the 1990s discourse, is found outside of quotation marks; the quotes in one case

are Pramoedya's representation of a male friend's memories of a woman's words heard many years earlier. Somehow some of the words that he felt the need to write could not be placed within quotation marks; given Pramoedya's rather liberal use of quotation marks, this indicates that there was a very low degree of loyalty to the original testimony. For example, Sukarno Martodihardjo related information about Sumiyati who he met in Siam [Thailand] in 1947. Statements like "Did they not receive pay from Japan No! Only sometimes received recreation money on certain days when they were granted permission to go out near the dorm" appeared outside of both Martodihardjo's and Sumiyati's quotation marks, although the words of both were somehow preserved in other places.²⁹ It thus is probable that the original evidence in this chapter has been manipulated more than in some of the other chapters.

The fourth chapter closes with a list of five points, perhaps foreshadowing the drastic change with the narrative about Buru, or rather trying to establish a link between the first and second halves of the book:³⁰

Before we reach the next part, we should conclude first that those teenage virgins: First, were released without responsibility, without severance pay, without facilities, and without thanks from the Dai Nippon military, as an action of washing their hands of their own evil.

Second, were turned over to their own instincts for life.

Third, were not given service and legal protection by the Government of the RI.

Fourth, did not receive attention from their own families

Fifth, as a result, until 1979 or around 35 years, they were forgotten exiles.

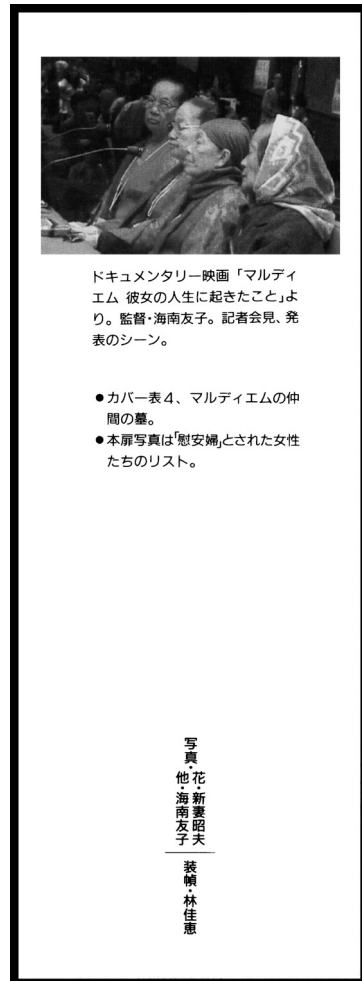
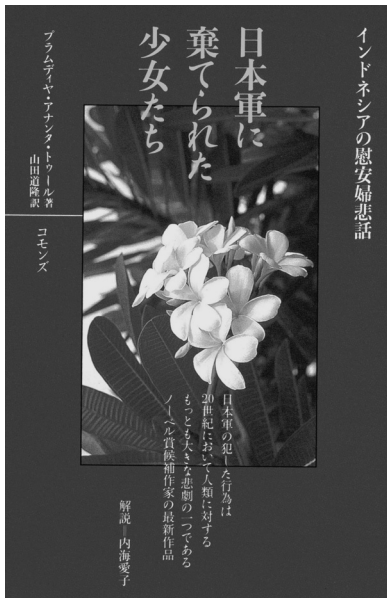
Reflections of readers

As a publication by one of Indonesia's most famous novelists, this book has obtained a large Indonesian readership. Some of these readers see the book as a novel, while many others see either a humanitarian discussion of military oppression of women, or most commonly, consistent with the first four chapters, readers see a description of the oppression of Indonesian women by Japanese soldiers or Japan.³¹ Even if this book is occasionally mistaken as a novel, presumably due to the author's fame as a novelist, the floating use of the first person, and the frame of a letter to young girls, this book provides careful documentation and important source material. The difference with the Japanese "autobiographical" book of Yoshida Seiji's imaginary comfort women hunting adventures couldn't be greater.³²

The publication of this book had an impact in Japan as well. Internet blogs and book reviews appeared almost immediately, but rather surprisingly it wasn't until 2004 that a Japanese translation by Yamada Michitaka was published. With an elegant cover decorated with a photograph of a flower, the translation was entitled "The Young Girls Abandoned by the Japanese Military: The Tragic Story of Indonesian Ianfu."³³ Rather than focusing on the initial period of recruitment, this title leaves the intended period undefined, capturing the larger picture of the book, while the reference to the Japanese military and *ianfu* suggest the subject of the narrative itself and a particular political leaning.

The Japanese translation raises numerous problems related to the author(ity) of

Pramoedya, and is essential not just for interpretation of the text but also for the reception of this text and other works by Pramoedya in Japan. Although such a full analysis of Japanese materials is outside of the scope of this study, it should be noted that the framing of the text with a political forward from KPG editors was intensified by an introduction by Utsumi Aiko, who has long been active in Korean and World War II related movements. The back leaf carries a picture of the four former Indonesian comfort women during the VAWW-NET “trial” of December 2000, unmistakably connecting this text to this fin-de-siècle movement. None of these women had any connection to Buru. Without a more substantial effort to review the literature in Japanese, it is unclear whether the content has influenced understandings of *ianfu* in Japan, as much of the political discourse during this period has revolved around the search for crude force (*kyōsei renkō*) in recruiting. Thus more ambiguous materials or those showing a range of experiences have not been highly valued (Yamamoto 2009a, Yamamoto 2009b).



Cover and inside back leaf of the Japanese translation showing 4 Javanese women at the VAWW-NET trial.

In this context, it seems important to raise the question of whether the experiences of these women during World War II were the main focus of the narrative by Pramoe-dya and his collaborators. I would suggest that they saw in these women victims of society who, like themselves, were exiled from Java, but were weaker and even more helpless. The early nationalist revolution against the fetters of traditional social codes and old-fashioned “feudal” elites had not reached the interior of Buru, entrapping not just these women who were even bought and sold, prevented from speaking in Indonesian, and prevented from communicating with outsiders, but also the youth who wanted to learn to read and write or to speak Indonesian. The fact that the women were the victims of terrible treatment during the Japanese occupation is simply the first part of the story; the main theme is the ongoing oppression by traditional society.³⁴

This point is illustrated well by the conclusions to Chapter 5 (pp. 65–66):

1. Some of the young virgins who were cheated by the Japanese fascists between 1943–1944 have lived on Buru island until 1978.
2. They live far below the civilization level and culture of their origins.
3. They are not sought out by their family, perhaps being forgotten by them, even perhaps by the entire nation of Indonesia, and considered non-existent or lost.
4. They never contacted the family they left behind, because that was indeed not possible.
5. They miss the family they left behind, and some or perhaps all of them desire to go back, even though they do not know the road which must be followed.
6. They don't dare speak in their native language, or speak about themselves to others if they are near their husband or non-Buru people.
7. They have become prisoners of their own environments. The overly heavy conditions of life make them age quickly. It can be guessed that the majority of them are dead, especially as there is no medical care, the frequency of epidemics or parasite sicknesses, which is the characteristic of virtually every foreign and backward society.

In its apparently “original” form, that is to say divested of the introductory sections, the book presents a (com)passionate description of the way in which traditional society in Buru oppresses its weakest members, women and children, especially those not born into the local community.³⁵ It also reads as a condemnation of social codes or anything else which prevents individuals from returning home from their exile. Pramoe-dya and his comrades in Buru were trapped in the local “communities” established by the New Order government, unable to return to their families. Like Pramoe-dya and the other *tapol*, the Javanese women on Buru were prevented from returning to Java, or even from participating in local activities with the more modern communities on the coast, especially those with the Javanese exiles. It is a wonderful universal statement on the human condition, the contradictory and oppressive demands of society, and the need to extend a hand to the weakest people.

However, as a historian who has an interest in teasing out information about the past, an interest in popular discourse on history, and a desire to see more accurate and critical popular historical knowledge, my eyes invariable also turn to the information

about World War II. In large part, although filtered through the interviewers and Pramoedya in 1970s, and the constraints of contact with the women in Buru at that time, details about these women's experiences in World War II presented in chapters 5–8 are probably largely accurate. Many of these particular women were probably recruited with the excuse of some kind of schooling (including the safe-sounding profession of midwife at a/the hospital in Ambon), and various pressures like the demand for loyalty and need to struggle for victory in the war, as well as the potential loss of their fathers' positions. It is not already clear exactly who was involved in the recruiting of the girls, although certainly the Javanese bureaucracy was involved in many cases. There are a few hints that parents were not always willing to allow their 14 year old girls go away, and there is at least one hint that a Javanese woman far away from the port cities understood the fate that awaited these girls. Pramoedya himself was skeptical about the idea of both boys and girls having the chance to go to Tokyo for further education, although he just mentioned the boys in passing. However, it is clear that in each of these cases the families at least pretended to believe that these girls would obtain an education. It could well have been that understanding that allowed them to live at peace, both psychologically and with the realities of Java under Japanese occupation.

Thus while similar in many respects, the information in the earlier four chapters seems even more worthy of caution, perhaps because of the holistic claims that are made, rather than the careful, precise limited claims characterizing the later narratives. Unless we are willing to take single cases to exemplify the whole experience of the war, to take cases from 1944 and assume that they were identical with unknown cases from 1942–43, and to accept decontextualized information, then we have a long way to go before we understand the situation throughout Java and Indonesia.



The reoccupation of Buru, symbolized by the raising of the Dutch and Australian flags in October 1945. Courtesy of the Netherlands Institute for War Documentation.

Much of the hard work of compiling data and checking reliability remains. Where, for example, both “Suwarti” and “Sulastri” mention 228 women on a ship, a judgment must be made about whether as comfort women being transported they would know the exact number of women on board, whether the two women were really the same person, whether one woman learned the number from the other woman, and whether they were even on the same ship. Where the movement of the ship varies from story to story, does it imply a different ship, a different awareness, or inaccuracies of the memory of one woman? Other sources, such as postwar NICA (Netherlands Indies Civil Administration) records, may indicate women who were repatriated to Java, perhaps including the girl that Rodius Sutanto had assumed never left Semarang. Similarly, it is possible that Pramoedya’s conclusion that elite girls were disproportionately represented may be a result of his male informants’ own backgrounds, a reluctance of elite girls to return home to their families, or pure coincidence. The sample he presents from Buru is too small and the data presented from Java too limited to reach a conclusion. If a larger sample cannot be found, then records of NICA, or perhaps NEBUDORI (Netherlands Bureau for Documentation and Repatriation of Indonesians), could perhaps provide the key.

Following up on the hints provided by Pramoedya and his fellow exiles in Buru, each of these sources may adjust our understanding of the war and comfort women. It is even possible that field work in places like Buru will yield some useful information, although the chances of meeting either these women or eye-witnesses to the events of the war in places like Namlea decrease every year.³⁶ More importantly, though, such work entails the risk of damaging the social position of those women and reviving memories which they may have tried to leave behind.

By publically locating Pramoedya’s book in a key position in stimulating further studies of the past, allowing his introductory letter to serve in a literary role of easing readers into his narrative, but subjecting it to critical historical analysis, a history not-entirely driven by political agendas may be possible. That is to say, it seems safe to say that much of his data about women in Buru is salvageable for the writing of history, apparently being neither fully regurgitations from contemporary discourse, nor hopelessly vague. This process, unfortunately, does not currently seem to be taking place. With a better process of historical reconstruction and reproduction, information about the comfort women will be more effective in the effort to change Indonesian society to be a safer, more just society for all of its members.

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Footnotes:

1. Earlier versions were presented at the Annual Meeting of the Association for Asian Studies in Chicago on March 18, 2009, a meeting of the Waseda University Asia-Japan Relations History Research Group on April 18, 2009, and at Akita University on July 31, 2009. Thanks are due to Mayumi Yamamoto for comments and suggestions on a draft of this article, and to the Netherlands Institute for War Documentation for consent to use photographs in their collection. The author can be contacted at dbroto@gmail.com.
2. Located on the western end of the same group of islands as Ambon and Seram, the island of Buru is located between 3° 4' and 3° 50' S and 125° 58' and 127° 15' E (1911 Encyclopaedia).
3. On Pramoedya's time on Buru, see his autobiographical *Nyanyi Sunyi Seorang Bisu: Catatan-catatan dari P. Buru* and the English translation *The Mute's Soliloquy: A Memoir*, translated by Willem Samuels (New York: Hyperion, 1999).
4. In a discussion in his visiting room and even more explicitly on the street “escorting” me to the edge of the housing complex in which he lived, he explicitly blamed the Suharto regime for his inability to put *any* words on paper.
5. As Pramoedya uses the first person for his own comments as well as the narratives of his informants, there is some confusion about who is speaking.
6. On recent images of the Japanese occupation in Indonesian discourse, see Horton 2005 and Raben 1999. Additional information may be found in the *Encyclopedia of Indonesia in the Pacific War* (Post 2010), particularly the articles by Adrian Vickers on “Indonesian Historiography of the Occupation Period” (pp. 448–453) and by William H. Frederick on “Indonesian Views” (pp. 455–468).
7. *Minggat dari Digoel* (Solo: Awas, n.d.) was one of a number of books published about the political internees of Boven Digul in the Netherlands East Indies (Indonesia) and their attempts to escape, this fascinating, multi-volume book was filled with ethnographic notes and photographs. Pramoedya was collecting these “Digoel” books in the early 1990s, which were eventually published in *Cerita dari Digul* (Jakarta: KPG, 2001). Only volumes I-IV of *Minggat dari Digoel* were included in this collection.
8. See both his novel *A Passage to India* and the film of the same name, as well as Dirks 1992.
9. See pages 45–47.
10. See pages 47–49.
11. Namlea was the Dutch administrative center before the war, as well as the site of a small pre-war airstrip which was used by Australian aircraft in 1941–42, and then subsequently by the Japanese during the war.
12. Here, *alfuru* refers to the darker skin ethnolinguistic groups of the mountainous interior of Buru and other eastern Indonesian islands near New Guinea, in opposition to the lighter skin “Malay” groups generally resident in coastal areas.
13. The meetings between Sutikno W. S. and Sulastri are described on pages 49–51. Pramoedya notes Sulastri may be the same person as Sutinah as they even have the same number of siblings.
14. The context indicates that “they” are Sulastri and the other women with her, but the language used allows readers to assume that all 228 women from the ship were there in Buru. An examination of the Oshikawa translation (see below) suggests that Pramoedya may indeed have believed that there were “hundreds” of Javanese women on Buru.
15. On the meeting of A. L. Soeprihono Koeswadi with Kartini, see pages 59–64. A Bandung Geological Survey team (1976) and later a *tapol* named “Kang Sardi” met her in her home somewhere in Wai Tina (see pages 64–65). “Kang Sardi” was also present at the earlier meeting.
16. See pages 53–54.
17. This is an interesting passage as it may indicate that she was dressed up as a Japanese woman. Her testimony that she was in an institution designated for officers is also plausible, as there were both civil administration centers and military units based in the Ambon/Ceram area during the war.
18. See pages 51–53.

19. Pages 67–78.
20. While the island of Flores was an important location in the Lesser Sunda islands, I have been unable to locate a Kisar village. There is a small Kisar island off the East Timor coast near Lautem. The only “Kisar village” I have been able to locate is Kampung Kisar on the north side of the city of Ambon.
21. The meaning of “stone house” and the house next door is unclear, but it is possible that she became Wataki-san’s mistress or servant. Atacuka is likely Akatsuka, while the uncommon family name Wataki does exist.
22. While events at the end of the war are virtually impossible to reconstruct, it is clear that Japanese troops in Namlea would not have had the authority or ability to send women to Java. The Allies only arrived in Namlea in October 1945 for what seems to have been a very short stop. Based on this narrative, we can guess that Siti F. had already run away.
23. See pages 79–98.
24. This might have originally been intended as a reference to the *Kepala Adat* Warianlaheng’s wife and children, but the text seems to indicate that the editors felt that it should include other women and their children, even in other villages.
25. “Diskusi Buku ‘Perawan Remaja dalam Cerkeraman Militer’ karya Pramo,” <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/pasarbuku/message/3085>. Given the tense relationship between the organizers of the VAWW-NET mock trial and the Indonesian delegation under the leadership of Nursyabani Katjasungkana and Antarini Arna, this continued focus on the trial is interesting.
26. Page viii. While the editor curiously chooses the massacre of hundreds of thousands of PKI sympathizers in the 1960s as an apparently close second to the holocaust, and overlooks other recent calamitous events like the killing fields of Cambodia under Pol Pot in the 1970s, it is fascinating that the editor also did not find the inclusion of the “sexual slavery” of “200,000 women” as an equal event to the deaths of millions somewhat odd. Ironically, on March 27, 2009, the night before the AAS panel on comfort women in which the first version of this paper was presented, MSNBC showed a special on the shockingly brutal “sexual slavery” of women in the US, in which it was asserted that 30,000 new victims are being taken each year. This indicates that the US in the first decade of the 21st century has treated an even larger number of its young women (approximately 300,000 women) in a similarly inhumane manner. While all numbers are subject to question, this is obviously a grave matter worthy of thought and action. It also reinforces a feeling that the editor of Pramoedya’s book was guilty of “over-akting.”
27. Beginning on page 3, the letter fades in and out of focus in chapters 3–4.
28. One such case was in Semarang, where buildings were borrowed to house women recruited for Flores in 1944, a case documented in part because of the Eurasian women included in this group. For a brief mention of this case, see Yamamoto and Höton 1999. It is possible that established brothels were used in some locales as transfer points.
29. The original reads “Apakah mereka tak mendapat upah dari Jepang? Tidak! Hanya kadang menerima uang rekreasi pada hari-hari tertentu, waktu mereka diijinkan pesiar sekedarnya di luar asrama.”
30. See page 42 for this list.
31. The views of some “average” Indonesian readers are easily available on the internet, for example through the reader’s comments at: http://goodreads.com/book/show/963127.Perawan_Remaja_Dalam_Cengeraman_Militer
32. Yamamoto 2009a. Yoshida’s book was entitled *Watashi no sensō hanzai: Chōsen-jin kyōsei renkō* [My war crime: Forcible mobilization of Koreans].
33. Puramudiya Ananta Tūr, *Nihongun ni suterareta shōjotachi: Indonেশia no ianfu hiwa* (日本軍に棄てられた少女たち: インドネシアの慰安婦悲話).
34. The failure of the modern Indonesian state and society to make any effort to help these women is similarly only the last chapter to the larger story.
35. By choosing the words “apparently original,” I am making a guess based on internal evidence. A pre-publisher draft in dot-matrix printed form has recently come into my possession and analysis has just begun.
36. To cite just one example, a journalist working for Surya visited Buru in 2008, yielding some interesting information from individuals who were in the Namlea area during WWII. See Rohi 2008.