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Books

Tuesday, March 05, 2013

Lingering Questions

Di Tempat Kejadian Perkara

Tulisan, refleksi, dan puisi tentang Timor-Leste, 1999-2010

By Pat Walsh - Translated into Indonesian by Mariana Hasbie

Published by Kepustakaan Populer Gramedia, Jakarta, October 2012

Paperback, 408 pages

In Indonesian, *Di Tempat Kejadian Perkara* does not sound as punchy as *At the Scene of the Crime*, the original title of Pat Walsh's reflections about East Timor. However, everything told in the original English version, is there for those who prefer to read it in Indonesian. The subtitle *Essays, Reflections and Poetry on East Timor* also sounds too bland for what the book has to offer.

Walsh walks the reader through the most significant segments of East Timor's recent history by trudging the uneven, often rough and rocky ground, through different climates. As we advance, we hear his voice, now tinged with sadness, now breaking in humour, occasionally passionate, but without any explicit or angry accusatory tones when describing the dire situations generated by internal conflicts, or resulting from external forces. All the same, we are left with no doubt about the perpetrators of the sufferings and the devastation that followed.

The journey is personally illuminating, especially for readers who allow themselves to see beyond what is immediately visible. Walsh's observations and reflections are sharp and critical, nonetheless largely non-judgemental, placing each event and situation in as impartial a context as possible. His sympathy, however, always lies with the victims. And he firmly believes that they deserve justice. This sentiment powerfully swells in the background as the book's leitmotif.

For those who are new to the affairs of Timor-Leste, as East Timor is now known, chapters such as *From Opposition to Proposition* (about The National Council of Timorese Resistance or CNRT), and East Timor's political parties and the role of the Catholic Church in politics, will paint a picture clear enough as an opening to the knowledge map which will grow larger as you continue reading.

The story of East Timor has not been all dark. Even in desperate circumstances, courage and kindness emerge among anger, disappointment and urges for revenge. This becomes apparent in the stories that recount Walsh's own personal encounters as well as events in the public realm. *Domingos Monteiro's Dream* for instance, tells of a community of seven families and some 50 people who were literally forgotten after being moved meant to be temporary from the site of East Timor's independence ceremonies in May 2002.

Several months later, when Walsh and his wife Annie, stumbled upon them, they were amazed that these people were not at all bitter about having had to live in unmarked UNHCR tents with no basic facilities and no known prospects about the time they would be properly resettled. They were in

fact, proud of East Timor's independence and bore no grudges towards those who were responsible for their displacement.

While acknowledging the good intentions of international aid agencies, Walsh questions the way some of them operate, as recounted in the chapter aptly titled *Knowing the Steps but Not Hearing the Music*. An example is a daily briefing led by UN Office for Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs on health, shelter, food and other essential information, a weekly international NGO consultation. Conducted in English without a simultaneous translation service, these are of limited effectiveness because most Timorese find it difficult to follow.

Walsh's great passion, which dominates the book, being sensitive to the trauma and grieving in the community he has lived in, is his quest for justice for the victims of human rights violations in Timor-Leste, and closely related to that, his quiet outrage at the possible impunity of the violators. Throughout several chapters we learn about the rationale, the arduous process and the limitations of CAVR (East Timorese Commission for Reception, Truth and Reconciliation), which Walsh helped establish.

CAVR's work has been limited to dealing with less serious crimes, though no less crucial for the proper running of a healthy community. And the careful thought and preparations needed for each session or hearing were enormous, involving numerous dimensions, such as those of religion, tradition and the fabric of the community to which the perpetrator belonged and hoped to return.

While the problems of the hurt and injuries of the less serious crimes are in no way all solved, there is still a huge question mark about the perpetrators of the serious crimes, the major violators of human rights who, Walsh believes, are protected by the politics of impunity. Walsh even questions the wisdom of Timor-Leste's leaders in not pursuing, in order to bring to justice, a number of alleged perpetrators who hold high positions in Indonesia.

In reading *Di Tempat Kejadian Perkara* we learn a great deal about Pat Walsh himself: his concern for humanity and his sense of justice. What he felt unable to express in prose he poured into poetry which is as touching and revealing. The book also tells a story about a people who have shown courage and determination to move on despite their suffering, much of it still unsolved.

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