

MALANG REPORT  
VISITING THE HOME OF AN ORGANIC FAMILY  
by  
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It began with my snap decision on the suggestion of Syed Haque to have Shaykh Hassan Pedersen ([www.lifedistorted.wordpress.com](http://www.lifedistorted.wordpress.com)) over from Malang, Indonesia to conduct two intensive introductory workshops at YARA Retreat in Jenderam Hilir, Dengkil, Malaysia. We called the workshop Islamic Community Building Program # 1, involving basic principles of sustainable living, permaculture design, Islamic Medicine, wholesome nutrition and self defense. ([www.iii4s.wordpress.com](http://www.iii4s.wordpress.com)). What impressed me most about Shaykh Hassan was his self-consistency, for the way he talked was the way he walked. This means for me that it was quite possible for me to create an ambience, within my home and in society, in which my vision can find expression in action to produce a viable counter-reality to live in, i.e., counter to the current reality of secularism, consumerism and nihilism. To be further inspired in this direction of recreating reality, I decided to visit Shaykh Hassan's home in Malang, a large city in East Java, Indonesia. I managed to persuade my wife Zaiza to tag along so that she might also be open to the possibilities of an alternative, sustainable way of living.

Our first full day at Shaykh Hassan's urban link-house home in Kampung Indah, Malang, involved a guided tour of the sustainable vegetable garden in the front yard and on the roof deck, the tilapia fish tank cum rain collection system and observing his wife, Mrs. Deasi, making soap. Later that afternoon, Mrs. conducted an English tuition class with a few neighborhood children in the small living room. She must be really proficient for all her three bright-looking, elder children, Zakaria, 11, Yusuf, 7, and Yasmin, 3, spoke flawless English at home (the youngest, Sarah, was 8 months). Bored with being indoors all day we took a stroll in the neighborhood and came across a quaint little shop in a corner shop selling well designed clothes for Muslim women.

Early the next morning we received a visit from Riza, a lecturer at the Malang Muhammadiyah University whom we contacted through my friend Adnin of INSISTS, a well-networked Indonesian Muslim NGO. As someone teaching at the University's Agricultural Faculty, Riza was attracted to Shaykh Hassan's garden, especially the fish tank, as he was in the fishery department. I asked him whether permaculture was taught at his faculty to which he replied in the negative, which was telling to me. Soon his wife Daisi came with their two young sons, and together they examined the garden, the fish tank and some of the products of Mrs. Deasi's Green Mommy Shop project ([www.greenmommyshop.wordpress.com](http://www.greenmommyshop.wordpress.com)). Before leaving, Riza made a few phone calls and then announced that he had arranged for Shaykh Hassan to speak on permaculture and sustainability at his department. He came back in the afternoon with his uncle's seasoned wagon and we drove through Malang toward Batu and the high hills beyond. We went on a busy winding road through the forested slopes passing a small, picturesque township and vegetable plots and rickety wooden food and souvenir stalls perched precariously on steep slopes until we arrived at a popular nature recreation park with an impressive and photogenic hundred and fifty feet sheer-drop vertical waterfall ([http://www.eastjava.com/tourism/malang/galleries/coban\\_rondo/index.html](http://www.eastjava.com/tourism/malang/galleries/coban_rondo/index.html)), which brings to mind the famous Angel Falls of south America ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Angel\\_Falls](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Angel_Falls)), albeit at a smaller scale. That was obviously the highlight of the day. On the drive down Riza treated us to a delicious dinner of tenderly grilled and fried fish. He was a very generous host. My wife certainly had her wish of exploring Malang and environs fulfilled on this wondrous and unplanned excursion.

The talk at the department the next morning went well, with Mrs. Deasi and myself taking turns to translate Shaykh Hassan's talk on the true meaning of agriculture, which in effect, is the sensitive nurture of both nature and culture to realise a sustainable symbiosis between man and his environment. Though busy, the head of the department, Dr. Damat, found some time to be at the talk and he asked some very practical questions, including when can a MOU be signed between the IIS and the University to facilitate cooperation in educating students and lecturers on permaculture and the science and art of sustainable living.

Before the talk started I had found time to look at some of the notices pinned up on the campus' many notice boards. One was announcing vacancies for agricultural graduates to work in a big oil palm plantation company with so many tens of thousand of hectares of plantations in Sumatera, Kalimantan and Sulawesi (so you graduate in agriculture to destroy more forest?). Another was on work or study opportunities in agribusiness, aquaculture and so on (to slave away for the soulless agribusiness corporations like Monsanto?). During the talk itself it struck me how new and novel to the audience did Shaykh Hassan's talk, though down to earth and common-sensical, seem (are they really studying how to cultivate the earth?). And then I thought of Riza and his wife soon going off to Germany for their master's degree in fishery science, and the amount of money and resources that sojourn there would cost cash-strapped Indonesia (but do we really have to go half way round the world in order to learn how to fish or farm in our own backyard?).

Muhammadiyah is a very big Indonesian Muslim NGO with more than 20 million members or followers (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Muhammadiyah>) and I suppose very rich too, with many big educational institutions such as this one, and of course many thinkers and ulamas. But behind the impressive physical facade of the campus' stout buildings is a pedagogic system thoroughly coopted, wittingly or unwittingly, into the service of a secular, consumerist system of knowing and acting, whose net-harvest is the systemic desolation of nature and culture. What can we do about it? For one thing, we can definitely have our own counter-system of knowing and acting through the IIS and HIMIA and HAKIM ([www.hakim.org.my](http://www.hakim.org.my)) and WIA ([www.wia.my](http://www.wia.my)) and MRG and similar initiatives, while at the same time engaging with organizations such as the Muhammadiyah so that they would reverse course and change for the better.

All in all it was a productive visit, including productive of drama. The taxi taking us to the airport after the talk broke down in the middle of heavy traffic on a very busy 4-lane mainroad reduced to 2-lane because some people ahead were rehearsing preparations for the coming Indonesian independence day parade on August 17. There we were, stuck in smog on a hot afternoon while the driver frantically worked his cell-phone for a good half-hour trying to arrange for another car to carry us in time for check-in at the Surabaya airport, another good 2-hours' drive away. Trying to escape from the smog, noise and traffic, we went into a short, narrow pathway between the shophouses into, hey presto!, a wide breezy expanse of greenery of half-ripe paddy fields. And then it was a good 3-hour flight delay at the airport and so we touched down at 3 am at the LCCT. While Shaykh Hassan happily took off for bed in nearby Jenderam in Faiz's van, my wife and I, for no good reason, missed the 4 am LCCT-KL bus and had to board the next one , a good 1-hour later, at 5 am. Reaching home I hit the sack right away after Subh prayers, but wife had to prepare to go to her office job, poor girl!

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