He rocks, in the truest sense of the word. He plays bass guitar and is both a fan and friend of Metallica. Early in the morning, or sometimes late at night, he likes to spontaneously go out and mingle among the people. He listens to the problems of the poorest living in the slums, promising them swift relief. Indonesia's President Joko "Jokowi" Widodo, 54, is a pious Muslim who doesn't speak publicly about his faith. "That's private," he says. His countrymen call him "Jokowi Superstar." For many, he is a source of inspiration and hope.

Few politicians have had such a career. Jokowi was born a carpenter's son and went on to become a forestry student and furniture dealer. Indeed, his humble beginnings make him something of a phenomenon in a country dominated by wealthy families and the military. His first public office was as mayor of his provincial hometown of Surakarta, followed by his great leap to the governor's office in Jakarta. In October 2014, he was elected president of Indonesia.

The country he leads is a leading global economy, a member of the G-20 and boasts more than 250 million inhabitants. Only China, India and the United States have more people. But there's something else about this country that leaves the world in awe: No other country in the world has as many Muslims as Indonesia.
Almost 90 percent of the population follows Islam -- more than in the Maghreb, Saudi Arabia and the Gulf states combined.

There have, to be sure, been sporadic attacks by Islamist fanatics, the worst leaving more than 200 people dead on the vacation island of Bali in 2002. There are also signs of growing Islamization: The sale of alcohol has been restricted and headscarves are becoming more prevalent. Since 2009, however, there have been no more major attacks. News of Islamic State terror sounds like it's from another world. The Islam of the Far East is proof that the strict rules of the Koran and the freedoms of democratic society are not necessarily mutually exclusive. Should the rest of the Islamic world learn from that "spirit of tolerance," as described by US President Barack Obama, a man who spent part of his childhood in Jakarta?

Jokowi's tenure as president has not got off to a particularly impressive start. Treated as the world's next "tiger economy," resource-rich Indonesia's GDP is set to grow by only 5 percent by the end of this year, rather than the 7 percent Jokowi promised during his election campaign. The president's decision to execute foreign drug smugglers has damaged the country's relations with Australia and the European Union. He has also proven to be surprisingly tough with regard to Muslim refugees from Burma. And his promise to fight corruption, something his country so desperately needs, hasn't yet borne fruit. Jokowi has only really lived up to his platform on one point: He has defended religious freedoms against radicals who want Indonesia to impose Sharia and dissolve its liberal constitution.

Jokowi appointed a Christian as his successor to the governor's post in Jakarta, a man who belongs to the country's Chinese minority. "What's wrong with that?" he says of the nomination. Perhaps President Jokowi is a step ahead of his people in that respect.

Not Exactly Rosy

Those who conflate the words "Islamic" with "fanatic," "backwards" and "anti-modern" are quickly refuted by 40-year-old Yenny Wahid. She knows no reservations when it comes to the West, other religions or the latest high-tech gadgetry. As a meeting point, she suggests a Starbucks located in a glitzy shopping mall. She sports an Apple Watch and jeans and her headscarf, loosely bound, seems more like a fashion accessory than a religious statement. She laughs easily and shows off a video on her iPhone of a transvestite clown. When it comes to her faith, however, she gets serious very quickly.
She knows that the situation on the religious front is not exactly rosy. For years, Yenny Wahid worked as general secretary for the National Awakening Party, or PKB, which has now formed a coalition with Jokowi. Several Islamic parties have managed to enter parliament, collectively attracting around a third of the votes. The moderate PKB was the only faith-based group to have seen a significant jump, garnering 9 percent of the vote.

"Unfortunately there continue to be a number of attacks against other religious communities. Catholics in the city of Bogor were forbidden from building a church and priests had to defend themselves against a mob," Wahid says. "But Christianity is protected in Indonesia as an equal religion, while members of the Ahmadiyya faith are regarded as heretics because they don't believe that Muhammad was the last prophet of God." The Muslim Council has called upon the Ahmadiyya to renounce their "heresy." Wahid finds this outrageous.

Wahid, a liberal, is also not fond of the fact that men who drink alcohol or "lewdly" dressed women are flogged in the largely autonomous province of Aceh. Her parents taught her to be tolerant. Wahid studied in Jakarta and, later, at Harvard, going on to work as a correspondent. In 1998, her father Abdurrahman Wahid founded the PKB. One year later, he was unexpectedly elected as a compromise
candidate to the presidency of Indonesia. After he succumbed to blindness, his
daughter assisted him with state visits. It was at his side that she met Yasser
Arafat and Jiang Zemin. Soon, despite considerable efforts to rein in the excesses of
the Indonesian military, her father was no longer able to remain in office. His
resignation was attributed to political intrigue.

The Wahid Foundation, which she heads, strives to abolish prejudices against the
various religious communities and foster understanding for all that is "foreign." She
organizes meetings for women and helps them sell their wares at markets. The
foundation also gives out loans to projects -- under the condition that they employ
members of different religions.

Meanwhile, Wahid, who has three young daughters, has withdrawn from the party.
But she says she follows Jokowi's politics very closely and has great hopes for him,
"despite his initial stumbles and the many obstacles that are put in his path." And
yes, she was asked whether she would be interested in a position in the
government.

She tells of a phenomenon that she says awakens both hope and fear inside her.
Indonesia, the land of Wayang shadow puppetry and an oral tradition, has
discovered books. "But my countrymen don't read anything that could actually
broaden their horizons. They pounce on religious conservative propaganda
literature," she says. That includes the Indonesian variant of Rosamunde Pilcher,
plus family and romance novels that present Islam as an answer for everything.
"And this even though we have such great authors with such intriguing subjects."

But there are counterexamples -- books that have been successful despite their
progressive content.

**The Scene of a Miracle**

The island of Belitung, an hour's flight from Jakarta to the northeast of Java, is
little-known among most Indonesians. It's not even an insider tip for tourists,
despite having several beautiful beaches. Indeed, if it weren't for the writer Andrea
Hirata, 39, it would have likely remained terra incognita. For millions of enthusiastic
readers, however, Belitung has become something of a home away from home. The
scene of a miracle.
"Laskar Pelangi" -- "The Rainbow Troops" -- was the name of his first, largely autobiographical novel. After it was released in 2005, it sold 5 million copies and became the best-selling book in the country’s history. Translated into 34 languages, it earned Hirata an American literature prize. A German edition was published in 2013.

The story is as simple as it is moving. For children on the island, whose parents worked as fisherman or toiled in tin mines, there was little chance of education in the 1980s. Their lives seemed predetermined. "For a daily wage of less than a dollar, my father shoveled radioactive sand full of tin," Hirata writes. "That my mother was able to keep eight children from starving was a miracle worthy of UNESCO recognition."

Yet an opportunity arises for him and his friends. An older, engaged teacher and his young colleague found an Islamic school on their own initiative. The "rainbow troops" flock there every morning, lest they miss a single lesson, no matter if the chalk is in low supply, the notepads worn, the chairs rickety and the structure itself at risk of collapsing. Most come on old bicycles, undertaking hours-long journeys over hilly terrain, wading through rivers where crocodiles lurk.
They dream of the capital none of them have ever visited, but also of London and Paris -- places they know from listening to the news over their transistor radio. And they work hard at school, helping the weakest among them to keep up. But the "Rainbow Troops" is not only a success story: Lintang, the most talented of the boys, is forced to break off his education after the death of his father in order to earn money for his large family by working as a porter -- at the age of 12.

"You'll encounter a boy named Ikal among the schoolchildren. Ikal means curly hair. That boy is me," Hirata says. "One rainy morning, I saw my teacher, a slender, young woman, as she hurried across the schoolyard. She was holding a banana leaf over her head to protect herself from the rain. In that moment I swore to myself that one day, when I was an adult, I would write a book to thank her for everything."

He kept his promise. The book, with all its unforgettable characters and its funny and sad twists and turns, is a monument to those teachers and pupils. But how does life go on after that? Could a sequel enchant readers the same way?

**Spellbound**

It's a two-hour drive from the small island capital Tanjung Pandan to the village of Gantung. There is a house adjacent to the local mosque, colorfully painted with a garden. The rooms are packed with memories of the rainbow troops. There are guitars on the walls and bikes hung on a clothesline. "Indonesia's first literature museum," reads a sign at the entrance. A cafe invites visitors to relax among banana trees. This is what Pippi Longstocking's Villa Villekulla could have looked like.

Out back is the school that Hirata built after the decrepit structure of yore was slated for demolition. The landlord stands at the blackboard, his long, black curls protruding from beneath a newsboy cap. It's time for English exercises with the students. He patiently corrects their pronunciation. "One step toward education is a hundred steps toward civilization," he says. "I hope I can inspire you," is written on the wall. "I didn't have a chance either and I still made it."

His book, "The Dreamer," was released in Germany in March. Both educational and autobiographical, it tells the continuing story of the rainbow children. While at secondary school, Hirata also worked in the harbors. After graduation, he moved to Jakarta in a ship meant for transporting livestock. There, he attended college and earned money doing various odd jobs. A scholarship from the EU got him to Paris before he returned to the University of Jakarta to complete a degree in economics. The book also tells of how he found his first love.

In the evenings, when people gathered to break their fasts during Ramadan, Hirata, a pious Muslim, invites all the children and youths to the museum's cafe. The atmosphere is festive and peaceful. Oil lamps have been placed along the roadside, their glow meant to show the angels the way when they come down to Earth. A young man and his girlfriend are playing guitar and Hirata reads aloud in his melodious voice. Everyone listens as if spellbound.
Andrea Hirata writes like Henri Rousseau painted at the beginning of the last century. He is undeterred and unseducible; he is at the same time self-taught, naïve and a magical realist. Hirata gave up his well-paid position at an Indonesian telephone company in order to be able to fully dedicate himself to his writing. He uses the museum and the school lessons to give back to his village what it gave him: the gift of learning.

**Confronting a Violent Past**

There can hardly be starker contrasts as those between the village on Belitung and the metropolis Jakarta; between the casual, self-made writer and the elegant literary figure; between the intuitive Andrea Hirata and the intellectual Laksmi Pamuntjak. While the man from the village focuses on achieving equal opportunities for all, the city dweller wants her compatriots to own up to the horrors of their history. They may not know each personally, but they appreciate one another and they will both be ambassadors for Indonesia at the Frankfurt Book Fair in October, where the country will be showcased as this year's guest of honor.
the center of town there is a "golden triangle" comprised almost exclusively of luxury hotels and expensive shopping malls. And then there's the climate: Most of the year it's humid and hot. The season for tropical storms and monsoons lasts for months. And because most of the roads are hopelessly congested, 10-kilometer (6-mile) traffic jams are a part of everyday life.

Indonesia has its Dutch colonialists to thank for the rise of its capital, which before independence in 1949 was no more than an administrative center located on a bay under constant threat of flooding. "Big Durian" is what the locals half-lovingly, half-derisively call the urban beast that is Jakarta, after the large and foul, yet sweet-smelling fruit.

There, in the south of Jakarta, in a neighborhood of villas and gardens, is where Laksmi Pamuntjak, 43, lives with her husband and daughter. She has an expressive face with sparkling eyes and long hair, and is wearing a black dress and high-heeled shoes. "I know that my origins have provided me every opportunity," she says, almost apologetically. Her grandparents owned a publishing house, her father was an architect and her mother studied pharmacology. Laksmi was sent to good schools and learned to play the piano. There was a time when she considered a career as a concert pianist.

But even as a youth she was aware of the dark side of Indonesian society. Above all, she was interested in the massacre of the Communists and leftist liberals from 1965-66. Hundreds of thousands of "enemies of the people" were executed or deported to camps following a failed coup against the military dictator Sukarno. It was one of the greatest, unpunished crimes of the 20th century, and it still resonates years later. Many people who were deemed "suspicious" are still suffering today. Pamuntjak watched as one of her favorite teachers, who was married to a former deportee, was forced to quit her job due to constant changes imposed upon her husband.

The Courage to Go Looking

Pamuntjak, inquisitive by nature, later studied in Perth, Australia and published books of poetry and essays. But Indonesia's repressed trauma never let her go. She began researching on her own for a novel that would center around the violence of 1965, visiting the remote island of Buru and meeting with former prisoners and jailers. It was an investigation against forgetting, an appeal against the silence that for so long had been enforced by the authorities.

She tells the story as a family saga, based on the Indian national epic poem "Mahabharata," in which the young student Amba falls in love with a doctor named Bhism, who sympathizes with the far left. In the turmoil surrounding the hunt for any and all political opposition, Amba loses track of her kidnapped boyfriend. Only as an old woman does she have the courage to go looking for him and find clues about his fate.

"Amba" became a prize-winning bestseller in Indonesia even though the denunciation of the past is something that upsets many in the country. The book was published as "The Question of Red" in English, and will be released in German
this autumn. It has a rather melancholic ending: "It is hard to say what breaks a person more easily: the sting of failure or the music of hope."

It wasn't just the military and police that took part in the pogroms 50 years ago. Islamic organizations, members of which marched through neighborhoods and pulled "traitors" from their homes, were involved too. But the author does not want to place sweeping blame on the Muslims. She considers herself religious. For her, there is always room for doubt -- an attitude she does not share with the Islamists. The murders at the Charlie Hebdo office earlier this year still occupy her thoughts today. "I find many of their caricatures offensive. We Muslims, however, must learn to stay calm. If we had more confidence in our own religion, we wouldn't have to react so hysterically."

Laksmi Pamuntjak reserves no sympathy for radicals. She sees the greatest danger not in religious fundamentalism, but in increasing social disparities.

The Asian island kingdom, with all its faults and setbacks, does set the right priorities. Its most important politicians and writers are connected by the knowledge that education is the only way to progress and religion is something private. Of Indonesia's 220 million Muslims, far fewer have left to join the Islamic State than in Tunisia or Saudi Arabia or, for that matter, Germany.

http://www.spiegel.de/international/world/indonesia-has-found-success-in-moderation-a-1047018.html