

Voices from the Past:
Betawi Dialects in Firman Muntaco's *Gambang Djakartaé*
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Betawi is the Malay-Indonesian variety spoken by the indigenous inhabitants of Jakarta. Betawi no longer exists in its 'pure', uncontaminated form; probably all present speakers are heavily influenced in their speech by Indonesian. Most of our knowledge of Betawi comes from several scholarly works dating from the 1970s. By that period, however, many Betawi *kampung* had been bulldozed by the Sukarno regime in order to make way for grandiose development projects. Their inhabitants were dispersed to the outskirts, and the city itself quickly filled with migrants from other areas (mostly speakers of Javanese and Sundanese). As a result, ethnic Betawi now constitute an insignificant minority in Jakarta, and their speech in its original form is no longer heard.

What was Betawi like before the great displacement and the emergence of Jakarta Indonesian? No recordings of natural Betawi speech from that period exist. There is, however, an important secondary source: the copious Betawi dialogues contained in Firman Muntaco's short stories. Firman was an ethnic Betawi writer who, beginning in the 1950s, published hundreds of short stories in Jakarta's newspapers depicting scenes from traditional Betawi life. These were so successful that two volumes of his selected stories were published in 1960 and 1963 under the title *Gambang Djakartaé*. Many authors have since tried to emulate Firman's writing, but none have come close to his level of linguistic authenticity (and literary quality).

Each character in Firman's story speaks a distinct and recognizable dialect of Betawi, with its own distinct phonological, morphosyntactic, and lexical features, all masterly represented. One example of many is pronoun use: Betawi Kota speakers in Firman's stories, when speaking to equals or inferiors, consistently use the first-person informal pronoun *gué*; speakers of Betawi Ora use *guah*; and ethnic Chinese speakers use *gua*. This paper will analyze and discuss these dialectal differences, citing examples from Firman's writing along with supporting evidence from other sources.