What Makes an Activist?
Three Indonesian Life Histories

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The following narratives have been constructed mainly from interviews, or more accurately unstructured conversations, with three long-standing Indonesian friends: Hardoyo, Parakitri T. Simbolon and Mohamad Sobary. I first met Hardoyo in 1979, the year he was released from 13 years’ political imprisonment under Suharto’s New Order. Parakitri and I first met in 1971, when he was a student activist associated with the Yogyakarta student newspaper 

Sendi. Sobary, like Hardoyo, I came to know in 1979, when he was working with the Solo-based village development NGO, Yayasan Indonesia Sejahtera (YIS), the Indonesian Welfare Foundation.

The narratives presented here arose out of my conversations with these three men over a period of many years. Conversations are never complete, and there are always more things to ask and tell. However in reconstructing the narratives in this form, I have tried to identify the moments when the three narrators’ ways of understanding Indonesia and their own engagements in Indonesia’s social and political development were challenged, changed or expanded into new dimensions. Following Roxana Waterson, I have also attempted to uncover each informant’s ‘distinctive positioning’, what people tell us in their stories that is influenced by the particular historical periods in which they live, and the ‘particular contradictions, opportunities or constraints’ they face (Waterson 2007: 14). In other words my concern is with the way these three individuals have responded to the opportunities and challenges their location in the current of Indonesian history throws up for them, the ways in which their commitment to Indonesia and what it might be is reflected in their life histories. What do these life histories tell us about the making of three very different types of Indonesian activists?

The survivor

Hardoyo was born in Tulungagung in East Java in 1934, the son of a school teacher who was banished to a swampy malaria infested region of Blitar for opposing the closing of unregistered private schools by the colonial government in 1932. He

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1 An earlier version of this paper was presented to the 17th Biennial Conference of the Asian Studies Association of Australia in Melbourne 1-3 July 2008. My thanks to Roger Wiseman for his assistance with the original version, and to the editors of the University of Sydney Indonesian Working Papers series for their work on this version of the paper.

2 I owe my friendship with Hardoyo to an introduction by the late Herbert Feith, one of the original Australian Volunteers Abroad (AVA, now Australian Volunteers International). It was also the longest serving AVA, the late Mary Johnston, who introduced me to Sobary. On the relationship between narrator and investigator in this kind of research, see Waterson 2007: 18-19.

3 In his preface to his biography of Indonesia’s first Prime Minister, Sutan Sjahrir, Mrązek says that each personality is formed by two things, childhood and the crossing of cultural barriers. For Mrązek ‘the cultural barrier is a line at which a man is challenged to defect, to strengthen, or to reinterpret some of the fundamental values of his philosophy and behavior’ (Mrązek 1994:1).
spent a year in Dutch language primary school until it closed after the arrival of the Japanese. Towards the end of the Occupation he delivered anti-Japanese leaflets for his father. During the revolution he was a member of the struggle organisation Mobilisasi Pelajar (Mobilised Students). In the early 1950s he entered the Faculty of Social and Political Affairs at Gadjah Mada University and began to immerse himself in radical politics. In 1962 he became national president of CGMI, the communist-leaning Indonesian Student Movement Concentration, and from 1964 he was a member of the Indonesian Communist Party (PKI) Politbureau’s foreign affairs and youth departments. After his release from prison in 1979, he rebuilt his life as a translator and editor in the publishing firm Pustaka Sinar Harapan. As an advocate for the human rights of ex-political prisoners at the Indonesian Council of Churches, he started the e-List Wahana@centrin.net.id.

Bung Har, as he was universally known, made several starts on writing his autobiography before his death in December 2006. However he was too immersed in the present, particularly after the fall of Suharto in 1998, helping fellow ex-political prisoners and writing analyses of Indonesian politics for his e-List, ever to complete the task. This is his story:

In the village of Pakel, which lies in the Campurdarat sub-district of the kabupaten of Tulungagung, there still exists today [1998] the house where 65 years ago I began to know the world. My father was moved there to be head of the local primary school (Sekolah Rak-yat, SR), in a swampy area infected with malaria. He was a nationalist because of Bung Karno, and he said it was a kind of exile imposed by the colonial government. He had attended a meeting to protest against the ‘Wild Schools Ordinance’ (Wilde Scholen Ordinante), and as a result he was arrested by the colonial police intelligence service and jailed for

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4 Hardoyo also wrote many detailed analyses, which he called ‘study notes’, on party politics and political power during the New Order, as well as unsigned newspaper articles. After Suharto’s downfall he began publishing these notes under the pseudonym Wahana on his e-List.

5 The beginning of Hardoyo’s story, including his experiences during the Japanese occupation, is an edited version of an unfinished autobiographical narrative written in 2002. Subsequent parts of the narrative have been constructed from taped interviews in March 2002 and July 2005, and other spoken recollections.

6 Members of the nationalist movement from the 1920s founded large numbers of so-called ‘wild schools’ whose diplomas were not recognised by the colonial government. In 1932 the government attempted to restrict these schools through the issuing of a ‘wild schools ordinance’. This regulation
three weeks. That’s why they moved him to a swamp area. This transfer made him hate the Dutch. He was originally from Bojonegoro. My grandfather was first a village head, then manager of a local market (*mantri pasar*), then an agent for British American Tobacco.

My father was trained in a Dutch school for teachers (*Normaalschool*) in Jombang, East Java, where the pupils used low Javanese (*ngoko*) in everyday conversation, and treated each other as equals. This was the influence of the Djawa Dipo movement (Anderson 1990: 215-218, Lucas 1991: 152). From the viewpoint of the palace [in Solo or Yogyakarta], it was a kind of cultural revolution. Djawa Dipo indirectly destroyed the hierarchical structure of Javanese language with its 3 levels of *kromo*, *madya* and *ngoko*. Didn’t the nationalist Tjipto Mangunkusumo once say, ‘Don’t expect the Javanese to be democratic before they use the same everyday language to each other?’ At primary school teachers’ conferences, they spoke only in Malay or low Javanese. So my father was a member of the Djawa Dipo movement. During the revolution, he once gave a speech to the people of Karangbret in Tulungagung, which opened with the words, ‘I want to speak with you in the language of mankind, where there are no *ndoro*, no *tuan*. So he spoke in *ngoko*. When he finished his speech he came down from the podium, and the village people said, ‘Monggo ndoro...monggo ndoro... (please, your honour)’. My father said, ‘What’s this? Ndoro again?’ It was not easy to change long-ingrained cultural practices.

My father put me into a Dutch primary school (HIS) in Tulungagung. These schools were for the children of *priyayi*. The school principal was a Dutchman, Meneer Logeman. We wore trousers, ties and shoes and called all the male teachers ‘Sir’ (*Meneer*). We addressed the female teachers, who wore skirts, as Miss (*Mevrouw*). Every morning we practised the ABC in Dutch, and we also studied Javanese. In December we celebrated the Dutch Christmas with *Zwarte Piet* (Black Pete). We were told he would throw naughty or lazy children into the Oranje River (in Holland), which, because we had to study Dutch history and geography, we knew the exact location of. I hid in the classroom in fear of *Zwarte Piet* and a teacher had to persuade me to come out. Then we sat on a carpet in the cool school hall, and opened the presents that Sinterklaas and *Zwarte Piet* had bought. We sang ‘*Sinterklaas kapoentje, dankje sinterklaas*’, and were given cakes and milk to drink.8

I had been at the HIS for only two years, when one day our village drum sounded the fast beat summoning us to the meeting place near the market. We were astonished to see more than 100 Japanese soldiers had arrived. I remember they told us they were the ‘older brothers’ of the Indonesian people and they had come to help their younger siblings. I don’t know why, but I formed a bad first impression of the Japanese army. Before starting our lessons at school every morning we had to assemble, bow from the waist towards Tokyo to pay respect to the Emperor, who it was said was descended from the sun god. We had to swear an oath as pupils of the New Java. Then we did exercises. Then we listened to nationalist songs about the

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7 In his previous village primary school the male teachers wore Javanese headscarves and batik sarongs.
8 Hardoyo is referring here to a popular children’s song that goes ‘Santa Claus, naughty boy, Put a present in my shoe, Put a present in my boot [stocking], Thank you Santa Claus’ (‘*Sinterklaas kapoentje, Gooi wat in mijn schoentje, Gooi wat in mijn laarsje, Dank je Sinterklaas*’). My thanks to Peter Paul van Lelyveld who provided me with the complete version of the song, and contacted the Meertens Institute for a translation of *kapoentje* in this context.
victory of Greater East Asia over the Allies, and studied reading and writing Japanese. In our Japanese language book 3 we were already reading a Japanese folktale called Momotarosan.

One day during the Japanese occupation, when my father was a teacher at the local primary school in Karangbret, I happened to see him heading off on his bicycle. I didn’t know where he was going, but after watching him for some time, I found out he was delivering notices (siaran). He was surprised to see me watching him, and later he sought me out and said, ‘If you do what I’m doing and the Japanese get to know of it, you will be killed, understand?’ Here, read this.’ It said, ‘BE VIGILANT THE GREATER EAST ASIA WAR WILL SOON END BECAUSE JAPAN WILL BE DEFEATED.’ ‘This is dangerous. Your father could die because of this. You support me don’t you?’ ‘Yes. I support you.’ ‘Then take this to Tulungagung and give it to a teacher there. Bring me back another pile of notices, and don’t fall off your bike.’ (I had to carry them on the handlebars of my bike). ‘You can be a courier. Being a courier means that a lot of other people’s lives are at stake. A lot of people are implicated, so no-one must know what you are doing.’

Suddenly one day just before the Japanese defeat, there was a burst of gunfire over our house. I went looking for my little brother. Mother was looking for us as well. She had just given birth to a new baby, and Father was suddenly not there. It turned out that he and his friends had gone into hiding somewhere.

Merdeka!

Then, out of nowhere, came the news of Indonesian independence. I was watching a shadow play (wayang kulit), when the puppeteer, who was a teacher, stopped the performance and said, ‘I am going to make an important announcement. We are now a free nation! (Bangsa kita Indonesia sudah merdeka).’ No-one clapped or shouted, because they didn’t know what Merdeka meant. So the puppeteer explained that Merdeka meant that we would be in charge of ourselves (berkuasa sendiri) and that the Japanese would leave our country.

I started going around with the young men of the village, making barricades to obstruct the movement of Japanese forces. And once they understood the meaning of Merdeka, more and more people came to join the movement.

One night there was a meeting in our house. Bung Amir [Sjarifuddin] was coming, so even though I went to bed there was no way I was going to go to sleep. When he arrived I got up, thinking ‘Here’s Bung Amir’, and I brought him an essay I had written to ask for his signature. That would be something I could be really proud of at school. So I approached Bung Amir, and he said, ‘Well, who’s this kid?’ Someone told him I was the child of Sudjoko Sukowardoyo, deputy chair of the Socialist Party in Tulungagung. ‘How come you’re not in bed?’ he asked. I asked for his signature. And I asked him how to be a smart kid. He said ‘If you want to be smart you have to study two things, mathematics (wiskunde) and history (gescheidenis). If you study them you will be a smart kid!’ So after that I enjoyed studying mathematics and I enjoyed history as well. ‘You must study hard, and become a clever person,’ he

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9 Mr Amir Sjarifuddin (1907-1948) was a nationalist politician, and Prime Minister during the 1945-1949 revolution. He was recruited into the underground PKI before the Japanese occupation, and imprisoned for underground activities until the end of the Occupation. A key leader of the Socialist Party, he became Prime Minister from July 1947- January 1948 when he was executed in the aftermath of the Madiun Affair ( Poze 2007, Reid 1974).
said, and then he hugged me and I was very happy. Next morning at school the headmaster announced that a pupil had been hugged by Bung Amir. I was very proud.

After Amir Sjarifuddin’s visit a teacher at my primary school, who had heard him speak, asked my class ‘I want to ask you who are the people who do most for the world (orang yang paling berjasa)?’ He went on ‘Not everyone is useful. The most useful people are farmers. If we didn’t have farmers, even if you had a lot of money, with no food, you would die.’ No matter how much money we had, without the farmers we couldn’t eat. Then he told us that without workers who made textiles for clothes, we would go everywhere naked. My teacher said human beings were fortunate to have farmers and workers, and we had to fight for them. This made a deep impression on me.

The Proclamation of Independence led to great changes in Indonesia. From being colonised by white people, we had a government of our own. What was the legacy of Independence? We had a parliament and political parties. But the Supreme Court had no right to hear challenges to the Constitution. From 1950 to 1959 we had the 1950 Constitution of Liberal Democracy which also brought changes. Article 28 guaranteed freedom to organise and freedom of expression.

In the 1955 general elections I was living in a student hostel in Yogyakarta. We read all the party newspapers Abadi, Suluh Indonesia, Harian Rakjat and Pedoman. Nahdlatul Ulama (NU)10 didn’t have a paper until after the elections. We thought that a party which didn’t have a newspaper couldn’t win the election. But NU won the most votes.

The PKI was a political force against inequality. They strongly opposed any policy which created inequality. They had a national platform, which began with the statement, ‘With the general election we will form a people’s democratic government to build socialism.’ The second statement said, ‘With the general election we will form a national coalition to implement the national democratic revolution.’ They came up with this one only three months before the election.

Njoto (then a member of the PKI Central Committee, and later the Politbureau) came and spoke at UGM. It was very interesting for us. He said that the PKI was opposed to international monopoly capitalism, but that the party supported national capitalists in developing domestic capital to support the revolution. He said that all cultivators should have land. ‘We will struggle for surplus land to be taken over by the government including plantation land,’ Njoto said. He also talked about a cultural movement, and about science and education.11

Why we were intellectually attracted to the PKI? They didn’t talk about democracy. Masyumi and the PSI talked about democracy. Back then we said that democracy of the bourgeoisie or ‘liberal democracy’ did not fit with Indonesian conditions. Soekarno had criticised liberal democracy in his speech on the birth of Panca Sila.

In fact, the PKI’s attitude to democracy was ambiguous. They didn’t want liberal democracy, but they didn’t want an authoritarian government either. After the Constituent Assembly failed [to agree on a new constitution] there were two views. Aidit supported Soekarno’s return to the 1945 Constitution, while Ir. Sakirman rejected returning to the 1945 Constitution because it was not democratic.

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10 The Nahdlatul Ulama (Revival of the Religious Scholars) was founded in Surabaya in 1926 to reassert the authority of the religious scholars and their Islamic schools (pesantren) against the urban based reformist (Muhammadiyah). See Cribb and Kahin 2004: 284-286.

11 On Njoto’s life and political carrier see “Sang Flamboyan...” 2009.
I thought that the PKI should accept the 1945 Constitution in line with the implementation of democracy and return to the spirit (semangat) and soul (jiwa) of '45. The Constituent Assembly wanted to put its summary of human rights as a supplement to the 1945 Constitution.

Student and national politics

At Gadjah Mada during student orientation [in 1954] all new students were initiated (dipelonco). Those of us who had been involved in armed struggle against the Dutch during the Second Clash [December 1948] didn’t want to be initiated, because after all, it was a Dutch tradition, not an Indonesian custom. We were considered to be inexperienced, so there were fights between students who were anti-initiation and those who were pro initiation ‘ragging’. The anti initiation group founded the Jogya Student Concentration (CMJ, Concentratie Mahasiswa Jogja). Together with the Bandung Student Concentration (CMB, Concentratie Mahasiswa Bandung) and the Bogor Student Movement Concentration (CMIB, Gerakan Mahasiswa Indonesia Bogor), these three organisations became the founders of the Indonesian Student Movement Concentration (CGMI, Concentratie Gerakan Mahasiswa Indonesia). Bung Karno supported us because he wanted to cut down on the number of parties and organisations. ‘I welcome the birth of the CGMI, I give CGMI my blessing, so rise up (bangkitlah kamu!),’ he said. The Socialist Party (PSI) gave us the nickname ‘Soekarno Youth’ (Soekarno Jeugd), we didn’t care because we always supported Bung Karno (Hardoyo, 2001).

So the CGMI was founded in 1956, from the fusion of CMB, CMJ and GMIB. The first chairperson was Kapten Ir. Agus Wiyono who later became a Major General. I was national chair from 1960-63, which were very difficult years, because during Guided Democracy, we had the policy of ‘Nasakomisation’. This meant that the three elements of Nasakom – nationalism, religion and communism – had to be recognisable in every kind of organisation. So there had to be a communist student organisation, because there were nationalist students and different religious student groups. This presented a challenge for the CGMI. If CGMI did not call itself ‘Kom’ then the executive could not be represented on the national union of students. Finally we asked the PKI, ‘Can we declare ourselves ‘Kom’? Bung Aidit’s reply was, ‘How can you do that? Who is the ‘Kom’ in CGMI? How do you get to be ‘Kom’?’ The CGMI executive explained to Aidit, ‘Bung Aidit, it’s like this. According to Bung Karno everyone should be taught Marxism. We want the PKI to teach us Marxism.’ So a compromise was reached in 1964, with the CGMI becoming

12 Hardoyo maintained a lifelong admiration of Soekarno. On the wall of his house in Cipete there was a photo of Bung Karno inscribed by the great man himself with the words ‘God is enthroned in the poor man’s hut’ (Tuhan bersemayam di gubug si miskin).
13 Hardoyo recalls the second secretary general was Subroto SH, who was killed in 1965. Hardoyo was the third chairman and the fourth was Utoyo Mahir who was living in Holland at the time of this interview.
14 GMNI Gerakan Mahasiswa Nasional Indonesia and HMI Himpunan Mahasiwa Islam were the other two biggest student organisations.
15 Under the NASAKOM doctrine all political organisations had to include members of the three political streams, representing nationalists (NAS), religious groups (Λ=agama) and communists (KOM)
16 Darimana kok mengaku-ngaku Kom? Ya, nggak bisa, wong kamu Kom-nya siapa? Hardoyo probably underestimates the number of PKI members in the CGMI, which he says was about 2 per cent when he was general chair, out of a membership of about 18,000 in 1964.
‘a communist and progressive non-communist student organisation’. By then I was no longer the chairman. While I was leader I was not interested in internal party questions. I never had the time. I was always off overseas somewhere, so I never had the time to take courses offered by the party. Still I was interested in the history of the party because people where always asking me about it.\footnote{Hardoyo’s trips overseas were related to his membership (from 1964) of the foreign affairs section of the PKI’s Politbureau secretariat. The CGMI came under the youth department headed by B.O. Hutapea who was head of the Party’s Central Education Bureau (BIPSEN, Biro Pendidikan Sentral), responsible for party cadre education and training.}

Sometime before Lebaran in 1960, I heard an announcement over the radio that I had been appointed as a member of the Gotong Royong parliament (DPR GR).\footnote{The wheels of the Indonesian bureaucracy were slow moving. The official letter of appointment arrived sometime later. In March 1960, the elected parliament was dissolved by decree, replaced by a new gotong royong (mutual help) parliament. Elections, though still promised, were repeatedly postponed (Feith 1963: 593).} I was only 26, and at my inauguration the President shook my hand, saying ‘This is the youngest member of parliament.’ Automatically I was also a member of the temporary People’s Consultative Assembly (MPRS) representing the ‘youth’ functional group (golongan karya pemuda). I was also a member of the parliamentary Agrarian Commission.

There were two issues with the Basic Agrarian Law (BAL) of 1960. In the section on share cropping the PKI wanted 6:4, 6 shares to the tiller and 4 shares to the landholder but the BAL said it was to be 5:5. Then there was a maximum landholding, but no minimum holding. The PNI wanted to specify a minimum holding, but the PKI didn’t have a position on this. The problem of a maximum holding was firstly the different quality (productivity) of land in different places, and secondly the availability of land was different. There was much greater supply of land outside Java. The BAL should have taken into account these two factors in setting minimum land holdings, because in Java 0.5 ha would be the same as 1 ha outside Java.

In support of the BAL, the PKI’s peasants’ front, the Barisan Tani Indonesia (BTI) later launched its ‘unilateral mass actions’ (aksi sepihak) campaigns. This made me angry, and I spoke out against it in parliament. Why call them ‘unilateral’ actions? To me, an action is always unilateral. And it gave their political enemies the opportunity to accuse them of being provocative. ‘These actions are breaking the law’ their enemies could say. They should have called them ‘Actions to implement the basic agrarian law’ (Aksi melaksanakan UUPA [undang-undang pokok agraria]). The BTI’s motto was ‘Defend to the death your honour and your land!’ (Sadumuk bathuk, sanyari bumi den labuhi tumeka pati).

It was around this time that rumours began to spread saying that the CGMI had become ‘a communist organisation’ and all sorts of things (dan segala macam). In fact this was still to be officially formalised (at the CGMI national conference which was held in Jakarta at the end of September 1965). At the conference Aidit made a speech in which he said ‘Dissolve HMI! Dissolve HMI!’\footnote{The Islamic Students Association (HMI, Himpunan Mahasiswa Islam) and CGMI were ideological opponents.} Then he said, ‘If CGMI can’t close down the HMI, they should be all be wearing sarongs.’ The atmosphere was very tense.

The CGMI executive sent off a letter to Bung Aidit asking for clarification of what he meant. Aidit sent a message to the CGMI conference saying he wanted to see me. I was hours late, and didn’t get there till early evening. We wanted to ask him
why he had said if CGMI didn’t dissolve HMI they should be wearing sarongs. This would cause conflict in the future. It was 8 o’clock in the evening [of 30th September 1965]. What did Aidit say? ‘Hey, how come you’re asking me this now? Do you know what we’re up against?’ ‘I don’t know what’s going on, I don’t know,’ I replied. ‘You don’t know? I’ve heard that the Council of Generals is about to carry out a coup d’état. That’s all I know.’ Then he said to me, ‘Hardoyo, don’t worry. If something happens to Bung Karno, then the Soekarno forces will unite and the PKI forces will support them and everyone will fight against the Council of Generals, and without doubt will win. You don’t have to worry about it.’ Well I don’t know about that, but in the end I spent 13 years in jail.

During my interrogation by the military, they asked me ‘What did Aidit say to you?’ Then I was accused of assisting the police chief, Pak Tarto. I didn’t help the police! They asked me ‘Were you the contact person for Aidit?’ ‘No,’ I replied. But I was tortured because of this accusation.20

A new community

In prison I became a Protestant Christian. My mother was a Christian, and I remember my father once gently teasing her, saying ‘Hey, you are a Christian. So why don’t we eat together with our servants (bediende)?’ So at Father’s instigation, we made an attempt to get our domestic helpers to eat the evening meal with us. But they were scared. After a year or so they finally agreed to eat with us. My father wept, and my mother said, ‘Jesus is here with us.’ This was something I always remembered. It was very important to me.

My mother actually helped me a lot at this time. I was going to be sent to Buru Island after my case had been processed. My mother came to see the head of Central Investigating Team (Tim Pemeriksa Pusat, Teperpu) about this, she was crying.21 Then Pak Kotjo, the Head of Teperpu, asked my mother who she was. It turned out that he knew my family, so he said ‘I’ll help but secretly, don’t say anything to anyone.’ This was a miracle for me. In prison I got to know all the Malari prisoners, like Yap Thiam Hiem and Marsilam Simanjuntak.22 Marsilam was surprised. ‘Since when have you become a Christian?’ he asked and I just laughed. After the military found out that I was not a contact person for the party, I was safe.

On my release I worked at the Indonesian Council of Churches (Dewan Gereja Indonesia, DGI) under Yap Thiam Hiem.23 This meant a lot to me, because when I was released from prison in 1979 I was so fearful I couldn’t talk properly. How was I going to live? Before being released we had to sign a document with seven points: we

20 This was a case of mistaken identity, which often occurred at the time because the military were using initials. According to Hardoyo, the person the military were looking for was another member of parliament (Haryowisastro), who said that he was the contact between Aidit and Tarto.
21 Teperpu was set up in 1965 by Suharto after the attempted coup, and had the task of interrogating of top ‘coup’ suspects, to determine their classification as Group A (enough evidence to be tried in court), B (sent to Buru island prison camp) or C prisoners (‘ordinary members and sympathisers’). According to Home Affairs Ministry data there were 426 Group A prisoners, 34,587 Group B and 1,375,320 Group C prisoners. For an interview with the former head of Teperpu, see ‘Eks Tapol PKI...’ 1999 . My thanks to Dianto Bachriadi for this reference.
22 Malari (the disaster of 15 January) was a student-led protest and the first major political challenge to the Suharto government. A student, Hariman Siregar, and a lecturer, Sjahrrt, were later tried and sentenced for inciting riots.
23 The Indonesian Council of Churches (DGI, Dewan Gereja Indonesia) became the Persekutuan Gereja-gereja di Indonesia (PGI) after a name change in 1984.
weren’t allowed to join political parties, we weren’t allowed to do this, and we weren’t allowed to do that. There were nine kinds of employment that were closed to us: we couldn’t be journalists, and we couldn’t become ministers of religion, or lawyers, or teachers, or government officials, or members of the military and so on. We also had to sign a document to say that we would never demand compensation. At that time I thought ‘Heavens! What is the meaning of my release from prison if I can’t make a living as an ordinary human being? But at least I was free, and friends such as Tides [Aristides Katopo] and Satyagrah Hoerip quickly helped me and gave me translation work’. With this, and my work at the DGI, I was able to live.

So I started to struggle with immediate problems around me, what I could see and experience myself. I once counted 21 traders and peddlers passed by my house [in Cipete, South Jakarta] every day. These were an umbrella repairer, water and electricity pipe layer, a welder, a mattress seller, a shoe repairer, a flower seller/gardener, an LPG gas seller, a rice trader, a vegetable seller, a herbal medicines person, and 11 different kinds of food, snacks and drink sellers. I often wondered how they made ends meet. Is our mutual support, or gotong royong, the basis of the national Panca Sila philosophy, actually carried out in the city or is it a rural support system? In my spare time I asked Pak Amat, a cigarette seller beside the road, Pak Ali who had opened a warteg, Pak Ibrahim, a becak driver, Bu Yem who sold herbal drinks, and Kang Jais who sold second hand goods. I asked them all why they came to Jakarta. Their answers were almost all the same. ‘It’s not the because of what we see on TV or the stories people tell, but because there’s no work in the village anymore.’ They are grateful because with a bit of capital or a few skills, they can avoid the fate being a homeless person or a tuna [without] something or other.

The outsider

Born in North Sumatra in 1947, Parakitri was originally known by his Batak name, Tahi Simbolon. He became a student at Gadjah Mada University in Yogyakarta in 1966, where, in addition to changing his name for the reasons described below, he soon established a reputation as a writer. After military authorities in Central Java closed down the student newspaper he helped to found, he went to work as a journalist for the leading Indonesian daily Kompas. and later wrote an illustrated manual for media workers (Simbolon 1997). He studied overseas, first in Paris and

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24 A shadow puppeteer describes similar treatment after being released from Buru island prison camp in the same year as Hardoyo (1979) thus: ‘Although the word used was “freed”, that was merely a political expression. I still had no right to live like other citizens. I was not allowed to perform, and to get work anywhere, one had to have a letter showing one was “clean” which was not possible for me to obtain…my life from 1979-1999, exactly 20 years, was like someone suffering from leprosy, a communicable disease from which there is no treatment, and from which all distance themselves.’ (Rachmadi 2005: 42-43).

25 These were sate, bakmi/nasi goreng, bakso, gulai, siau mai, es putar, es krim, es campur, and dawet, ronde, and bajigur sellers.

26 Warteg or warung Tegal are roadside food stalls run by people from Tegal district in Central Java.

27 In the early New Order period ‘polite’ terms were instituted for social categories such as homeless people (tunawisma), or sex workers (tunasusila, without morals). This account of street vendors is taken from Hardoyo’s ‘Peranan guru sejarah bagi pendidikan anak-anak’ (typescript 15 November 1984). For his views on the Left in post-war Indonesian history see Hardoyo 2001: 152-165.

28 Parakitri’s Perkawinan diatas kuda (Married on Horseback) was first published in Basis in April 1967, and later reprinted along with other stories from Sastra and Horison magazines in Simbolon 2003.
then in the Netherlands, where he gained his doctorate. After returning to Indonesia, in 1996 he set up the KPG (Kepustakaan Populer Gramedia, Gramedia Popular Library) within the Gramedia publishing conglomerate that also publishes the well known national daily Kompas.29 KPG has an active translation program, and before his recent retirement Parakitri wrote a translation manual for KPG’s five full time editors (first drafts of translations are contracted out to translators then edited in-house) in which he describes some of the problems encountered in translating books into Indonesian (Pedoman 2007). The question of what makes a good translator and a good translation has been his major preoccupation as director of KPG. He has also pioneered the idea of translating scholarly and classical texts using the genre of illustrated adaptations. Having spent most of his life living outside Sumatra, Parakitri has nevertheless maintained his interest in Tapanuli language and culture, particularly since the publication by KPG of a book on Batak language scripts, and after the launch of KPG’s translation of Lance Castles’ history of Tapanuli under the last years of colonial rule (Castles 2001). On the other hand Parakitri seems to want to keep his distance from ethnic-based celebrations. Although appointed a member of the organising committee, he did not participate in the recent worldwide meeting of the Simbolon clan on Samosir Island in Lake Toba, North Sumatra. During our conversation Parakitri often chose to speak in English, I suspect because his sense of irony can be expressed more easily in English than in Indonesian:

I was born on Samosir Island in Lake Toba, on 28 December 1947. I was the son of an ‘old father’, the eleventh of 13 children.30 My father was the head (bius) of a traditional religious community in the time of the last Si Singamangaraja [independent ruler] of Tapanuli, who was killed by the Dutch in 1907. As chief religious official (also called pande bolon) he received some land, but we were well-off, not wealthy. He died in 1968, according to the villagers ‘he was the oldest among us’ and they calculated his age was 101.31

29 Gramedia has two other publishing houses Penerbit Buku Gramedia and Penerbit PT Gramedia Pustaka Utama.
30 Parakitri has one sister still living in Medan, who became a Jehovah’s Witness and brought her family to profess that faith. ‘She has lost her own culture,’ Parakitri says. ‘My brother who is the youngest in the family, is a businessman in Samarinda. I am not close to either of them. The rest are dead.’
31 Parakitri’s father Ompu Torang Simbolon was head of the ritual community of Rianiate, consisting of several huta or kampungs, each consisting of 5-12 houses. There were 70 bius in Samosir Island at the time of the last ruler Si Singamangaraja.
After independ-ence the Republican government was recruit-ing many new people to work in the local government administration, all of them far younger than my father. We old ‘elite’ families had no status any more (tidak dianggap lagi) except in matters relating to adat. So you can imagine how the new elite groups behaved towards people like us. The lowest level of government administration created by the Dutch was the local chief (kepala negeri); his administrative jurisdiction coincided with a bius, so the position lay somewhere between a village head (lurah) and assistant wedana [camat] in Java in those days. My father was religiously and socially passé. Mind you, at the time there was some confusion in Samosir between the religious and the secular, between the pande bolon (elsewhere called raja doli) and the new power emerging at the time.

There is no better illustration of this than my own case. One day I was herding the family buffaloes, and one of them killed a buffalo belonging to somebody else. Because of this, I was bought before a village meeting of the kepala negeri. My father considered this was not fair, he said that there was ‘no justice, because buffaloes kill each other.’ This was to be my self defence, because my father said to me ‘I won’t go with you, you defend yourself.’ I was only 8 years old! So I went before the kepala negeri and ten other people, and they all said ‘What the little boy has said is true.’ So I was let off.

Eight or nine months later I was involved in another case. The two sons of the kepala negeri were supposed to be looking after their family cows, but they were too busy playing marbles. As a herdsman I knew that their cows were going astray. They were eating our crop of peanuts, and I was very angry. For me these cows symbolised the bad habits of the new elite group. Eating the plants of everyone, and no one was protesting, except me! When I tried to evict the cows from our peanut patch they totally ignored me, so I went to our house and got a sword (parang), and slit the skin down the hind legs of their cows. They still didn’t leave our peanut patch!

When the two boys saw what I had done, they raced off to tell their father, leaving their buffaloes behind. So I was summoned again. The local chief said ‘Not this crazy boy again!’ I was questioned over the incident. Again there were women going past to the market who stopped to hear what was going on. ‘Is it true that you wounded our cows?’ he asked me. I said ‘No, it was the sword not me that inflicted the wound’. ‘Who held the sword?’ ‘It’s true that I did.’ ‘What did the cows do wrong? You are blaming the sword. But the sword could not have done the damage without you.’ ‘Whose fault was it that the cows ate our peanuts?’, I asked. ‘It’s your boys’ fault. Arrest them, not me.’ My father, who didn’t come with me this time either, had coached me on what to say. ‘Can you handle this on your own?’ he had asked me ‘Of course,’ I said, perhaps a bit too quickly. Anyway the local chief said to his secretary, ‘Stop this, stop this, let him go.’

I felt like a winner against the powers that be. This kepala negeri had many pieces of land. People like me were eager to work his rice fields at the time of planting and harvesting, because he provided pig meat for the labourers. Now pig meat was very special, only eaten on feast days, once or twice a year at most. This official gave pig meat to his labourers. This was unheard of! That’s why everyone loved to go and work for the local chief. But I felt ashamed and degraded to go and work for him. Why? I cannot beat them, I cannot join them either! There was a local council (dewan) which was elected, and the local chief who was also elected, wore a white uniform, like the old Dutch controleur. He was the only one in our village who
had an old wind-up HMV gramophone, with one of those big speakers, and he played records as he gave out the pork to the workers. Maybe he only had two records!

My father saw that I was by myself and didn’t want to go to the harvest. He came over to me, and ruffled my hair, showing he agreed without saying anything. This was a great moment for me.

So I won two times against the powers that be. I had a very strong sense of social justice. This must have come from my father. He used to sing his stories lying on a couch with me under his arm. He would say ‘It’s a pity I’m tired,’ but I was still listening. ‘Eya, eya,’ he would sing. His songs were about folklore, about justice, the Bible, his own fiction. People wanting to know the stories of their families and their villages would come to him. My mother was angry, as she would have to offer them tea and snacks. But he would calm her down. Chickens were always walking around everywhere. If the guests shooed them away the story got interrupted. My father would say, ‘If the chicken is more important than my story please go away.’ He would say later, ‘They don’t pay me, why should I spend sang hidop mata (the blink of an eye) with them?’

The Batak community were all members of the Batak protestant church (HKBP). But when I was ten I became attracted to the Catholic church, like metal filings to a magnet. Each day I would walk past one of their pastors. He was old and bald, with a thick beard, wore a dark brown cassock, and carried a stick. He was a friendly, cheerful man, and went everywhere on foot. Going up and down mountains he never got tired, no one could compete with him. For me at that time, this Catholic priest symbolised simplicity and purity (keheningan). I wanted to accompany him on his walks up and down the mountains. He agreed, on the condition that I was baptised. So at ten years old I was baptised into the Catholic church. For the next five years, whenever I was with that pastor I felt that Christ himself was present. What I mean is he gave me the teachings of Christ not in words but in his attitude to life and daily actions. I suppose that is why I always remember one of the verses he quoted from the Bible about the parable of the salt: ‘You are the salt of the earth. If the salt loses its taste, how can it be made salty again’ (Matthew 5, v. 13).

People in the southern half of Samosir all went to senior high school in Balige. But I told my parents I didn’t want to go there like the others. So I went to Senior High School (SMA) in Siantar on the east coast of Sumatra, after finishing Junior High (SMP) in the town of Pangururan on Samosir. Both were outstanding Catholic schools called Budi Mulia. The teachers were all Dutch brothers, who also ran a high school called Mardi Juwana in Sukabumi [West Java] and we had some of their teachers as well. The former principal of the Sukabumi school – I remember his name was van Vlerken – wrote texts on algebra, geometry and chemistry. My schools were very respected by other high schools in Samosir and Siantar. Now my daughter is a devout Catholic, just like I used to be.

One day as I was walking back from daily mass to the house where I was boarding in Siantar, my Protestant landlady ridiculed me about my Catholic faith. She said, ‘Hey, you’re always going to worship statues and do other rituals in that church, aren’t you? Can you afford to pay the penance to the priest so he will forgive your sins? What a shame, you’re a nice kid, but you’ve chosen the wrong religion.’ This outburst from my landlady was the cause of my first spiritual struggle (pergulatan iman) (Parakitri 1999).
**Student activism and its outcomes**

My second spiritual struggle came in 1966. Fed up with PKI agitation in the years leading up to the 1965 coup, I joined the Christian and Islamic youth groups to crush the communists, only to become disillusioned with the way these religious youth groups were killing communists. If only Christian youth were involved, maybe I would have chosen Islam. But both were equally vicious and there were no Buddhist or Hindu communities that I could join in that part of North Sumatra.

I knew someone in our kampung who was married to a Javanese girl from Yogya. She was learning Batak and she was very refined. Everyone admired her. She was the reason I decided I should go there! So in early 1967 I went to Yogya to study politics at Gadjah Mada University. In Yogya it was like meeting a noble society for the first time. It was what I had imagined it would be like from the Javanese girl I knew in my kampung in Samosir. But the men weren’t refined like her. They called me tai (shit). ‘No, no, my name is Tahi [ta-hi]!’ I would tell them. The more I objected the more they would tease me. I would even chase them around the Pagelaran.32 One cried out, ‘Don’t hit me, I’m a Catholic too!’ ‘Then don’t call me tai,’ I said. I never liked Javanese guys after that.

It was in Yogya that I began to write short stories, to support myself (Simbolon 2003). I became a student assistant (asisten mahasiswa) filling in for my lecturer (Idris Adrianata Kusuma) who was always away teaching in other institutions in order to make a living. I was paid every three months but the money didn’t cover my expenses. I would spend it on treating my friends to sate or bakso at Pak Ahmed’s stall in the alun-alun. After I got my doktorandus degree, in February 1972, I was immediately appointed as an assistant lecturer (asisten dosen) and research assistant for Usman Tampubolon. My new status meant I was picked up every day and driven to the campus in a car, with the other Faculty lecturers! I remember the car was a Fiat 125.

We organised our first student protest in 1969. It was in response to the killing of a student, Rene Coenrad, in Bandung by police cadets. It was rumoured that a general in the police force was involved, but this was hearsay at the time. Then in 1972 my Dean (also a Catholic) and my supervisor (a Muslim) verbally terminated my contract, saying the Faculty had received a letter from Kopkamtib [the powerful Command for the Restoration of Security and Order] banning me from teaching in the University. The problem was I was a contributor and a founder of Sendi, a weekly student newspaper critical of the New Order.33 It was then that I began to use the pseudonym Parakriti.34

After passing a test to enter the Foreign Affairs department in August 1972 I was given the Disarmament desk on a salary of Rp 4,450 per month. It wasn’t enough

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32 At that time the Faculty of Social and Political Studies was still located in the large meeting hall called the Pagelaran in front of the palace facing the city square in Yogyakarta, which had been loaned to Gadjah Mada University when it was founded in 1948 by Sultan Hamengkubuwono IX.

33 Set up as an alternative to the pro-New Order student weekly Mingguan Mahasiswa Jawa Tengah, the founders of Sendi included Fauzi Rizal, Imam Yudotomo, Ashadi Siregar, Daniel Dhakidae, Aini Khalid, Peter Hagul and Parakriti. Ashadi Siregar chaired the editorial committee. Founded with a donation of inheritance money from a Jesuit priest (the late Arthur de Pootre SJ), it ran from October 1971 to March 1972. At first the military tried to co-opt Sendi with a generous funding offer. When this was refused, the paper was banned, ostensibly for an editorial criticising Madame Tien Suharto’s Taman Indonesia Mini (Indonesia in Miniature) project.

34 A lecturer in Javanese ethics told him prakriti in vernacular Sanskrit was close in meaning to ‘the word/spirit’ as used in the opening chapter of St John’s gospel. (Interview 23 August 2008).
for me to live on, even though I subsidised it with my writing for newspapers, including *Kompas*. So I resigned and got a fellowship to study public administration in France. My departure was postponed after I was stopped from leaving the country because of the Malari affair, but I left later. In France I wrote a report about foreign aid in the former French colony of Haute Volta in West Africa. In August 1974 the Indonesian Ambassador, General Tahir, called me to the Embassy in Paris. ‘There is a small problem. Kopkamtib wants to talk to you in Jakarta,’ he told me. Erwin Ramadhan advised me to seek political asylum. ‘No, no, I love Indonesia,’ I retorted. Ramadhan got angry, ‘Don’t you think that I love Indonesia?’ he said. I was flown back to Jakarta and jailed in a detention centre near Gambir station with the Malari detainees. The reasons for my detention became clear when an essay I had sent to a friend in Jakarta was shown to me by my interrogator. It turned out my so-called ‘friend’ was a supplier of information for the military. At that point I felt so alone. I couldn’t trust my friends any more. There seemed to be nothing I could believe in.

I was interrogated by a captain next door to where Dorojatun Kuncoro Yakti had once been interrogated by a sergeant. Dorojatun and his interrogator had argued over a standard question each of us was asked: ‘How has Panca Sila has made development succeed in Indonesia?’ Dorojatun said that there was no way that Panca Sila could make development succeed. I heard that this had led to a fierce argument, so I decided to try a different approach when my interrogator asked me the same question. ‘Oh, you know the answer to that question better than I do, Pak!’ I replied. ‘I don’t have a clue. Please explain what it means!’ So we ended up having takeaway Padang rice (*nasi bungkus*) for lunch together.

I worked for *Kompas* from 1976. One day Jakob Oetama came to see me and said, ‘Bung (he always called me Bung), your name is on a blacklist at Kopkamtib.’ ‘Me? How?’ I asked him. ‘You’re Tahi Simbolon,’ Jakob said. ‘No I’m not, I’m Parakitri!’ But I knew what he was telling me indirectly – he is a Javanese, after all – that I was to be ‘di-Litbangkan’. I had previously been given the title of ‘editorial writer attached to the chief editor’ of *Kompas*. This was in 1976, when I was 29 years old. So I reorganised the Kompas documentation centre. I had to set an example, so I was the first to arrive at 6 am and the last to leave at 6 pm. I typed out subject cards for the catalogue. The centre wasn’t computerised until 1981.

In 1979 I started writing a column called ‘Cucu Wisnusarman’ in *Kompas* under my pseudonym of ‘Parakitri’. This publication led to a summons to an interview with Colonel Arisandi at Kopkamtib in Medan Merdeka Barat. ‘What do you need from us to stop writing these stories?’ he asked me. ‘It’s my life,’ I said. ‘The Republic of Indonesian won’t collapse because of my writings.’ But Colonel Arisandi said, ‘You must know what the situation is in Indonesia. I’m also a Christian.’ ‘Oh, are you the father of Desi Arisandi?’ I asked him. You have to flatter these guys. I knew what to do because I’d been through it all before. We were playing games, and I was using flattery. Was it hard? Yes it was. But I had a

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35 It cost Rp.15,000 a month for board and food in Jakarta in 1972 according to Parakitri. (In Yogyakarta, I was paying a foreigner’s rate of Rp.10,000 a month for full board at that time).
36 Erwin Ramadhan lived in Paris for twenty years. He was secretary to the public intellectual Soejatmoko when the latter was Rector of the United Nations University.
37 ‘Litbang’ is a shortened form of ‘Research and Development’ (*Penelitian dan Pengembangan*) All government departments have Puslitbang, centres of research and development. Being ‘di-Litbangkan’ means being consigned to a job in research and development, out of the public eye.
38 The columns were published with an introduction by Ali Sadikin and an epilogue by Daniel Dhakide in 1993 (Simbolon 2005).
39 Desi Arisandi was a well known singer in Jakarta at the time.
leitmotiv, and that was fighting against everything that was detestable in Indonesia at the time. Was this a kind of vanity on my part?

Then one day I went to see Jakob Oetama again. ‘I have to leave, I want to write a dissertation,’ I told him. ‘Why?’ he asked me. ‘I’m fed up,’ I told him. ‘Maybe you think it’s hell here [at Kompas],’ Jakob replied, ‘but believe me my friend, it’s worse outside.’ I thought he would say ‘When are you leaving?’ But instead he said ‘You can get a Ford Foundation or a Rockefeller Foundation scholarship.’ ‘Are you serious?’ I asked, ‘No way! I work in a newspaper, not a university. I would be embarrassed to apply’. Jakob sat down at his desk and calculated how much it would cost to give me a scholarship to study abroad with my family. This later became the Kompas scholarship fund.

Life as a publisher

I came back from Europe in 1991, and found that the situation in Kompas wasn’t to my liking. I was part of an editorial team which had to edit news articles at the final stages, usually late at night for the next morning’s edition. I was the only one who did the job conscientiously and didn’t let the articles through without corrections. Everyone else just said, ‘Just leave it’ (Sudahlah). The deadline was 12 midnight. One night I didn’t approve any of the submitted articles. Jakob Oetama came and said to me, ‘We can’t go to press tomorrow, just because you won’t approve the articles. You can sack all the journalists, that’s OK. But tomorrow we have to publish.’

This was the problem with Indonesia. How was I going to recruit 100 new people? Impossible! So I quit. Two years later Jakob said, ‘Bung, please come back.’ ‘No, unless I can build my own section,’ I told him. So I made the KPG proposal. ‘What is KPG? What will it publish?’ Jakob asked. ‘Science and technology!’ I told him. ‘My hunch is that a good book should sell enough to at least break even. If we don’t break even then you can close us down.’ ‘OK,’ he said. He was happy with that.

We now have 30 staff, and the workforce turnover is virtually zero. We began in 1996 and started operating in 1997. There are five editors including myself, and ten translators. Then we have marketing, distribution, clerks and a gardener. KPG has a ‘flat’ structure. There is no ‘boss’, even though you referred to me that way just now. How do I inculcate a sense of purpose in my staff? ‘In the past, when you were studying you had to pay. Here you study and you are paid,’ I tell them. Also when they are new I tell them, ‘Assume you know nothing.’ I trained my editorial and translation staff by teaching them how to write a good letter (you have to write clearly to authors about their manuscripts). It took a year to train them how to write a letter! Everyone complained. ‘What kind of training is this?’ they asked. ‘Never write a letter if you are not convinced your letter will be read by the person to whom it addressed,’ I told them. ‘You have to learn to pick the right word for the feeling you have. For example if you want to say ‘You are feeling homesick’, rindu is not the right word. We use the Javanese word nglangut. Sometimes you have to use a word from the local language.

In 1998 Herb [Feith] came to KPG asking me to publish a translation of Lance Castles’ doctoral dissertation on the pre-war history of the Tapanuli region. He said he would finance the translation with a donation of US$1000. I asked Professor D.

\[40\text{Nglangut means homesickness, longing, or a gloomy feeling. (Interview with Parakitri in Jakarta, 23 November 2007).}\]

\[41\text{Parakitri identifies 5 problems in choosing words in translating, literal (harfiah) syntactic (tata-bahasa), idiomatic (peri-bahasa), aesthetic (sastra) and ethical (susila) (Pedoman 2007: 10-18).}\]
Maurits Simatupang, former Rector of the Indonesian Christian University (UKI) to translate it. Herb sent the money directly to him. I never touch money, my friend!

Now it so happened that in the middle of the 1997-98 economic crisis one of Maurits’s children was getting married. We were invited to the wedding. He said to me ‘Thank you very much. The translation money made this wedding possible.’ He used the translation money from Herb to cover the wedding expenses.

Meanwhile the Batak community in Jakarta was organising a grand occasion at the Grand Melia Hotel to launch the book on a budget of Rp. 250 million, with contributions from various Batak companies. The chairman of the project was Ir. Omri Samosir, a former vice president of the nickel mining company in Soroako in South Sulawesi. The book launch was to be part of the promotion of Lake Toba as a centre of tourism. It couldn’t be postponed.

So, after everything was prepared we got the translation, and began to read it. ‘What is this?’ we said. It was quite a scandal. Maurits had obviously subcontracted the translation out to someone else. Just at that time KPG was involved in a UN-Johns Hopkins project supervising the preservation of coral reefs called Coremap in Papua. I had to go there for two weeks. But the translation was in such a sorry condition, and we had just two weeks left before it had to be printed. I said to the KPG staff, ‘Please, you finish editing this!’ and went off to Papua. As everyone in KPG was involved (in the editing), I was expecting to come back after two weeks and find everything OK. But it wasn’t. We gave up in the end because there was just no time. I was angry and ashamed but with whom? Myself. My motto as a journalist was ‘never take anything for granted’, but I’d still let this situation happen.

How can we develop our nation with people like this? You can find the problem everywhere, in every kind of occupation and profession. It’s not simply a lack of capacity. What do you call it? A lack of personal responsibility? But it was also my mistake. I believed that Maurits would do a good job, because he came to it with such high qualifications. Firstly, he was a ‘professor doctor’, secondly he was the former rector of one of Indonesia’s biggest private universities, thirdly he was a doktorandus in English, and fourthly he had a reputation for being an honest man. People said he was a very simple person, who lived modestly, given his position.

*If only* I had been true to my own motto ‘as a journalist never take anything for granted’. I should have asked for the translation to be finished much earlier. I didn’t, because I respected him. I really blamed myself for what had happened. It was like a Greek tragedy. In the beginning everyone has great expectations, in the end there is nothing left. Or like a goat which has a big body and a small tail – that’s the meaning of tragedy. Maurits was only the tail, and I am the victim.

People in Indonesia have the wrong view about Machiavelli. In Indonesia we need a sense of what ‘*Realpolitik*’ means. Here we only have a lofty ideal about politics, while political practice is very, very dirty. People think Machiavelli is all about ‘the end justifies the means’ and most people only know his book *The Prince*, which is about what the ruler does to gain and maintain power. But Machiavelli wrote another book *The Discourses*, which is about political morality, and politics as a normal reality, as a power play. So I adapted and translated *The Discourses*, and we published it in illustrated form, as we have done with many other adaptations (Simbolon 1996). We tried to get the members of parliament to buy it, but to no avail. ‘Give it to us,’ they said. They wouldn’t buy it!

Another project we took up was to popularise the work of the economist, Paul Omerod, author of *The Death of Economics*. In Indonesia at that time the highest positions in government were those of economists, the economic engineers. But we
knew there was a knowledge gap between the economic theorists and technocrats, and the real facts of the Indonesian economy. Nobody had bothered to try and explain this relationship between theory and practice in the Indonesian economy. Suddenly we came across Omerod’s book. I wrote to the author, and he agreed to us doing an illustrated adaptation using the same format as the Machiavelli book (Simbolon 1998). We wanted to make the book launch a confrontation with Indonesian economists and technocrats, people like Emil Salim, Kweek Kian Gee, Suhardi Mangkusuwondo and the rest of the Berkeley Mafia. Wijoyo Nitisastro didn’t come. Kweek Kian Gee was the chair of the discussion. Paul Omerod himself was staying on the seventh floor of the Borobudur Hotel, which just happened to be where the IMF delegation visiting Indonesia at the time was staying. Omerod was interviewed on TV. ‘Be careful of the IMF. This organisation tells lies,’ he said. ‘Never listen to the IMF’ was his advice to the Indonesian government. The next day [15 January 1998] Camdessus stood almost bending over Suharto, who was signing a new IMF agreement. Our KPG caption was ‘The headmaster and the good pupil’.

Looking back on it, it strikes me how ridiculous all we so-called activists were! Jakob Oetama said once to me, ‘I don’t have any expectations about all those activist groups. I am very disappointed in them. All these PhDs, what do they do? They only belittle each other.’

I remember before the 1999 election, Herb [Feith] and Lance [Castles] were saying that Amien Rais’s PAN would win the election. I thought they were wrong and I said so. In the end PDIP won 34 per cent and PAN got 8 per cent. Then Herb came to the office. I said ‘How could you be so wrong?’ Herb said something like we should have put our hope in Marsillam Simanjutak and the other radicals. I said, ‘Herb, isn’t it all hopeless?’ Herb said to me, ‘Don’t be a nihilist’. I was angry. I wanted to say to him, ‘What do you know about Indonesia? I live here. Maybe you know it. But I feel it.’ I really wanted to say that to Herb!42

Finding my roots

Am I still a Batak? Two months ago there was this festival called ‘Simbolon International’ (Simbolon Sedunia) on the island of Samosir. I was appointed as an ‘expert adviser’. They never informed me of this appointment, and I never went to any of the meetings in preparation for the festival. To me, it’s wrong to aggrandise the Simbolon name in a near bankrupt state!

Actually, though, I have a lot of affinity with Batak culture, something that was passed on to me by my father. I learnt Batak morality, as six principles that can be summarised as (1) Do your work (2) Pay your debts (3) Collect the debts owing to you (4) Practise modesty and frugality and be diligent (5) Avoid greed, unscrupulousness and showing off (6) Be careful, you will be disliked for telling the truth. As well, I learned the four Batak aphorisms: ‘Be fair like the tiny scales used for weighing gold’ (Parhatian Si Bolatimbang); ‘Plough a straight furrow’ (Parninggala Si Bolatali); ‘Who tends the ripening paddy without a sling to drive away the sparrows (Pamuro So Marumbalang); and ‘Be like a herdsman without a whip’ (Parmahan So Marbotahi).

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42 On Parakitri’s office wall are two framed notes from Herb Feith, dated 7 November 2001. One was about the loan of a book called The Underside of History, saying he would pick it up in Jakarta the following February. The other was about Herb’s ideas for two new books ‘Tokoh dan Teman Zaman Soekarno’ and ‘Re-imagining the Future’. Herb was killed in a train level crossing accident a week later near his home in Melbourne.
My father could not read the Roman alphabet, but he could read Batak lontar, which were mainly about black magic, white magic and astrology (ilmu falak). I could read Batak script, as it was standardised and taught by the Dutch. But I couldn’t read Batak manuscripts. At least I couldn’t until KPG published Uli Kozok’s book (Kozok 1999). In this book the author reveals the variety of scripts and how to read them. We were fools. We didn’t know how to do it until Uli showed us. But this meant I could read and write my own language. Uli provided the ‘software’ to show me how to read the words of the Seal of Si Singamangaraja. I was elated! I was talking to my ancestors for the first time. Now I can converse with the past.43

The searcher

Mohamad Sobary was born into a family of landless farmers in the poor south central Javanese village of Seloarjo in 1952. In 1966, after finishing primary school, he went to live with an aunt and uncle in the Jakarta suburb of Kebayoran Baru, where he completed secondary school, including three years at a senior high school specialising in community development. Like Parakitri, Sobary began writing fiction while he was a university student. He began with children’s stories, and since then he has published many collections of essays, often using a central character to illustrate his liberal religious and moral values. He has also become a well-known media commentator on social issues. Sobary speaks with the voice of ‘cultural Islam’ (Fealy and Hooker 2006: 47-49) and the focus of all his writing is on the wong cilik, literally the ‘little people’, the lower classes of Javanese society who are also now known by the Arabised term kaum duaafa. The stories in his best known collection, Kang Sejo Melihat Tuhan, all deal with the wisdom of these people at the bottom of the social hierarchy of Javanese society, how they live with their neighbours, their community and how they live their religion (Sobary 2004 [1993]44, 1995, 1996, 2007) His study of motor bike taxi drivers (tukang ojek) in East Sumatra was a rare insight into the lives of poor urban Javanese transmigrants.45 In the late 1990s he served as head of the national Antara newsagency. Currently he is executive director of the NGO Partnership for Governance Reform. Here is his story:

43 The Seal reads, ‘Ahu Sahap Ni Si Singa Mangaraja Sian Bakara’ (‘I am the Seal of Si Singa Mangaraja from Bakara). Parakitri mentioned at this point that his wife is a Batak, from Cimahi in West Java, who ‘learnt to speak Batak later, like my son. My son said, “Dad, I want to speak Batak.” And he did.’

44 Most of the stories in Kang Sejo Melihat Tuhan are available on line at http://dhitos.wordpress.com/2006/08/21kang-sejo-melihat-tuhan/.

45 In his introduction to the English translation of this study, Chris Manning remarks, ‘For one whose academic endeavours over the last couple of decades have been much channelled into grappling with quantitative dimensions of employment and income change in urban and rural Java, Mohamad Sobary’s paper is both a challenge and a breath of fresh air. If only all those theories and tables could tell even part of the multidimensional and interesting story presented here one would be well satisfied. Alas, I fear they do not.’ (Sobary 1987: 4)
I lived in Seloarjo from when I was born in 1952 until 1966, when I left to go and live in Jakarta. So I am not Javanese, or rather not like my colleagues who went to Gadjah Mada University. For me understanding Jakarta meant understanding multicultural relationships and understanding Islam in a very crowded community. It also meant understanding Muhammadiyah in the context of the Al Azhar mosque in Blok M in Kebayoran Baru. That’s where I studied Islam. I stayed nearby in the Wisma Malawi, where my aunt and uncle lived. I joined the mosque’s Islamic youth study club. It was a kind of Indonesia in miniature, and Buyar Hamka’s influence was strong there. There were Muslim students from Java, but the Minangkabau influence dominated the mosque. The Islam was the Islam of Muhammadiyah and Masyumi. So we talked about modernity all the time. All the preachers at the Friday prayers (khotib Jumaat), the teachers of Islamic commentary (tafsiran Islam), and everyone, including the students, wanted to be up to date (moderen). Masyumi and Muhammadiyah were adapting to the changes of the times. In 1968-69 humans visited space for the first time, and a man walked on the moon. But in Nahdatul Ulama mosques around Kebayoran Baru, this was ridiculed as impossible, because the moon was where the angels lived. At the Al Azhar Mosque we were taught that man travelled in space because of scientific knowledge.

Lots of young Muslim intellectuals came to Al Azhar. Nurcholish [Majid] was there, and the senior people admired him. So I was shaped in this liberal atmosphere. For example Christmas and Lebaran were celebrated together with Christians in 1972-73. But by 1974 Hamka said that we couldn’t do this any more because it was polytheist (musyrik). Outside the Al Azhar mosque, Blok M was also the place to be. There was the Beatle pop culture (beatle-beatle-an), there were gangs, and the development of the market areas, like Mistik (Mayestic) where you could by Japanese transistor radios and TVs. The Blok M market was huge. Then there was Santak market. The economic growth there was palpable. The world was alight (dunia menyala) in Blok M.

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46 Hamka was a Muslim novelist and later journalist, active in Muhammadiyah throughout his life and influential in the New Order as a leader of the MUI (Indonesian Council of Islamic Leaders) (Cribb and Kahin 2004: 169).

47 Muhammadiyah is a modernist Muslim organisation promoting adherence to the five Islamic principles of faith and the promotion of religious understanding. It emphasises social welfare through its schools, health clinics, mosques and welfare institutions. The post independence Masjumi consisted of modernists, (the religious socialists) and “fundamentalists” (who advocated an Islamic state), as well as more traditionally orientated rural Javanese leaders, who split from the organisation in 1952, resulting in its poor showing in the 1955 elections. It was banned in 1961 for sympathising with the PRRI/Permesta rebellion. (Cribb and Kahin 2004: 262-263, 279).
My auntie had a food stall behind Wisma Melati. Through her I got a job as a cleaner. I got a wage! So I was able to buy a batik sarong for my mother. It would cost Rp. 300,000-400,000 in today’s money. When I went back to Seloarjo to see her, it was four years since I’d been home. My mother cried. Before I left the village, I had told my grandmother that I would also buy her a piece of batik cloth but I never fulfilled my promise. Neither of my parents could read the Roman alphabet. My father could read Malay in Arabic script and Javanese.

In Jakarta I went to the Senior High School for Social Work. There were two of these schools in Jakarta in those days but they don’t exist any more. We read stories about how people suffer, become poor and helpless and how problems are resolved. These stories were the beginning of the great interest I took in social issues.48 I had a Sundanese teacher at this school who was called Pak Amir. He was also the director of an orphanage, and he was a real fanatic where social work was concerned. I used to go there routinely to see him. He was my personal mentor. He told me not to bother joining a political party because they were ‘too narrow’. ‘You should join an academic community,’ he told me. So I suggested Muhammadiyah University in Jakarta. ‘Don’t do that,’ he said. ‘You should sit for the University of Indonesia entrance test. If you pass I will reimburse your entrance test fees.’ I passed and got into the social work degree, but I wouldn’t let him pay the fees. To finance my education I wrote short stories for a number of children’s magazines, such as Kuncung, Kawanku, and Cemerlang. When I was in the first year of University, in 1974, my first novel was published.49

After I graduated from the University of Indonesia, I went to work at the Indonesian Welfare Foundation (YIS, Yayasan Indonesia Sejahtera) in Solo, Central Java. It was while I was working there, in 1976 or 1977, that I attended a seminar on structural poverty. Poverty as a structural issue affects me deeply because I myself have witnessed how people moved from my village to other places due to poverty. When I was in the village elementary school many neighbourhoods, including mine, did not have rice, or even tiwul or katul50 to eat. It goes without saying that poverty is in my blood. My parents were farmers who had nothing. They tilled other people’s land.

I have been overseas. Apart from Monash University for two years in the early 1980s, I went to the States in 1996 for three months as an Eisenhower Rockefeller Fellow. I went to Birmingham in 2003 and Oslo in 2004. On these trips I speak of the need for truth, humanity and justice in Indonesia. In the past we struggled for freedom. Now we struggle for truth, welfare and humanity. Without having the truth, we can’t have welfare and humanity. Truth is the basis the ground of welfare and humanity.

There are many forms of truth. Nelson Mandela says ‘We are not forgetting but forgiving’. But what’s wrong with forgetting? If something has happened that is really bad, why are we always remembering it? Let bygones be bygones (Yang sudah, sudahlah). The problem of Suharto? Let go the past!

48 Some of the material in this section comes from an interview with Sobary in The Jakarta Post, 16 July 2006.
49 The novel was entitled Dalam Pengejaran (Being Chased). Publication details are unknown.
50 Tiwul is a cassava rice substitute. Katul is the outer coating of unhusked rice, rich in vitamin B1.
My Indonesia’ was the title of an article I wrote in Kompas in May 2006. I wrote then that Indonesia is the result of a long dialogue and political negotiation, which is tiring, takes a lot of patience and needs tolerance towards different aspirations appearing here and there. Each aspiration has to be accommodated with goodwill with a spirit of multiculturalism that we must never cease fostering. I don’t ‘own’ ‘my’ Indonesia, it’s also yours. We slowly build Indonesia on different dreams and cultural aspirations, full of variety, full of nuances, which enriches our lives, like a garden full of flowers with many perfumes in our minds and in our ideal of nature.

My Indonesia is not like a marble, which has a round, hard, clear form. With my mind I can imagine what its political form will take. But I can’t feel what this form is like with my heart. Concepts are technical and political and they contain elements of pretence (akal-akalan). Democracy is slowly trying to prove itself, but it has to bring cheap rice and affordable health care to the people. Has democracy contributed to the welfare of society?

I am a member of the Inter-religious Prayer Association (Perhimpunan Berdoa Antar Agama). I really care about pluralism and multiculturalism, which are the same thing. I don’t like Ulil or his Liberal Islamic Network (JIL, Jaringan Islam Liberal) though. They seem to be denying or at least ignoring the existence of other older leaders such as the late Gus Dur, and Masdar Farid Mas’udi, who for me symbolise liberal thinking in NU. To me, the name is inaccurate, because it coopts the word 'liberal' and does not acknowledge that in some ways, NU is just as liberal as JIL. You can be very critical in NU, you can work for the betterment of NU, without entering into an unproductive discourse which gives the impression that JIL are the only liberal thinkers that NU has ever produced. None of them are ‘liberal’ in the real meaning of the word. They make interpretations for the sake of interpretations. And America needs them. ‘We are liberal Muslims so invite us’, they say. The real Indonesian liberals were Dawam Raharjo, Ahmad Wahib, Johan Effendi and Nurcholish Majid. We haven’t got a new generation yet who can put Islam in a cultural context like they could. Other liberals apart from Gus Dur and Masdar Mas’udi, are Cak Nur, Azumardi Azra, Khomaruddin Hidayat, Syaiful Muzaini, and Syafie Ma’arui. Liberal Islam has to bring Islam to a more democratic context. It must be liberating but also safe, and it should give people peace of mind. In my view upholding Islamic law [by the fundamentalists] makes other people scared. I wrote an article in Kompas about what is now the custom in mosques (in Jakarta) to yell out before the daily prayers. It’s called arkam. Showing off their holiness (kesalehan) before the call to prayer. ‘I know that you are proselytizing (berdakwa),’ I told them, ‘but this should create empathy, not antipathy in the local community’.

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51 Ulil Abshar-Abdalla is from an NU background and supports NU’s community development NGO Lapersdam and interfaith dialogue (he was program director of the Indonesian Conference on Religion and Peace). His writings are available at http://ulil.net/. The website of his Jaringan Islam Liberal (Liberal Islamic Network) discussion newsletter is at http://islamlib.com/id/index.php?page=article&id=1
Understanding religion, understanding life

I was brought up with tamba ati,52 shalawatan (prayers to honour the Prophet), pujian-pujian, and other things from which my Islamic faith grew. When I was a young boy, my mentor from Muhammadiyah would often wake me up in the middle of the night to meditate, then we would go back to sleep again until it was time for the dawn prayer (sholat subuh). For a small kid, this was suffering! My mentor had this kind of discipline. My madrasah teachers used this spiritual tradition in their teaching. I felt a great inner peace from this. When I grew older, I appreciated the beauty of this tradition, such as the phrase rabbana dhalamna anfusana and how it had become part of my inner self.53 Faith in a general sense is like a rope that connects us to many things, but especially to God. You can’t see the rope, but its impact is real. From faith comes religious duties and obligations (ibadah), which take many forms, and can be performed in a communal way, in the form of annual rituals for example. Just as social life (mualamah) also has many forms.

But performing religious obligations can also be an individual thing, done in silence, not in front of anyone else. This is part of the process of the internalisation of faith, and reminds us that faith connects us with what is positive for ourselves, and more importantly for those around us. Faith and religion are given by God for human beings.

Christians, Hindus or Buddhists are on the same level when they worship, make devotions, or obey and submit to God. As Muslims we say that we obey Allah and all His commands, His Prophets and other things. What about those who follow spiritual beliefs (aliran kepercayaan) who believe that when they meditate that are also worshiping God the Omnipotent (Tuhan yang Maha Esa)? This is a very subtle and difficult issue. I have been debating this question since I was a student. Years ago there were efforts to exclude these spiritual beliefs from the Outlines of State Policy (Garis Besar Haluan Negara, GBHN). The controversy created problems amongst religion leaders. It boils down to how you understand God. Living a godly life can only be felt by those who do it themselves.

Other people have absolutely no right to pass judgement. I don’t have a right to say this is wrong. These beliefs have to be respected. So if someone claims that these religious observances are the right ones, I say that God knows better than us, because the Almighty is All-understanding. The essence of faith and religiosity (being religious) is integrity and devotion to God. To the extent that other beliefs help to build a better social world that is more peaceful and dignified, there’s no problem. Personally I don’t know if my daily prayers are accepted by God or not. Or whether

52 In Sobary’s village there were five tamba ati (literally ‘medicine of the heart’) sung in the form of a Javanese song (tembang): read the Qur’an and understand its meaning (ingkang dihir moco qur’an sak mknane); say the evening prayers (kaping pindo shalat wingi lukonana); mix with virtuous people (kaping telu wong kang shaleh kumpulana); make yourself hungry so you can fast (kaping papat wetengiro ingkang luwih); chant in praise of Allah quietly in the still of night (kaping lima dzikir wengi ingkang suwe). Tamba Ati originated from a poem by Sayyidina Ali, the fourth Caliph, which was adapted into Javanese K.H. Bisri Mustofa, the father of K.H. Mustofa Bisri and the late K.H. Cholil Bisri of Rembang. It has been a popular oral tradition among Muslim communities in the villages of Java for many years, and is now also very popular among urban communities, including in Jakarta.

53 The complete prayer, also sung in the Javanese tradition, is rabbana dhalamna anfusana, wa intlam taghfirlana, wa tarhamma, lama kunana, minal khosyirin (Wahai Tuhan kami, sungguh kami telah bertindak aniaya pada diri kami sendiri).
my fasting during Ramadan is accepted by God or not. The beauty of religious practice is the uncertainty about whether God accepts our devotions.

My life just flows like a river, Javanese style; my writings have indirect anger and criticism, although some people feel I have a very blunt satirical style. I am optimistic about the future of young people. People always say ‘When I was young, the sun was brighter’, there is always a generation gap. My father was pessimistic also about youth. But look at IT, computer programming, the internet, and its all young people. And what about Anne Ahira, this successful and now famous Indonesian internet marketing person. Look at all the students going overseas to get Masters degrees.

Pramoedya once said, ‘Sobary is still Javanese,’ implying that he thought I was too Javanese. When I was working at the Indonesian Welfare Foundation the director also told me it was not a good thing to always be using Javanese metaphors and wayang stories. But I am writing about morality, not about wayang. Wayang is a means, a way to enter the essence of what I’m going to say to readers, who are not Javanese. One time when I was still at Monash, a Catholic Indonesian from Sulawesi told me ‘You use Islamic metaphors for teaching morality, but I get the essence.’

I have just finished writing a novel, called Sang Musafir. A theme is life’s transitory nature. I am only visiting this earth here. Life is like a danau persinggahan, a lake where we rest on a journey. What about family? They are also temporary. Nothing is for ever. I am musafir, a wanderer just visiting this world (Sobary 2007). The song Dandang Gulo sums up this philosophy:

Out stay in this world is not long,
It’s like going to the morning market.
Soon you are back home again,
Soon too you will return to your eternal dwelling.

There is only one thing that I ask of God: when our homes and our possessions become dust, let us also become one with You (luluh dalam jiwa-Mu).

Individuals in history

How do these life histories illustrate the relationship between historical circumstances, personal experience, and activist engagement in modern Indonesia? In many ways, the life histories of these three individuals cut across the social categories in which our current knowledge often places them. Hardoyo had a big network of non-communist friends and acquaintances, many of whom came to his funeral in 2006. At the time of the first presidential elections in 2004, he said that he supported SBY because it was ‘the will of the people’, while the ex-Tapol network supported Megawati, because it was the ‘party line’. Parakitri describes himself as a ‘lapsed Catholic’, even though he would be considered a Catholic intellectual in Indonesian

54 The previous four paragraphs are adapted from a 2004 interview with Sobary conducted by Ulil and available on the website of the Liberal Islamic Network. See http://islamlib.com/id/index.php?page=article&ud=638
55 Sobary’s Javanese version is ‘Urip iku neng donya tan lami, Mung upomo cebeng. Menyang pasar tan langgang, Ing pasar bae, Tan wurung bakul mantuk, Neng wismane sang kane uni’. My thanks to A. Budiharto for his help with this translation.
social history. Is Sobary a traditionalist (syncretic) or a modernist Muslim? These categories are not important to him, he moves between Islamic cultural communities, and is accepted in both. In fact the choices that they make, and the attitudes they bring to bear on modern Indonesia, are influenced by childhood and social background, as well as ideology and political experiences.

In Hardoyo’s case, a commitment to social activism grew out of his experiences as a child of a late pre-war nationalist family. His outlooks on Indonesia were influenced by Dutch or Dutch-influenced education that produced a rationalist, anti-colonialist nationalism as a basis for engagement in the wider world of Indonesian politics and society. When Hardoyo looked at Indonesia he always saw the big picture, so he had a commitment to an idealistic vision of building the nation. This vision was infused by a strong commitment to social justice, hence his attraction to the PKI and the types of large scale activism that attraction produced. It also led him to a type of engagement with Indonesia that wants to let go of the past. This approach is ‘anti-feudal’ (the Jawa Dipo legacy he inherited from his father) and is largely secular. (His memory of the importance of eating with the servants, and his post-imprisonment work with the Indonesian Council of Churches and Yap Tham Hiem suggests that for him, Christianity was another framework for the struggle for social justice.) As he recalls the formative experiences in his life, all his stories seem to be ‘externally’ focussed, all to do with building the nation, big picture idealism and thinking on a grand scale. This was the basis of his engagement with Indonesia, and his life-long commitment to social activism.

In Parakitri’s case, we see a way of engaging with Indonesia that is formed out of a post-revolutionary childhood in a family experiencing the loss of inherited status. In these circumstances making one’s way in life meant relying on one’s own wits, being clever enough to see how to get things done when the odds seemed stacked against one (his childhood memories of the buffalo incidents; in adulthood, his survival of interrogation). When Paraktiri – as distinct from Hardoyo – looked at Indonesia, he saw a society where religion influences the way a person is seen in society, where one’s ethnicity is also a factor in society’s treatment of individuals and where the fight for social justice is localised and personalised – all things which present such a big contrast with Hardoyo’s experience of Indonesia. In Parakitri’s case the struggle for individual advancement, and to live a meaningful life takes place against the workings of a bureaucratic state, where nothing and no-one can really be relied on (his KPG translation story), and where making a contribution doesn’t come through the big picture activism of Hardoyo, but by trying to devise a way of countering the ignorance and inwardness of the world around him (the basis of his decision to transform himself from a student activist to a publisher).

When we come to Sobary, everything is different again. Sobary’s engagement with Indonesia is formed entirely through the lens of his Javanese Islam. In many ways, Pramoedya’s comment (‘Sobary is still Javanese’), which Sobary includes in his narrative, is the voice of Hardoyo’s generation looking at the way Indonesians like Sobary have chosen to live out a commitment to the nation and its people. Everything Sobary says implies a way of engaging with modern Indonesia that is formed through the way Javanese culture and Islam function as guide to both social justice and personal morality. The way Sobary’s understanding of Indonesia differs from both the Indonesia of Hardoyo and Parakitri is very clear from his alienation from the Liberal Islamic Network; he feels much closer to those whose Islam is more culturally embedded. (In Java, the Liberal Islamic Network could be typed as culturally ‘radical’, something which would perhaps appeal to Hardoyo and Parakitri, but
understandably, not to Sobary). Despite all his experience in the Indonesian national context, and overseas, his way of living out an activist commitment to Indonesia is at all points of his life history consistent with his ‘cultural’ Islam.

The narratives of these three men remind us of the importance of studying individuals in the context of their historical circumstances. Each of them became an activist out of a commitment to defend and promote moral and ethical values formed in childhood under the influence of parental example and a wider socio-cultural environment. But the way that commitment found expression in their public lives can be seen in each case as a response to the opportunities and challenges they faced because of their location in broader processes of historical and social change. In responding to those opportunities and challenges, they each made their mark on history, becoming what Liddle (1997: 3-5) calls improvisers or innovators in their own social, cultural and political worlds.57 It is this reciprocal relationship between individuals and history that the lives of these three men so richly illustrate.

Bibliography


57 Liddle reminds us that ‘culture is to some extent created anew by every individual in response to the challenges of his or her particular environment.’ (1997: 3).


