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Exit Suharto

Benedict Anderson

Benedict Anderson's "Exit Suharto" examines the life of the late Indonesian dictator in a wide-ranging political-cultural analysis. The article is reprinted from New Left Review 50, *March-April, 2008*.

Obituary for a Mediocre Tyrant

In 1971, the Indonesian presidential machine informed the public that Suharto and his wife were planning a mausoleum for themselves on a spur of Mount Lawu, the dormant, 3,000m sacred volcano that lies to the east of the *ci-devant* royal Javanese city of Surakarta. [1] The site had been carefully chosen, respectfully situated some metres below the early tombs of the Mangkunegaran dynasty—the second most insignificant of the four small Central Java principalities instituted by colonial authority in the late 18th and early 19th centuries. Mrs Tien Suharto—by then already quietly mocked as Tientje (Ten Per Cent)—claimed some connection with the little dynasty which had barely survived the revolution of 1945–49. For Suharto, who always insisted that he was of simple peasant stock, but was rumoured to be the illegitimate son of a Chinese tycoon, the site represented a social step up; and a normal one, since hypergamy was common among the army officer corps in the 1940s and after, and families were traditionally uxorilocal. Still, the construction of this expensive, unprecedented mausoleum for the future dead had something creepy about it, since Suharto himself was a healthy 50-year-old at the time.

Enlarge this image

I visited Surakarta in the spring of 1972, after the Suharto government had discovered that I had entered the country by roundabout methods and had informed me that I would be deported. After some negotiations, I was allowed two weeks to wind up my affairs and say farewell to friends. I took to the road with my Vespa and stopped briefly in Surakarta for a meal in the city's pleasant amusement park. In those days, young 'white' men on Vespas who could also speak Indonesian fluently were a real curiosity, so my table was quickly surrounded by locals. When the topic of the mausoleum came up, I asked my new acquaintances what they thought of it. After an awkward silence, a skinny, intelligent old man replied, in Javanese: 'It's like a Chinese tomb.' Everyone tittered. He had two things in mind: first, that in contrast to Muslim tombs, even those of grandees, which are very simple, Chinese tombs are or were as elaborate and expensive as the socially competitive bereaved could afford. Second, in the post-colony, many Chinese cemeteries had been flattened by bulldozers to make way for 'high-end' construction projects by the state and by private realtors, speculators and developers.

During the long noontide of the Suharto dictatorship, from the 1970s to the early 90s, three things happened to the mausoleum. It was gradually filled, almost to bursting, with the remains of Tientje's para-aristocratic relations, but none of Suharto's; it was heavily guarded by a unit of the Red Beret paratroopers who had organized the vast massacres of the Left in 1965–66; and it became a tourist attraction, especially for busloads of schoolchildren, so that it was always crowded with village women selling T-shirts, baseball caps, snacks, drinks and plaited bamboo fans. One thing did not happen: even after Tientje joined her relations not long before the Crash of 1997, the mausoleum never became sacred or magically powerful. After I was finally allowed back into the country in 1999, I often went to observe the site. No paratroopers, no busloads of children, only a desperate handful of vendors, a melancholy caretaker and the smell of a decaying building that had already endured a quarter of a century of annual monsoons. It remains to be seen what will happen to the place now that Suharto has finally joined his wife. To paraphrase Walter Abish: how Chinese is it?

If the mausoleum marked an early version of Suharto's 'death foretold', I caught a later variation in Jakarta a few years ago. I had been interviewing an elderly Javanese Communist, who had once held a high position at the party newspaper *Harian Rakjat* (People's Daily) and spent many years in Suharto's grim gulag. At the end of the interview, to cheer him up, I asked casually whether he thought Suharto would soon be dead. It worked, but not in the way I expected. With a big smile he said: 'Not at all! It will take a long time, and will involve much suffering.' How could he be so sure? He replied that the secret of Suharto's enormous power, vast wealth and remarkable political longevity was that, early in his adult life, a renowned shaman had inserted a number of *susuk* under the skin

in various crucial places. 'But the shaman died quite a while ago', he said cheerfully as he went on his way. There is an old belief that such *susuk*—tiny slivers of pure gold impregnated with magic spells—bring the bearer wealth, power and a long life. But there is a catch: for a man to die peacefully and speedily, the *susuk* have to be withdrawn, and this can only be done by the shaman who inserted them in the first place. Otherwise death will be a drawn-out agony.

I. LIFE AND TIMES

What sort of man was he? How did he manage to rule his country without much serious opposition for more than three decades? Suharto's start was humble enough. Born in June 1921 in a village near Jogjakarta in Central Java, he joined the Dutch colonial military (KNIL) at the age of 19; just about the time when the Wehrmacht overran the Netherlands, and Queen Wilhelmina and her cabinet scuttled off to London. The KNIL, like its sisters in other European colonies, was trained to suppress internal rebellion rather than to combat external enemies, and was organized racially: mostly Dutch and Eurasian officers, and native NCOs and foot-soldiers with very limited education. Suharto himself had never finished his private Muslim high school. In less than two years, however, he had risen to the rank of sergeant, as far as it was usually possible to go. At that point, Hirohito's armies invaded the Dutch Indies and the KNIL surrendered virtually without a fight (except for its small air arm). But in October 1943, when he was just 22, the Japanese military in Java, fearing an Allied assault, formed a small auxiliary military force called the Peta to support a planned guerrilla resistance. [2] Suharto immediately joined this force, and by 1945 had achieved the second highest rank available—company commander.

After the Japanese surrender to MacArthur, and the hurried proclamation of Indonesia's independence by the seasoned nationalist politicians Sukarno and Hatta, a national army was established. It was composed of former KNIL, former Peta and former members of various Japanese-armed youth groups, but with Peta officers in the dominant position. There was, naturally, a huge inflation of ranks: a swarm of generals and colonels with immediate backgrounds as lieutenants and sergeants. Suharto joined the rush and, by the spring of 1946, was a Lieutenant-Colonel. More importantly, he was posted just outside Jogjakarta which became the infant Republic's capital city when the British and Dutch seized Batavia-Jakarta early in 1946. There were not many people in the new Army who had served both the Dutch and Japanese regimes within the space of just six years, but Suharto was one of them, and profited by the experience. In 1946, at the age of 25, he was already a relatively senior military man.

It was at this point that he can be said to have started his political career. On the night of June 27, 1946, a group of armed militiamen, attached indirectly to the political 'opposition' (a mix of pre-war nationalists, most of whom had collaborated with the Japanese), kidnapped the civilian Prime Minister Sutan Sjahrir, charging him with weakness in dealing with the returning Dutch. Sukarno took direct control of the government and demanded Sjahrir's immediate release, which was eventually forthcoming. But the conspirators—backed openly by the Jogjakarta military commander and less openly by the 31-year-old Commander-in-Chief General Sudirman—retired to Suharto's command-post. From there they attempted a coup d'état on July 3 which was, however, easily broken up. The civilians involved went (briefly) to jail, as did the Jogjakarta military commander, but Sudirman made sure that no other officers were affected. Still, the coup might have ended Suharto's military career, and he was very careful thereafter.

Rise to power

From the autumn of 1945 up to January 1948, the core leadership of the ruling multi-party coalition in Indonesia consisted of a variety of socialists and communists, including some returnees from Holland who had taken part in the anti-Nazi underground. They were not 'contaminated' by collaboration with the Japanese, a strong card domestically and internationally. It was also believed that since the first post-liberation government in Holland was led by socialists, there was a chance of a diplomatic route to independence. By 1947, however, the Dutch cabinet had shifted to the right, and in July of that year a large and successful military attack caused the new Republic a considerable loss both of territory and of access to the outside world. The socialists and communists were forced to accept a highly disadvantageous interim agreement in January 1948, and so fell from power, replaced by a coalition of Muslims and 'secular (bourgeois and petty aristocratic) nationalists'. Meantime the Cold War was setting in and the left was radicalized all over Southeast Asia, abandoning parliamentary for military means to come (back) to power.

In the summer of 1948, a civil war was looming in Indonesia between the left and its various adversaries, with both sides backed by military units and armed militias. Sudirman tried to overcome the crisis by appointing two men to mediate: Wikana, the then Communist civilian governor of Central Java, and Suharto. In 1963 I interviewed Wikana in Jogjakarta, where he had retired after being sidelined by the Party's younger leadership. The gentle elderly man told me that Suharto had been excellent, taken no sides, and done everything he could to prevent warfare between the armed backers of the cabinet and the opposition—to no avail. The civil war (which took place only in Republican-held areas in Java) was brief but bloody, and the left was completely crushed. A good number of the leaders were killed in action or executed after surrendering.

After the formal transfer of sovereignty at the end of 1949 the new member of the United Nations faced an enormously difficult situation. The colonial economy had been devastated by wartime Japanese rule and the military struggle with the returning Dutch. The huge popular mobilizations that began against the Japanese and continued during the 'revolution' created a large body of people who expected to be rewarded for their sacrifices. But the lightly populated eastern part of the archipelago had been successively occupied after the war first by Australia and then by the Dutch, so that Republican activism there was difficult. Furthermore, the Dutch–Indonesian agreement, supervised by the US, required the Republic to return all pre-war properties of Dutch capitalists. Finally, no political party had even come close to monopolizing the revolutionary upsurge. Hence, a multi-party constitutional democracy came into being, which even permitted the surviving Communists to rebuild their strength. One could also say that there was no alternative, given the country's geography; the military was powerful, but it had no air force and not much in the way of a navy.

In this environment Suharto started to make his mark, by a successful amphibious attack on pro-Dutch and other dissidents in Celebes. This in turn led to him being appointed in 1957 (aged 36) the Military Commander of Central Java, a key position in the army hierarchy. Then he made another serious mistake, not so much political (he was very careful) but financial. He and his trusted staff became involved with certain dubious Chinese tycoons in extensive smuggling operations and other businesses. This resulted in his being dismissed by the High Command. (Two of these Chinese friends later became key cronies under the dictatorship.) But armies usually take care of their own, and Suharto was sent off to the staff and command school in Bandung, where he did well, and after that was appointed Commander of the Army Strategic Reserve, planned as the High Command's strike force against provincial dissidents and other 'national enemies'. In the early 1960s he commanded the joint operations designed to liberate 'West Papua' from residual Dutch colonialism. There was no military victory, since the Americans intervened diplomatically against the Dutch, but Suharto was treated by the press as a kind of national hero. When Sukarno decided, in 1963–64, on a military confrontation with the London-arranged Malaysian Federation, Suharto was named Deputy Commander, and secretly (fearing the growing power of the Communist Party in Java) opened contacts with the 'enemy'. By then he was so senior that he was the automatic replacement for the Army Commander General Yani, when the latter was overseas.

Meantime, political polarization between right and left was increasing rapidly as hyperinflation embedded a *sauve qui peut* mentality which persists to this day. It is an indication of Suharto's penchant for secrecy and manoeuvre that he was by then a trusted army leader (his secret contacts with Malaysian intelligence and, indirectly, with the CIA were well hidden even from Yani) and an apparent Sukarno loyalist.

Feint, massacre, coup

The crisis finally exploded on the morning of October 1, 1965, when a small group of mostly middle-ranking army officers kidnapped and later killed six senior generals on the grounds that they were planning Sukarno's overthrow. Most of these disaffected officers had long personal associations with Suharto, and it is virtually certain that they informed him of their plans. They made no attempt to seize him, though he had operational command of all seasoned military units in the capital. Nor did Suharto make the slightest effort to warn Yani and his comrades of what was afoot. Instead he crushed the conspirators with ease and proclaimed that they were tools of the Communist Party.

Almost all the military officers involved in what was then called 'the coup'—though the actors themselves claimed that they were protecting Sukarno from a military coup steered by the CIA—were executed, via death sentences in kangaroo courts, or outside any legality. Only one (barely) survived the dictatorship. Colonel Abdul Latief, who was tried and sentenced to life imprisonment, probably avoided execution because of his long and close association with the Suharto family; perhaps Tientje intervened. After enduring 32 years in prison and unimaginable suffering (the wounds he received when arrested were allowed to fester to the point that half his body was riddled with maggots), Latief was released by Suharto's successor, Habibie, but suffered a crippling stroke. When I interviewed him not long before he died, much of what he said was unintelligible. But when I asked him how he felt on the evening of October 1, when Suharto had crushed the 'coup', he said, brokenly, but clearly: 'I felt betrayed.'

With the mass media closed down except for the mouthpieces of the military, the Suharto group published photographs of the decayed bodies of the dead generals and announced that their eyeballs had been gouged out, and their testicles slashed off with razors, by sex-crazed members of the Communists' Women's Organization. (Some years later, by accident, I discovered the text of the doctors' post-mortem, which stated that the generals suffered only wounds from bullets and rifle-butts, with eyes and genitals all intact.) Within a few days all Communist offices in Jakarta had been occupied or destroyed. On October 17, the elite Red Berets arrived in Central Java and began the mass killing of men and women of the left. The same killings started in East Java with the arrival of the paratroopers in mid-November, and in Bali when they landed there in mid-December. [3]

In every case, the military enlisted the panicked and murderous help of the 'mass organizations' of the Party's many enemies. The strategy of involving large numbers of civilians in the massacres achieved two goals. First it allowed the military to announce, and a good number of foreign reporters to believe, that the citizens had 'run amok' on a vast scale. Second, it ensured that there would never be any investigation of the killings, since blood was on too many civilian hands. No one really knows how many people were killed—the figures offered run from half a million to two. On his deathbed, the by-then marginalized General Sarwo Edhie, who led the Red Berets in 1965–66, even said he had been responsible for the death of three million people. [4] Nor does anyone really know how many were imprisoned for years without trial in the grimmest conditions, but certainly the number exceeded half a million. The intelligence apparatus was also cunning enough to enlist the help of a number of captured Communists, some quite senior, who betrayed their comrades and even participated in their torture. By the end of the year, the Party had been completely destroyed—for good, as they say.

President Sukarno struggled vainly to stop the killings and rally his supporters, but he no longer had access to the mass media. In early March 1966, paratroopers in mufti surrounded the palace where an emergency cabinet meeting was being held, broke up the meeting and arrested fifteen ministers while Sukarno fled to his 'summer palace' in Bogor. On the evening of March 11, three generals visited him there and demanded that he sign a document transferring all executive power to Suharto. Feeling himself at gunpoint Sukarno signed the authorization letter, which gave the General, who had often sworn loyalty to his President, the opportunity to replace him the following year, and keep him under house arrest till his death in 1970. Curiously enough the original of this famous letter has never been seen by the public, and was said to have been lost. Many years later, after Suharto's fall, a young aide of Sukarno who was with him that night told the press that the signed document had carelessly been typed on Army Headquarters stationery.

By this time Suharto had achieved full power in 'legal terms', but he continued to deepen it in the years immediately following. All state institutions, including the Armed Forces, were massively purged of 'Communists', 'Communist sympathizers', Sukarnoists and other subversives. No ruler in the archipelago had ever had such a chance to pack the bureaucracy, the legislature, the judiciary and parastatal agencies with supporters, sincere or opportunist. This initial packing was later systematically continued: by the early 1990s, the number of bureaucrats was triple what it had been in 1970.

Mindful of the niceties of protocol in the 'international community', Suharto did not eliminate the party system altogether. But all the conflicting Muslim parties were forced into a single United Development Party, led by a sly opportunist recruited by Suharto's personal political intelligence agency, financed (modestly) by the regime, and forbidden to use religious symbols when campaigning. The same thing happened to the rest of the tolerated surviving parties, variously Protestant, Catholic and conservative secular nationalist, which were compressed into an Indonesian Democratic Party, also funded by the regime and led by intelligence nominees. The regime had no trouble winning two-thirds majorities in every 'election' held till the dictator fell, thanks to a state party (but it was not called a 'party') which included all members of the civilian bureaucracy, the military, the police, assorted 'technocrats' and mercenary journalists and academics.

Development?

Suharto's difficulties lay elsewhere. By the end of Sukarno's *soi-disant* revolutionary regime, Guided Democracy (1959–65), the economy was in ruins, and the rate of inflation staggeringly high. But fortune and Washington were with the General. At a moment when the Vietnam War was 'going very badly', and huge numbers of American troops were poised to cross the Pacific, Suharto had completely destroyed the largest Communist Party in the world outside the USSR and China. For this the American political elite was naturally grateful. Furthermore, Indonesia was strategically located and had vast mineral and timber resources; new oil fields were just beginning to be productive. Suharto understood what he had to do: the legal system was promptly revamped to open most of the doors to Western capital that Sukarno had tried to close. The Americans accordingly rounded up the Western Europeans and the Japanese to create the Intergovernmental Group on Indonesia, which for many years thereafter essentially paid for Indonesia's development budget. [5] The formation of OPEC and the huge rise in oil prices in 1973 gave Suharto riches undreamed of hitherto. In the late 1960s, the government began the systematic destruction of the country's primary forests by favoured cronies and military men, as well as foreign corporations. The main beneficiary of all this was the dictator himself, who is generally thought to have had something like $73 billion in various accounts by the mid-1990s. [6] To say nothing of his greedy children and assorted close relations and cronies.

During the 1970s and 80s, Suharto had many admirers in the West for what they saw as his sincere campaign to modernize the Indonesian economy, to promote rapid growth, to institute the Green Revolution in the countryside, to bring rapid population increase to a halt and to expand that 'middle class' so commonly believed to be the harbinger of real democracy. These claims are by no means entirely mistaken, but they need to be looked at comparatively, especially if one remembers the vast subsidies provided over two decades by the IGGI. The most obvious comparisons are with Indonesia's neighbours, Malaysia and the Philippines. If one considers health first, by the beginning of the 21st century, all three countries had about the same life expectancies (males in the late 60s, females in the lower 70s). But the statistics on infant mortality look quite different: Indonesia shows 33 deaths per 1,000 live births, the Philippines close to 23 and Malaysia 17. On the other hand, thanks to extremely invasive and coercive policies, the

natural rate of population increase was 1.38 per cent for Indonesia, 1.78 per cent for Malaysia and 1.95 per cent for the Philippines. (Literacy in all three states was around 90 per cent.)

The economies show much greater differences. If one divides the labour force between the agrarian, industrial and service sectors, the comparison looks like this: Malaysia, agriculture 14.5 per cent, industry 36 per cent and services 49.5 per cent; the Philippines, 36 per cent, 16 per cent and 48 per cent; Indonesia, 46.5 per cent, 11.8 per cent and 41.7 per cent. Per capita GDP in the three countries was about $12,100 in Malaysia, $5,100 in the Philippines and $3,600 in Indonesia. In fact, given the enormous inequality prevailing especially in the Philippines and Indonesia, the real annual 'product' for the mass of people is substantially lower than these figures suggest. Most strikingly of all, in a larger context, almost all the countries whose currencies were severely damaged in the Asian Crisis of 1997–98 have today more or less retrieved their old position vis-à-vis the dollar. The biggest exception is Indonesia, where the 'collapse' exchange rate has remained largely unchanged.

East Timor's torment

There were other fronts on which Suharto's grip was slipping. Of these the most important was 'internal security', with East Timor as the exemplary case. When the Portuguese dictatorship finally fell in April 1974, he was persuaded that his intelligence agencies' 'black' operatives could manipulate the internal politics of the decolonizing entity to prevent the 'communist' Fretilin party from taking power. But the gamble failed. After a brief, bloody and Indonesia-instigated civil war, Fretilin did take power, and hastened to forestall Jakarta by declaring the ex-colony an independent state. After some initial hesitation, Suharto, basking in a sea of oil money, decided on military invasion, followed by annexation. All the messages from the US were positive. Ford and Kissinger arrived in Jakarta on the eve of the expedition, and the latter is said to have told Suharto: 'Just do it quickly.' Virtually all the armaments used for the invasion were American, but Washington winked at what was a clear violation of the existing arms agreement between the two countries, which specified that they could not be used externally. The Americans had another reason to be complaisant: in a secret agreement Suharto had permitted (against international law) US nuclear submarines to pass through the Timor Strait without surfacing, thus evading Soviet monitoring from the heavens. A few weeks before the invasion, a high-level team of military and civilian intelligence operatives, on a propaganda tour in the US, dropped by Cornell University. When I asked one of them about plans for East Timor, the cheerful reply was: 'Don't worry, it will be over in a few weeks.'

The initial invasion was a disaster, with Indonesian planes bombing their own ground troops in several places. Two years later, Fretilin still controlled more than half of the demi-island's territory. Jimmy Carter, the 'human rights' president, then secretly sent Suharto some of the OV-10 Broncos that had had so much to answer for in Vietnam. They turned the tide. Thousands upon thousands of Timorese fled to the Indonesian-controlled lowlands. There they were herded into 'resettlement camps', and large numbers died of hunger and disease. But the resistance never gave up, gradually regained strength, and started a steady underground penetration of the lowlands.

Suharto tried everything he could think of, but nothing really worked. The land of East Timor, famously arid, had no mineral resources and scarcely any forests; its people were desperately poor and largely illiterate. Teachers hated being assigned there, as did bureaucrats. Attempts to settle migrants from other islands failed in the face of popular hostility and intermittent sabotage. The territory's one high-class export, coffee, became a military monopoly. The deeper problem was that in East Timor, Indonesians, often half-realizing it, were in the position of colonialists. Hence the regular colonial complaint that the East Timorese were 'so ungrateful', language that would have been taboo anywhere in Indonesia itself. Furthermore, East Timor could not be accommodated in the standard 'our centuries-long struggle against the Dutch' narrative of nationalist ideology and school textbooks. Worse still, they were Catholic in a 90 per cent Muslim national population. Irritatingly, the Vatican refused to merge East Timor's priests into the pliant and often cowardly Indonesian Catholic hierarchy.

But there was still another factor which has not generally been much noticed. Virtually all the soldiers at the time of the 1945–49 Indonesian revolution were in their twenties. So large and so young was this force that a military academy was not opened until 1957. The first class graduated in 1960, with only childhood memories of the struggle against the Dutch. They had been green lieutenants, with no important role to play, during the massacres of the Left in the mid-60s. East Timor, their first experience of war, came ten years later when they were in their thirties. Since the invasion was justified to them as a campaign against communism, the model they were given was 1965–66: no mercy, torture, burning of villages, rapes, crude intelligence operations and, most notoriously, in the spirit of 65, the organization and financing of lumpen pro-military militias among the local population, who got accustomed to using methods from which even the army officers occasionally shrank. Characteristically, Army HQ prepared a secret manual on effective torture techniques and how to avoid being caught trying them. One of the best-known younger commanders, who had successfully ambushed and killed Fretilin's first military chief, Nicolau Lobato, had himself camcorded with his triumphant booted feet on his enemy's corpse. He would tell occasional reporters that he fought off boredom of an evening by replaying the videotape.

In November 1991, increasingly bold demonstrations by youngsters in Dili, the small capital city, were answered by a characteristically brutal and stupid outburst of killing. Unfortunately for Suharto, a brave young English journalist called Max Stahl managed to film the bloodshed and smuggle the videotape out of the country. The film's international circulation destroyed overnight the Suharto regime's constant assurances to the 'international community' that the East Timor problem was 'over', and enormously encouraged the resistance. The capture of Xanana Gusmão, the heroic successor to Lobato, could not be handled any more by a quick execution. Jailed in Jakarta, his prestige undamaged, he became a hero even to some Indonesian youngsters in the opposition, who would joke, 'If only we had Xanana as our president.'

The same methods and the same lack of success marked the regime's military suppression campaigns in Acheh and West Papua. Acheh had been a quiet and prosperous province in the 1970s and early 1980s, but the discovery of a vast field of natural gas led to the creation of exploitation enclaves, heavily guarded and filled with workers and managers brought in from other parts of Indonesia. Military rule set in; armed resistance followed, responded to by East Timorian methods. The end was a terribly costly stalemate in which neither the military nor the resistance had the power to come out on top. It turned out that some of the Acheh resistance commanders had earlier had some Red Beret training. More or less the same was true in West Papua, where timber-mad cronies and Western mining conglomerates worked in a vast forbidding terrain where a small armed resistance continued right through the era of the dictatorship.

In the long run, all these adventures undermined the prestige and self-confidence of younger-generation military leaders, not one of whom ever emerged as a hero in the mould of some of the veterans of the older generation. The Asian Crisis of 1997 gave striking evidence of how the institution had been hollowed out. The military newspapers, which no one but military people willingly read, and which depended on large subsidies, were forced to close down and never re-emerged. After Suharto fell, newspapers reported that the head of military intelligence was being investigated for forging large amounts of currency. When reporters questioned the general about this, he engagingly replied: 'Look, what could I do? Our budget had been cut to nothing, and the high command couldn't give me any more money, but there were all these militias in East Timor who hadn't been paid for a long time and were getting really upset.' So he went on to become, briefly, the Army Commander.

Father of bankruptcy

The secrets of the ultra-secretive President—security failure, industrialization failure, financial failure, moral failure, parental failure

(all his children either monsters or nonentities), even political failure—came oozing out bit by bit. For the irony of Suharto's story is that he was finally undone by the forces that had made his long dictatorship possible. In the early 1990s, he had been persuaded by Washington to 'open up' his country more widely to global financial capital. A lot of fast money flowed into a plethora of shady new banks created to take advantage of this sudden bonanza. By then Suharto was living on borrowed time. Indonesia had become a net importer of oil, and the forests were largely gone. Local industrial development was weak, and the education system had been decaying for years. When the 'Asian Crisis' broke out, Indonesia was hit harder than any other country. Within a few weeks the rupiah lost four-fifths of its exchange value. Dozens of banks went bankrupt. Millions of people lost their jobs. The national debt climbed dizzyingly. His toadies had long flattered him with the title of Bapak Pembangunan (Father of Development) but by the beginning of 1998, bitter local wits had turned it into Bapak Pembangkrutan (Father of Bankruptcy). Nothing more cruelly demonstrated this Waterloo than the photos of the haggard dictator at his desk while the *capo* of the IMF, arms akimbo, stands behind him, ultimatum symbolically in hand.

What was he to do? The thinking that led to Suharto's stepping aside in 1998 could be formulated in two quite separate ways. The first is cultural. Suharto had no oratorical gifts whatsoever—almost always he scrupulously droned his way through tedious, statistic-filled, cliché-ridden speeches written for him, in bureaucratic Indonesian, by the State Secretariat. As John Roosa has pointed out, no one remembers a single phrase Suharto coined in thirty-three years in power. (Siad Barre? Franco?) Probably he did not even think in Indonesian, which he had had to acquire in his late teens. Occasionally, however, he would let his guard down, especially when he was furious. A few braver souls would mock his Indonesian for its Javanese accent, imported Javanese grammar and Javanese moral clichés. Once, enraged by student criticisms of one of his wife's more extravagant 'projects', he blurted out that he would *gebuk* anyone who dared to criticize her. *Gebuk* is Javanese for 'beat the hell out of someone'. On another occasion, privately addressing the group of ambitious toadies who ran his National Youth League, many of them non-Javanese, he astounded his listeners with a long digression about the mystical meanings of the names for the letters in the Javanese alphabet (the State Secretariat made sure this curious rant was never published). Late on in his dictatorship Suharto was seduced into helping an experienced journalist ghost-write his autobiography. What blazes out from the pages is burning resentment—resentment of all those who thought he was stupid, uneducated, a mystical novice, manipulated by his aides, and so on. The central motif is 'I, and only I, decided everything'. But *rancune* led him uncharacteristically to claim—correctly—that in 1983 he had personally ordered the execution of several thousand small-time thugs. [7] The book was barely out when Suharto had second thoughts and ordered its recall, a rare case of a dictator banning his own book.

In fact he was Javanese to the bone, secretly consulting shamans and astrologers, and visiting magically powerful caves, tombs and so on. In late 1997, shaken to his core by the financial collapse, Suharto let it be known to the press that he was prepared to *lèngsèr kaprabon* and become a *pandito*. The Javanese words are a kind of cliché drawn from the old chronicles of Javanese kings and from the even older shadow-play repertoire, based on the Mahabharata and Ramayana. *Lèngsèr kaprabon* can be translated as 'abdicate the throne', while *pandito* means Great (Mystical) Sage. In effect, the Great King, in old age, passes the kingdom to his successor and ends his days as a Revered Sage and Counsellor. This utterance was received with bitter mirth among his many young enemies, who believed not a word of it. In fact, he probably meant it, at least at that moment. For Suharto here let slip what many had long suspected, that in some moods he thought of himself as a monarch, and maybe really expected to play a key further role as the Wise Man of whatever-next.

Calculating the succession

The second reason for Suharto's decision to retire was straightforwardly political, seasoned with several tablespoons of *rancune*-concentrate. Stalwart to the last, he would show 'them' what would happen without him. Re-elected president for the last time—unanimously, as always—in March 1998, he had picked as his running mate the aeronautical engineer Habibie. [8] This was something new and remarkable, since over the past two decades the vice-president had always been an (unthreatening) retired general. Habibie, who came from Celebes, was often regarded as an amiable, lightweight gasbag, who had persuaded the dictator to spend untold sums of money on building an export aviation industry along the lines of the German company Messerschmitt, where the engineer had worked for many years. The US (in the person of Boeing) made sure that these planes would never meet 'international' standards, and in any case the Crash of 1997 had ended the whole enterprise.

But Habibie's candidacy also served another purpose. In the late 1980s and 1990s, Suharto increasingly felt that the armed forces might be slipping out of his control. So he started to manipulate high-level promotions in the military: in the first instance Tientje's nonentity brother, and later a visibly unbalanced and fascist-minded son-in-law; and in the second instance former personal aides, whom military wits joked about as *prawira piningit*. *Prawira* is Javanese for officer, while *piningit* refers to the old aristocratic tradition of putting daughters, after their first menstruation, into seclusion until they were successfully married off. In effect, 'virgin officers'.

But Suharto was also thinking about how to create a political counterweight to the active senior officer corps, a generation younger than his own. The solution was remarkable. Throughout much of his dictatorship Suharto had been visibly hostile to political Islam. In the 1970s, his political spymaster Ali Murtopo had created a Komando Jihad, partly formed by released and desperate prisoners from the failed Islamic-state rebel movement of the 1950s and early 60s. Some of these sad mercenaries had carried out an amateurish bombing of part of Borobudur, the famous 9th-century Buddhist stupa in Central Java. It suited the regime's book to have 'Islamic terrorists' secretly on its payroll. Then, suddenly, in his old age, Suharto took his family on a highly publicized, deluxe pilgrimage to Mecca, from which he returned not only as a 'Haji' but with an entirely fictitious, new first name—Muhammad!

Habibie was now instructed to create what was briefly known as the League of Muslim Indonesian Intellectuals (ICMI). The engineer learned fast. He had previously astonished pious Indonesian Muslims in the US by telling them that the Prophet was akin to a television set, faithfully transmitting Allah's programmes to serious viewers. But Muslim intellectuals, excluded from power for decades, rushed to join the ICMI, also with Machiavellian intentions. Suharto might wish to use them, but they would also use him—and they were much younger. As it turned out ICMI, which had no social or religious base, disappeared in a puff of smoke when the dictatorship collapsed. But Suharto's calculation had been that, although Habibie would have general Muslim support in counterpoise to the army, he would be too weak not to need to turn to the Great Sage for instructions and help.

In this the ex-dictator would be gravely disappointed. Habibie, an affable, garrulous figure, quite aware of the enormous public hostility to Suharto after his fall, struck out on his own—and Suharto is said never to have spoken to him again. He released almost all surviving political prisoners (including Col. Abdul Latief) and ended virtually all mass media censorship. Out of this came a torrent of abuse for the Great Sage, demands that he be tried for his crimes, and a strong push for 'total reform' of the political system. Habibie also made a start at organizing the first free elections that Indonesia had experienced since 1955. More strikingly still, he agreed that the East Timorese should be allowed a referendum on their future, monitored by the UN. The military were at first furious about this; but then told Habibie that, with the help of their notoriously violent militias, they could guarantee that the natives would opt for Indonesian citizenship. Unfortunately for them, they had not reckoned with Xanana's guile. Against vehement opposition within the resistance, he had sent word from jail that all East Timorese should massively support the ex-dictator's electoral machine in the national ballot held in June 1999. So huge was this machine's success in the territory that military intelligence let down its guard; they were livid and bewildered when the great majority of the population voted for independence in the referendum two months later.

In retrospect Habibie's brief presidency had many good moments. Unluckily, he believed that these earned him a full term as a real

president, at which point his stock plummeted and he felt compelled to return to his second *patria*, a Kohl-created united Reich. From this moment on, Suharto disappeared from public view, successfully fending off demands that he be put on trial thanks to faithful doctors' reports that he was too ill or too senile to face the courts. Nor was the political elite he had created eager to go after him —he knew all their miserable secrets.

II. SOME LEGACIES

From the later 1980s on, I used regularly to ask young Indonesian visitors and new students arriving on the Cornell University campus: 'Who is the living Indonesian that you most admire?' Almost invariably, the reaction was merely a puzzled scratching of the head, as if the question were ridiculous. Sometimes a youngster would hesitantly name a popular folk-singer whose lyrics were mildly critical of the way things were. One or two would mention Pramoedya Ananta Toer, the country's greatest writer, whose oeuvre was banned throughout Suharto's New Order.

If the same question had been posed in the 1950s, the answers would have been completely different: many 'heroes' of the colonial-era nationalist and Islamic movements and the revolution were still alive and publicly active. The contrast points to a central legacy of the long dictatorship—the production of an overwhelmingly timid, corrupt and mediocre political class. Resentful, suspicious and cunning, the dictator made sure that no potential rivals, military or civilian, could develop any independent social or political base. Even his abject cabinet ministers believed they were under surveillance. The amiable, intelligent son of one of these ministers studiously avoided me during his first three years at Cornell—on parental orders. But in his last year, now socialized to American campus norms, he suddenly became very friendly. His father, he reported, had forbidden him ever to mention anything political when he telephoned home, since he was sure his lines were tapped. Well-educated in some ways, the boy turned out to know almost nothing about his country's history and had never read the many important books about Indonesia's politics.

Suharto terrified people, not only on the basis of his blood-stained record, but by his demeanour—chilly, silent, masked, except for occasional eruptions of real or staged rage. But with international backing he also acquired the resources to buy people on a massive scale. In the early years of the regime, it was his fellow-generals who were the main beneficiaries of his largesse, but after 1973 and OPEC it was increasingly the so-called technocrats, economists and engineers of many different types who became the richest (non-Chinese) people in the country, as they were given control of the ministries of oil and gas, basic and light industry, finance, foreign trade, employment and so on. They had no political base and were reliably loyal and compliant.

In his final years, however, it was Muslims (often of Arab descent), especially Muslim technocrats and intellectuals, on whom the cornucopia fell. A whole generation and a half of politicians grew up within and absorbed the authoritarian, corrupt and clientelist political culture that Suharto created. He liked to play them off against each other, but would tolerate no substantial or inflammatory rhetoric. Deliberately or not, he created over time the Indonesian national oligarchy of today: quarrelsome, but intermarried; competitive, but avoiding any serious internal conflict; without ideas, but determined to hang on to what they have, at all costs. This is the main reason why Suharto remained above the law after his fall, and why his children, except for the murderer Tommy, continue to control many of the country's television stations, tollways and other strategic assets. The crucial thing is that this national oligarchy and its hangers-on are largely incapable of thinking outside the old regime's box. Cynics joke that there used to be one big Suharto; now there are hundreds of little ones.

How did the oligarchy survive the popular demands for reform after the mass protests that erupted as a result of the 1997 financial crisis? One reason was the deep-seated fragmentation of the electorate, reminiscent of the elections of 1955. The biggest winner in 1999 was the 'secular nationalist' party led by Megawati, a lazy and overweight daughter of Sukarno. But it failed to get even one third of the votes, and lost support in succeeding elections. All governments since then have had to be coalitions.

Second, under the constitutional rules inherited from the Suharto era, the president was not popularly elected (until 2004), but rather selected by the party-dominated Supreme People's Consultative Assembly. After the national elections of 1999, when the reform tide was still high, this body elevated Abdurrahman Wahid, whose party won 10 per cent of the vote—partly because of his popularity with the reformers, but mainly because he was too weak to prevent his cabinet being packed by nominees from all the other political parties and the military, with Megawati as his vice-president. Rather full of himself ('I got a message from Allah summoning me to be President'), Wahid felt humiliated by his position, and tried to extract himself by conspicuous interventions into internal army affairs, a drastic reshuffling of his cabinet and various other manoeuvres. He lasted only a year and a half, at which point all the parties except his own agreed to impeach him and remove him from office. When Megawati succeeded him, she promised and delivered a 'rainbow' cabinet, in which all the parties (if one includes a renegade from Wahid's who became Defence Minister) had their quotas. The target of the oligarchy had been achieved: a parliament without an opposition, and every party clique sharing in the perquisites of power. Sukarno's daughter was not an energetic figure in any case, but the absolute lack of any creative initiatives during the three years of her presidency was also due to what Dan Slater has nicely termed the cartelization of the political system. [9]

A third factor was the general outlook of the oligarchy, which feared popular mobilizations outside their control, fully accepted the neo-liberal international order, and had no interest in anything that smelled of the left. The army leaders not only accepted the cartel but were important players within it. Nonetheless, as the popularity of the parties visibly declined, the oligarchy felt forced to change the method of electing the president, by opening the office to the sentiments of the national electorate. This is how, in 2004, Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono, an unassuming but intelligent Javanese (retired) general, a key behind-the-scenes member of the oligarchy and Megawati's Senior Minister for Security and Defence, became Indonesia's first popularly elected president. But the party he created for himself did not do well, and he has largely succumbed to the logic of cartelization: passivity, systematic incorporation of any possible parliamentary opposition, and catholic division of the emoluments in his gift. It is not very likely that he will be re-elected in 2009, but his replacement will not be very different, barring some popular upheaval which seems for now over the horizon.

Characteristically, when Suharto finally died on 27 January 2008, the President presided tearfully over the funeral, worked things out with Suharto's children, who own many TV stations, so that no 'negative' reports on the dead man would be aired, and ordered flags all over the country to be half-masted for a week. Luckily, in many places this order was scornfully rejected.

Cloaks of faith

A second major legacy relates to the political parties and their competitors. Like many military men, Suharto despised such parties and, as we have seen, corrupted and castrated those that he tolerated. Other than that, he paid them no attention. Since the legal parties were completely marginalized and had no influence on policy, they bore their impotence without attracting much in the way of political support or funnelling social protest. Under these conditions, people soon realized that the only institutions which Suharto was usually cautious about suborning or directly suppressing were those based on religion. After all, one of the ideological banners under which the slaughter of the Communists had been organized was the primordial battle against atheism. Suharto's religion was a characteristic Javanese syncretism of Islam, Hindu-Buddhist mysticism and shamanistic animism—but this was usually concealed from the public.

Christians, though a small minority, had high educational qualifications—a heritage of colonial-era state favouritism and missionary

energy. Generally sycophantic, eager for protection against phantom Muslim fanaticism, they were useful to Suharto's cynical ideological campaign for national 'unity'. But they also had crucial support in Rome, Western Europe and, above all, the US. Catholics were not a real problem, since their power was largely based in Java, and their hierarchical leadership was easily bought off or cowed. Protestantism was a very different story. In the colonial period, Protestant evangelism had its main successes with minority groups in remote or upland regions, which were divvied up among different sects with different overseas sponsors. Hence even in the colonial period Protestantism became closely associated with Outer Island ethnicities, creating separate ethno-cultural 'churches' for the Toba Bataks, the Karo Bataks, the Ambonese, the Toradjans and so on. It is telling that the largest-circulation newspapers in Jakarta under the Suharto regime were controlled by Catholics and Protestants: the most easily intimidated and therefore the most tolerated. It was not long before the obsequious Catholic *Kompas* was quietly mocked as *Kempes* (flat, like a tyre), and the Protestant *Sinar Harapan* (Light of Hope) as *Sirna Harapan* (All Hope is Gone).

As for the vast Muslim majority, Suharto closely followed the advice of the panjandrum of Dutch colonial Islamic studies, C. Snouck Hurgronje (who had had the courage to go to Mecca disguised as a pilgrim): give them everything they want that is not political. Hence, until the 1990s, Suharto donated enormous sums for the building of high-tech mosques in the bourgeois neo-Arab style, schools, charities and subventions for airplane pilgrims to the Holy City, while brutally repressing any manifestations of political Islam.

Today, any serious visitor to Indonesia should visit the beautiful old mosque in Surabaya dedicated to Sunan Ampel, said to be one of the nine founders of Islam in the country. It is located in the centre of the old town, next to the traditional Arab and Chinese quarters. Visitors will find a civilized warning posted against disturbing the peace of many tired and hardworking neighbours. This mosque is, to my knowledge, the only significant one in the country that still uses the beautiful unmediated human voice for calling the faithful to prayer. Everywhere else, and this is another Suharto legacy, the calls to prayer are made *fortissimo* with the help of high-amp loudspeakers, and often lazily taken from tapes.

The relative immunity of religious institutions from Suharto's increasing insistence on his own form of *Gleichschaltung* had consequences that he failed to predict. All kinds of political, economic, ethnic and even criminal interests which, under other circumstances, would have gravitated to political parties clustered round different religious denominations. The late Suharto period thus saw the emergence of something unimaginable before he came to power: Protestant street-thugs, Catholic extortionists, Muslim mercenaries. After his fall, the consequences became bloodily evident. Protestant Ambonese hoodlums who had long controlled part of Jakarta's brothels, bars and gambling dens were evicted by Muslim gangsters loudly proclaiming Muslim morality. [10] Forced to return to Ambon, the defeated Protestant hoods convinced almost all the local Protestants that they had been victims of Muslim aggression.

Meantime, the corrupt, but quietist, colonial-era local Protestant Church was being undermined by fanatical American and German evangelical missionaries, who provided much-needed social services but insisted that Islam was the work of Satan. The outbreak of cruel religious conflict in the Moluccas, which had never experienced anything of the kind before, was initiated by a Protestant massacre of an entire Muslim village—no surprise that this was not reported in the Western press. No surprise either that the alliance of gangsters with fanatical Protestants led sizeable numbers of other gangsters and fanatics to 'come to the rescue' of their fellow-Muslims. The police and military, who should have prevented the bloodshed that followed, often broke up along religious lines. The result was a savage local civil war in the Moluccas, from which no one but gangsters profited.

Arms and assets

Suharto rightly believed till the very end that the one Indonesian institution capable of felling him was the Army. After the massive purges of 1966–67 he could be sure of the loyal support of a now completely anti-communist officer corps, composed mainly of people of his own generation—'veterans of the Revolution'. Still, he took extra precautions. The most striking of these was a budgetary allocation policy which in no way sufficed for a modern military, especially one in power. (At various points in the 1980s and 90s, senior military officials would even say in public that the budget covered only about one third of their needs.) This also provided plausible evidence to foreign reporters, scholars and, of course, officials that democracy was up ahead, somewhere along the yellow-brick road. The financial solution was ingenious and had its roots in the short period after 1949 when Indonesia was a constitutional democracy. The country was desperately poor after the ravages of the Depression, the Japanese Occupation and the revolution, and the demands on a series of weak governments were substantial. Some provincial military commanders, headed towards warlord status, began to create their own hidden budgets by protecting smugglers, controlling local export revenues and practising extortion, especially of Chinese entrepreneurs who nonetheless found these commanders useful at the price. We have earlier observed Suharto getting into this game in the mid-1950s.

The big change, however, came in the year 1957. The very free elections held in 1955 had shown that no political party was able to win more than one quarter of the electorate, but about 77 per cent of the vote went to four large parties, three of them based on the heavily populated island of Java. These three were a so-called secular nationalist party, a 'traditionalist' Muslim party and the Communist Party, while the fourth, a 'modernist Islamic' party, was strong above all in non-Javanese areas. That the two (usually) mutually hostile Islamic parties could not together win even a small majority in a country which is nominally 90 per cent Muslim points to the real peculiarity of Indonesia in today's Islamic world.

Prior to the generally peaceable political arrival of Islam in the mid-15th century—eight hundred years after the Prophet and his immediate successors had achieved astounding military successes in the Near East and on the Mediterranean littoral—Old Java for centuries had been culturally dominated by an eclectic mix of Hinduism, Mahayana Buddhism and local animism. Virtually all of the grand monuments which earn Indonesia a substantial tourist income are pre-Islamic. The arrival of the Dutch at the beginning of the 17th century helped block any thoroughgoing Arab-Muslim transformation. Thus even today the Javanese are divided between (mostly urban) 'modernist' Muslims who have no patience with syncretism and superstition, 'traditionalist' Muslims (mostly rural) whose outlook is both nationalist and syncretic, and 'statistical' Muslims who are circumcized, married and buried according to Muslim rites, but whose real faith still shows strong traces of Old Java's religious outlook. In 1955, the secular nationalists and the Communists competed for the votes of the 'statistical' Muslims, while active Muslim voters were divided between traditionalists and modernists.

The post-election cabinet was necessarily unstable, weak and incapable of halting the spread of Outer Island warlordism which increasingly took on local ethno-linguistic features. Behind the scenes, the CIA, alarmed by the Communists' surprising electoral strength, and by President Sukarno's anti-imperialist rhetoric, was looking towards a major rebellion which would get rid of Sukarno and bring about an Army-backed right-wing regime. In March 1957, the country was put under martial law. In the autumn negotiations between the centre and the Outer Island opposition broke down.

At the same time, Sukarno, increasingly enraged by Dutch obstinacy in hanging on to West New Guinea, with American support, decreed the nationalization of all Dutch enterprises and the eviction of almost all Dutch citizens. The High Command, using its martial-law powers, took over the huge welter of Dutch factories, banks, export–import firms, mines, shipping and plantations, and promptly moved to immobilize the Communist-dominated trade unions attached. In one blow, the Army thus seized almost the entire 'advanced' sector of the economy, and made use of these resources to win the civil war that broke out at the start of 1958, despite heavy CIA assistance to the rebels. Most of these enterprises were parcelled out, and either mismanaged or effectively

looted, making a major contribution to the economic crisis that undid Sukarno's Guided Democracy.

As noted above, Suharto had far more resources to dispense than his predecessor, while the Army's overwhelming political power helped it to build a huge, ramshackle economic empire independent of the national budget, often with the cooperation of favourite Chinese tycoons. It was, however, not an effectively centralized empire, since the Army was organized territorially, right down to the village level, and each predatory level created its own sources of funds. Furthermore, most sizeable private enterprises were forced to accept 'security units', ostensibly to protect them from scarcely existing labour unrest, but actually as agents of systematic, hierarchical extortion.

But this was by no means all. For the first two decades of Suharto's rule, military officers were 'parachuted' into all the state ministries and parastatals, and most important positions in the territorial civil bureaucracy were occupied by generals and colonels. The armed forces had a large, Suharto-selected bloc in Parliament, and dominated the electoral machine, Golkar, which always won elections without difficulty. Perhaps most important of all, the officer corps was essentially above the law. Not a single senior officer was ever put on trial for corruption or abuse of power, let alone for murder.

Yet, as we have also seen, by the mid-1980s the last of the revolution's veterans had retired, replaced by former cadets from the Military Academy. They had adapted fully to the regime, but failed to produce a single moment of 'glory', and not one of the new generation of generals enjoyed any independent public prestige. After Suharto's fall, and Habibie's ending of the old order's strict censorship, the mass media began to be filled with devastating stories of military malfeasance and brutality.

The popular anti-military movement was briefly strong enough to get rid of the appointed military bloc in Parliament, and restore much of the bureaucracy to civilian hands. [11] But other legacies of Suharto have remained. The officer corps is still largely above the law, the territorial organization of the Army has not been undone and, after enormous losses in the 1997 financial crisis, the soldiers have clung still more fiercely to their extra-budgetary enterprises. But the drastic decline in the Army's prestige and the mediocre quality of its leadership appear to rule out for the foreseeable future any return to military rule.

National amnesia

Since the cultural legacy of Suharto is a vast and complicated matter, it makes practical sense to focus here on just two crucial policy initiatives. The first and most important was the introduction of a new spelling system for the national language, inaugurated in 1972–73. Officially, this policy was justified as a way to open up a common print market with Malaysia. But the real motive behind it was to mark a decisive break between what was written under the dictatorship and everything written before it. One had only to read the title of a book or pamphlet to know whether it was splendidly modern, or a derisory residue of Sukarnoism, constitutionalism, the revolution, or the colonial period. Any interest in old-orthography materials was automatically suspicious. The change was sufficiently great that youngsters could easily be persuaded that 'old' printed materials were too hard to decipher, and so not to be bothered with. [12]

The effective result was a sort of historical erasure, such that the younger generation's knowledge of their country's history came largely from the regime's own publications, especially textbooks. Needless to say, the decades of anti-colonial activity against the Dutch largely disappeared. The revolution was renamed the War of Independence, in which only soldiers played significant roles. The post-revolutionary period of constitutional democracy was abruptly dismissed as the creation of civilian politicians, aping Western rather than Indonesian ways. All this had some comical aspects. For example, the brave but hopeless Communist rebellion against the Dutch colonial regime in 1926–27 was described as the first of a series of treasonable Communist conspiracies culminating in October 1, 1965.

In the decade after Suharto's fall, some tentative rewriting of textbooks has occurred, but in general inertia prevails. Many once-banned books have been republished (anachronistically, in the Suharto spelling), but the market for these books is basically limited to students and intellectuals. The general ignorance of the past is probably greater than at any time in the last century.

The second, related, policy concerns Indonesia's Chinese minority. Very soon after October 1, the regime's media claimed that the masterminds of the failed 'Communist coup' had received a large clandestine shipment of arms from the PRC, and that Party chairman D. N. Aidit had acted at the behest of Peking. There followed the sacking of the Chinese Embassy and the suspension of diplomatic relations until 1990. Under Sukarno, the only substantial political organization for the Chinese minority, known as Baperki, had been a strong supporter of the President, who enjoyed excellent relations with Peking. Baperki had also allied itself with the Communist Party and leftwing secular nationalists. This body was now prohibited, many of its leaders were imprisoned, and a significant number of ordinary Chinese killed.

Suharto followed this up by banning Chinese schools, any use of Chinese calligraphy, and the near-compulsory changing of Chinese personal names to more Indonesian-sounding appellations. Needless to say, the rationale for all this was that the Chinese had to be better assimilated and become like other Indonesian citizens. But in reality the Chinese were almost completely excluded from political power. Discrimination was rampant and systematic in the universities, the civil service and the armed forces. Over the 32 years of the dictatorship, only one Chinese ever became a cabinet minister, and this figure, appointed only two months before Suharto fell, was a notorious crony.

On the other hand, on the economic–financial side, Suharto surrounded himself with a small group of Chinese tycoons who, in addition to acting as his bagmen, built huge and successful business empires. (Some of these people, sniffing the wind, began transferring their assets to Singapore, Hong Kong, Australia and elsewhere several years before the Crash of 1997.) The policy suited the dictator's book, since he both respected Chinese acumen and knew that Chinese wealth could not be converted into dangerous political power. 'Native' Indonesians were another story.

Below the level of the cronies, the Chinese, facing exclusion from most other options beyond private medical and legal practice, concentrated energetically on commerce and swelled the ranks of an already timid middle class. The concentration became so great that the old stigma of being 'economic animals' became partly internalized. Yet there were a few impressive exceptions: Soe Hok Gie, a prominent student opponent of the Communist Party and of Sukarno's authoritarian populist rule, was the one and only person in the late 1960s to denounce in public the massacres of 1965–66; the Protestant lawyer Yap Thiam Hien was so courageous in defence of human rights that he ultimately became a national icon. Dede Oetomo, on returning from graduate study in America, was brave enough to announce that he was 'gay', and over two decades tirelessly worked to help HIV/AIDS victims and to enhance the civic rights of gays, lesbians and transsexuals. The playwright Riantiarno dared to compose and stage politically coloured plays and musicals, though these were soon shut down. Nonetheless Suharto's policies made the Chinese more vulnerable than ever to popular envy and hatred, and Suharto's fall was marked by savage anti-Chinese riots in Jakarta and the old royal city of Surakarta.

After Suharto? Politically the Chinese have no vehicle of their own, though they are financially important to all the large parties today. Only two Chinese, to my knowledge, have become cabinet ministers. The more important of the pair, Kwik Kian Gie, was quickly dismissed because of his personal honesty and blunt attacks on corruption, in general, and the activities of the tenacious Chinese cronies in particular. Discrimination is still rife. Young Chinese know even less about Indonesian history than their 'native'

counterparts, and that goes for the history of the Chinese in Indonesia as well. Many parents, still traumatized by their experiences under the Suharto regime, try to send their youngsters overseas to study, often with the dream of following them into permanent emigration. One remarkable development, however, is that there has been no significant anti-Chinese riot over the past ten years, which have otherwise seen a great deal of inter-ethnic and inter-religious bloodshed. I think that the ironic explanation is that the Chinese minority, maybe 1 per cent of the population and scattered around the archipelago, is too small to matter in the open electoral politics where these larger conflicts are involved; under Suharto, with his tight control over the public sphere, the Chinese were regarded as the least dangerous targets for social anger and resentment.

Children of 1965

The Communist Party, as we have observed, was completely destroyed— physically, politically and morally. Among the elderly survivors of years of imprisonment there is no agreement on what actually happened in 1965 or who should be held responsible. No one, not even overseas, has attempted to write a serious account of post-revolutionary Party history. Up till today, former members of any Communist-controlled organization and their families have to carry ID marking this stigma. Most are very poor, having lost all their property after 1965. They are barred from many significant occupations, educational institutions, the bureaucracy and parliament.

To the very end of the Suharto regime, its military and intelligence services continued to warn, in menacing terms, of a 'latent Communist Party', and more idiosyncratically, of a dangerous 'organization without organization'. Seemingly oblivious, even today, of the collapse of the Soviet Union and the Communist regimes in Eastern Europe, and of the delirious success of the 'capitalist-roaders' in China, right-wing generals and 'modernist' Muslim organizations continue to rant about Communist conspiracies. When this interminable *Hetze* will end no one knows.

But there are some interesting things occurring, nonetheless. During his brief presidency at the beginning of our century, Abdurrahman Wahid, the maverick and charismatic leader of 'traditionalist' Muslims, spoke out strongly for reconciliation *à la* Mandela and the end of stigmatization. He even asked Parliament to remove the constitutional ban on Marxism and Marxist writings. His many enemies made sure that this request was rejected, but the ban is no longer seriously enforced. One can find in bookshops today many texts about Marxism, and by dead Communists, including D. N. Aidit who was summarily executed forty-three years ago. Suharto's fall has opened the way for a good many publications claiming—sometimes with evidence, sometimes on the basis of rumour and mystical signs—that the real mastermind of October 1, 1965 was Suharto himself. These circulate quite freely.

The most surprising development has emerged in an unlikely place—among young intellectuals and social activists from 'traditional Islam', who in many ways are showing themselves to be far more modern than the 'modernists'. Taking a cue from Wahid, they can be found, even in remote rural areas, visiting and helping impoverished old Communists and their families. They say they are doing this work as a kind of atonement for the conspicuous and ferocious role that their elders played in the 1965 massacres. Not long ago, a friendly meeting was held in the old Republican capital of Jogjakarta between women from the traditionalist Islamic sector and female survivors from the Communist side. Muslims listened sympathetically to the elderly Communists talk about their sufferings in 1965 and after. All went well till one of the victims started to describe in detail how and where she was raped and tortured. At this point one of the younger Muslim women stood up ashen-faced, stuttered a few unintelligible words, and fainted. It turned out later that from the account she could identify the sadist—he was her father.

It is possible, indeed likely, that Wahid, a very shrewd politician, took his initiatives with the idea of getting votes from ex-Communist families. [13] He knew that the modernist Muslims and the residual electoral machine of Suharto have no interest—to say the least—in this constituency. He also believed that the reborn secular nationalist party, assuming that the victims had nowhere else to go, felt they needed to make no appeals or concessions. Their party leader, Megawati (the wags call her Miniwati), Sukarno's daughter, has repudiated her father's ideological legacy and displays a thoroughly petty-bourgeois conservative outlook. All this means is that there is no serious political party representing anything remotely left. Nor is there any immediate chance that this situation will change, especially given today's international environment.

The old social base of the Communist Party has changed greatly over the past forty years. The factory-based work-force has become —for well-known reasons—heavily feminized and based on short-term employment contracts. Organizing is very limited, and the old social divide along quasi-religious lines remains. Corporatist mentalities are still dominant in the bureaucracy. It is probably telling that the work-force's one modern hero has been a heroine, a brave East Javanese trade unionist who was raped and murdered by the local military for her persistent and vocal opposition to her employers and their 'security units'. The peasants are still there, but population pressure, landgrabbing and the alluring suggestions of the mass media have brought huge numbers, especially of the young and active, into the cities. Peasant organizations are small and weak. In the late Suharto era and in the first years after the dictator's fall, there were many enthusiastic and idealistic NGOs—tolerated, up to a point, by the authorities because of their small size. But the return of political parties to power, and the successful holding of a series of free elections since 1999, has lured many NGO staffers into mainstream party-political careers. Others are too dependent on ignorant and trend-happy 'sponsors' in the North to be capable of much creative work.

Quiescence?

It says something that, in 2007, Indonesia was often cited as Southeast Asia's most open and democratic society. The competition was not heavy: Thailand under military rule, interminable authoritarian regimes in Burma, Laos, Malaysia, Vietnam and Singapore; and the appallingly corrupt and violent regime of Gloria Arroyo-Macapagal in the Philippines. With the melancholy help of the tsunami, peace has come to Acheh, and an intelligent, peaceable former rebel is now its governor. Perhaps exhausted by the bloodshed of previous years, the Moluccas are fairly calm. Concessions have been made to the Papuans. The important decentralization law, passed by Parliament at the height of the short wave of 'reform' that followed Suharto's fall, has shifted power and money to the regional elites whom cynics dub mini-Suhartos. Islamic extremism is a spent force. The press is pretty free, though mostly conservative.

Yet there is one other phenomenon that needs to be noted. Indonesia's educational system today is mostly a dreary swamp. Up until perhaps the early 1960s, primary and secondary schoolteachers were, even if miserably paid, respected local figures, partly for their energetic role in overcoming widespread illiteracy, and partly for the contributions many had made to the colonial-era nationalist movement. The everyday word for 'teacher', *guru*, still had an impressive traditional aura. During the 1965–66 massacres, the occupational group that was proportionately hardest hit consisted of just such primary and secondary schoolteachers. Their emergency replacements were a mass of uninterested, unqualified placemen and placewomen who wanted a civil service job at all costs, and, of course, were completely loyal to the regime that hired them. It was this phalanx that really brought the pervasive miasma of civil servant-style corruption into schools—bribery, 'tea-money', embezzlement of school budgets and so on.

This generation has finally retired, but they are responsible for recruiting their successors. (I have often asked young people which of their high-school teachers they remember with either affection or admiration. Typically, the reaction is incredulity at my naïveté.) Suharto had no time for students, but he encouraged the spread of hundreds of diploma mills to sop up unemployment. Even in the better universities, teacher absenteeism has long passed the time when it was remarked on: sidelines, real-estate speculation, boondoggling state-financed 'research projects' are the usual lures. There is no better evidence of Suharto's educational legacy than that the political elite sends even its stupidest and most anti-social children to be tamed and tutored overseas. This does not mean

that the country lacks a lot of very intelligent youngsters, but many of them are part autodidacts, more dependent on each other and the internet than on their teachers.

One of Winston Churchill's more acerbic *bons mots* was 'While there is death there is hope'. Every year, the number of young people who only remember dimly or not at all what Suharto's *Neues Ordnung* was like grows apace. It is nice that, after half a century, Pramoedya Ananta Toer has found a successor. The young Sundanese Eka Kurniawan has published two astonishing novels in the past half-decade. [14] If one considers their often nightmarish plots and characters, one could say there is no hope. But the sheer beauty and elegance of their language, and the exuberance of their imagining, give one the exhilaration of watching the first snowdrops poke their little heads up towards a wintry sky.

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[1] I would like to record my gratitude to my friends Ben Abel and Joss Wibisono for very helpful comments and criticisms.

[2] An acronym for Pembela Tanah Air (Defenders of the Motherland), the name expressed the Japanese plan to hitch local nationalism to the defence of the Empire. There is a clear parallel with the almost contemporaneous Japanese creation of the Burma Independence Army to help fight against the British.

[3] The massacres were mainly aimed at the Communists' mass bases, easily identified since the Party had been legal since independence, and actively participated in electoral politics. These bases were, numerically speaking, concentrated in the rural areas of Central and East Java and Bali, and in the plantation belt of North Sumatra. The cities were less severely hit, probably because they were more easily controlled,

[4] *50 Tahun Merdeka dan Problema Tapol/Napol* (50 Years of Independence and the Problem of Political Prisoners), published by Masyarakat Indonesia untuk Kemanusiaan, Jakarta 1995, p. 591.

[5] Suharto was soon treated like royalty by the UK, whose arms dealers profited mightily from trade with Indonesia. Australia followed suit, with its eyes on the huge underwater oil fields spotted off the island of Timor.

[6] The psychology behind this astounding accumulation is an interesting puzzle. Suharto's personal tastes were quite simple, and he did not keep an expensive stable of mistresses. He was visibly uncomfortable in foreign countries, and one cannot imagine him settling down with the loot in Los Angeles or the Riviera. He seems to have thought of himself as a good paterfamilias, spoiling his children, especially his eldest daughter and his youngest son 'Tommy', who did luxury time in prison (after his father's fall) for arranging the assassination of a Supreme Court judge who annoyed him. In the liberal 1950s, the maverick Sumatran politician Muhammad Yamin cheerfully explained why, as a cabinet minister, he had ordered the purchase of pianos for every school in the country: he wanted comfortable lives for his descendants 'to the seventh generation'. There is a general belief in Indonesia that even the canny Chinese can rarely stay rich for three generations. Children and grandchildren, used to luxury, and the usual vices, quickly fritter away the family fortune. It is possible that Suharto was thinking how much money would have to be accumulated to fund his own brood's frittering over seven generations.

[7] The regime had officially insisted that these clearly military-style murders were the result of turf wars between gangs. The popular *on dit* had it that most of these small gangsters were election-enforcers in the pay of General Ali Murtopo, Suharto's longtime personal political spy-chief, who was getting too big for his boots, and was soon exiled as Ambassador to Kuala Lumpur where he died of a stroke.

[8] Under the constitution, such as it was, the presidents of Indonesia were not chosen by popular vote, but by the Supreme People's Consultative Assembly, composed of all members of Parliament, plus a phalanx of representatives of various regions and functional groups, selected by . . . the president. This was handy for Suharto, who had no talent on the stump. The system was only changed five years ago. The current president, (retired) General Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono, is the first to be directly elected by the Indonesian voters.

[9] Slater has written a theoretically sophisticated and often very amusing account of top-level politics in Indonesia since Suharto: 'Indonesia's Accountability Trap: Party Cartels and Presidential Power after Democratic Transition', *Indonesia,* 78, October 2004.

[10] Their boss, explaining a later visit to the Great Satan at state expense, averred he was only going to see his children, comfortably ensconced in lesser Californian universities. It is also characteristic of these Muslim thugs that they never showed the slightest interest in the plight of the famously devout Achehnese.

[11] This success was possible in part because of the support of the political parties, eager to fill the parliamentary seats vacated by the soldiers.

[12] From the end of the 19th century the colonial regime had tried with mixed success to create a standard orthography for Malay/Indonesian based on Dutch orthographic rules. The Revolutionary government adopted a simplified form of this colonial spelling system by substituting, quite sensibly, 'u' for the odd Dutch 'oe'. A simple example will show what Suharto's New Improved Spelling achieved: 'I am looking for a special jacket', once *saja tjari djas chusus*, became *saya cari jas khusus*.

[13] Probably, a comparable calculation lay behind his spectacular decree (when still President) that the Chinese New Year, locally known as Imlek, would henceforth be a national holiday. For most of the Suharto period, public celebrations of Imlek were prohibited. It may have surprised Wahid that this decree was hugely successful, not only among the Chinese but especially among young non-Chinese Indonesians. One cannot doubt that here the influence of films from Hong Kong, Taiwan and more recently the PRC, and of advertising, soaps and travelogues on television, has played a big role. What in the 1950s was seen as the cultural expression of an often disliked local ethnic group is now seen as part of a general culture of the spectacle and of tourism. It was common in the old days for wealthy Chinese to hire young and poor non-Chinese to dance the famous lion-dance. The practice has been revived, but in a 'Mardi Gras' spirit of festive fun.

[14] Eka, a great admirer of Pramoedya, wrote a first-class academic thesis, since published, on the older writer's complex relationship with 'socialist realism'. The two novels are *Cantik Itu Luka* ['Beautiful', a Wound] (2002) and *Lelaki Harimau* [Man Tiger] (2004). The first is a huge, rather unwieldy, surreal recapitulation of the past century of Indonesian history set in a sort of isolated Macondo somewhere on the south coast of Java. The second is a brilliant, tight-knit and frightening village tragedy, also set somewhere on that barren littoral. I understand that both novels are starting to be translated into other languages.

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