

## Preface and acknowledgements

This is my second book about Indonesian autobiography. The first dealt with the autobiographical writings of Indonesians of the twentieth century who had in one way or another left their mark on the country's history as politicians, reformers, religious leaders and writers, including individuals whom in the last chapter I identified as representative of the youngest generation of Muslim intellectuals. The structure of the book was chronological, beginning with the early years of the century and tracing through the autobiographies the origins and development of a collective nationalist consciousness. I was above all interested in the way in which a discourse of nationalism and the awareness of a common Indonesian identity were formed and how it had been constantly evolving. This present book seeks to do something similar but within narrower confines. The autobiographies selected for critical review here are less concerned with the general sweep of Indonesian history or in locating Indonesia within the currents of colonial and post-colonial experience and international politics. Instead they are concerned largely with trying to make sense of a traumatic period in Indonesia's recent past, the period between 1965-1998 known to Indonesians as the period of the New Order and associated inextricably with the person of President Soeharto. Furthermore, these autobiographies all represent oppositional voices. All the autobiographies published during the New Order itself were severely limited in what they could say, and opponents of Soeharto were simply silenced and excluded from public platforms. Consequently, the personal accounts we have from that period omit much of the critical reservation which was shared by many at the time. Seen from outside Indonesia, too, although there were of course activists lobbying for action to be taken against a dictatorial repressive regime, Soeharto and his government received a good international press thanks to the significant development of the economy and the general rise in the prosperity of the people.

What the autobiographies published after Soeharto's fall seek to demonstrate is the human cost at which this development occurred. Taken together they offer an alternative account of what it meant to live through that period

for people who in different ways suffered from political oppression and social exclusion.

Some critics of my earlier book felt that I had leapt too quickly into a discussion of the texts without providing sufficient historical and personal context for a proper appreciation of the arguments I was making and the conclusions I was drawing. Mindful of that criticism, in this book I have attempted to locate the autobiographies here within a fuller description of the circumstances faced by the writers. I do not, however, claim to be writing a complete history of the period. The descriptions are intended to illustrate the intellectual and cultural context with which the writers themselves chose to identify. In the book I refer to concepts such as the spirit of the age and a structure of feeling to capture what I mean by this issue of context. I have more to say about this in the book, but for the present let me just state that what I am striving for is a representation of the kind of interpretative framework of the understanding of contemporary times shared in some measure by all the writers of these alternative works. The reader will, I hope, be able to see more clearly what I have in mind in reading through the individual chapters.

I was fortunate in being able to write the book over a short period of time in ideal circumstances. A grant from the Arts and Humanities Research Board (now Research Council) allowed me to match a university sabbatical term with another term for research and gave me the time to complete the book over a six-month stretch. I spent the time in Bandung, and although I did not have access to good libraries I was able to find most of the material I needed through visiting the numerous 'alternative' bookshops to be found in that city, as well as by regular visits to the book kiosks in Palasari and Pasar Suci. Among the latter I was fortunate to have the friendship of (Mohammad) Hidayat (Rahz) who not only helped me to find materials, but also spent numerous hours discussing books in general and providing me with leads and information. In particular he took time to explain to me how he came to edit the volume *Pendidikan hati* which later became the subject of one of the chapters of this book. It was from him that I heard about the Ashoka Foundation's office in Bandung. When I visited that office I was very kindly received by Ibu Mira and her staff whom I would like to thank.

Staff at the Utan Kayu complex were also very helpful and I should like to thank them in the person of Pak Tedjabayu who answered a number of delicate questions and provided me with some important names and addresses. At the same time I was in correspondence with Keith Foulcher in Australia tapping into his specialist knowledge and I must thank him both for his prompt helpful responses to my questions as well as for sending me his books as gifts.

Perhaps the most rewarding time I spent working on the book, however, was the opportunity I had to interview some of the individuals whose work

I was reading and scrutinizing. There was sometimes an unreal quality to the interview situations in which I found myself. On one occasion when I went down to Jakarta for few days, having sent ahead of me drafts of chapters that I had written about individuals, I found myself in early morning welcomed into the modest house of Hasan Raid by himself and his wife, and heard about and observed the grim conditions in which communist ex-prisoners lived. From there I went immediately on that same morning to the Majelis Permusyawaratan Rakyat (MPR, People's Consultative Assembly, the Indonesian Upper House) where I was received in a vast room, as befitting his office, by A. M. Fatwa, a deputy speaker. The contrast could not have been starker.

I owe thanks to A.M. Fatwa for being eager to respond to questions and for giving me some of his books. And I owe an even greater debt of gratitude to Hasan Raid and his wife not just for their hospitality but for showing me how dignity and fortitude can be sustained throughout adversity.

Ibu Sudjinah who received me in the old people's home in which she was living near Cikini was also very happy to answer my questions and supplement my knowledge of her life story. She also corrected one or two mistakes, which she noted in the draft chapter I had written about her. I thank her for help and for her patience with me. She said that she had recently written more autobiographical writing but was having difficulty finding a publisher. I hope that has now been resolved.

I also have to thank Deliar Noer for a long interview which he gave me in his house in Jakarta. I had been a little uneasy before the interview since the draft chapter which I had sent him at some points took a critical view of some of his autobiographical statements. I need not have worried. He had certainly read my draft very carefully and had noted the criticisms, but he said that I was free to hold to my opinions if that was the way the text struck me, although he himself did not agree with me. I thank him for his scholarly professionalism.

When engaged on this book I could not help but reflect on how fortunate I had been in comparison with the people whose lives I was writing about. I have always been surrounded by close family and friends and have never experienced separation, let alone exile or imprisonment. That I have been able to live a life of relative *otium cum dignitate* in circumstances which permit me to conduct research and write books, including this one, I owe entirely to my wife and children. They know that, but I should like to make a public acknowledgement of it. Finally, just to address them directly: Ben isn't here for this book, but I know that you remember him as I do and you will allow him the dedication.