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# YOUNG SOEHARTO

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# YOUNG SOEHARTO

The Making of a Soldier, 1921-1945

DAVID JENKINS

“For if we are to understand changes in human history, human philosophy, we must always remember the importance of single generations. One generation of men may be bound together by common experiences from which its fathers and sons are exempt; and if those experiences have been signal, terrible, inspiring, they will give to that generation a character distinctive to itself, incommunicable to other men. How can we who lived through the 1930s, whose minds and attitudes were formed by the terrible events of those days, understand or be understood by men to whom those events are mere history, reduced to the anodyne prose of textbooks? Of course not every generation has common experiences sufficient to mark it out in this way; the experiences, if they are to have this effect, must be powerful, formidable, inspiring. But if they are inspiring, then there are such generations. Spaniards, in their history, talk of ‘the generation of ‘98’ as an enormous, significant fact which alone gives meaning to a part of its course. In Europe the generation of the 1930s may well prove similar. And in seventeenth-century Europe, and particularly Protestant Europe, the generation of the 1620s was the same.”

Hugh Trevor-Roper, *The Crisis of the Seventeenth Century: Religion, The Reformation, and Social Change*  
(New York: Harper & Row, 1967)

“I returned, and saw under the sun, that the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, neither yet bread to the wise, nor yet riches to men of understanding, nor yet favour to men of skill; but time and chance happeneth to them all.”

Ecclesiastes 9:11

“According to Mr Wöller, the Dutch are the most humane of the imperialist powers. If so, God knows what the others can be like.”

George Orwell, in a review of *Zest for Life*,  
a novel by Johann Wöller,  
*Time and Tide*, 17 October 1936

In memory of

PAMELA WINIFRED ANN JENKINS, 1943–1998

and

JAMIE ANDREW JENKINS, 1970–1996

First published in Singapore in 2021 by  
ISEAS Publishing  
30 Heng Mui Keng Terrace  
Singapore 119614  
E-mail: [publish@iseas.edu.sg](mailto:publish@iseas.edu.sg)  
Website: <http://bookshop.iseas.edu.sg>

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### ISEAS Library Cataloguing-in-Publication Data

Names: Jenkins, David

Title: Young Soeharto : The Making of a Soldier, 1921–1945 / David Jenkins.

Description: Singapore : ISEAS – Yusof Ishak Institute, 2021. | Includes bibliographical references | “The first volume in a three-volume series”.

Identifiers: ISBN 9789814881005 (paperback) | ISBN 9789814881012 (pdf) | ISBN 9789814881029 (epub)

Subjects: LCSH: Soeharto, 1921–2008—Biography. | Indonesia—Presidents—Biography. | Indonesia—Armed Forces—Political activity. | Indonesia—Politics and government—1921–1945.

Classification: LCC DS645.1 S9J52

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#### *Photo credits:*

Front cover – Main photo, Lt. Col. Soeharto, Yogyakarta, 1949 (*Indonesia Press Photo Service, IPPHOS*); top right, Sukarno, arms raised, leads Indonesian dignitaries in a “Banzai!” cheer at the former Dutch Governor General’s palace in Jakarta in 1944. (*Spaarnestad Fotoarchief ID: 479383. SFA 002022132*); bottom, Dutch colonial army volunteers, Buitenzorg (Bogor), 1915. (*Spaarnestad ID: 403932. SFA: 022801511*).

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Typeset by Superskill Graphics Pte Ltd

Printed in Singapore by Markono Print Media Pte Ltd

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# Foreword

David Jenkins' biography of the late dictator of Indonesia, General Suharto, is truly extraordinary. The only other grand biographies of famous Indonesians—Rudolf Mrázek's on the country's first Prime Minister, Sutan Sjahrir, and Harry Poeze's on the legendary communist Tan Malaka—were written long after their heroes were dead, and depended mainly on archival sources.

Jenkins became very well known for his book *Suharto and His Generals*, published in 1984 when the dictator was at the peak of his power. This work relied substantially on the author's astonishing store of intimate interviews with senior and high-ranking generals of Suharto's generation. The biography still relies on Jenkins' unique access to the military elite right up to the present, which one can only explain by his calm, tact, patience, and friendly sobriety. But it also relies on Jenkins' searches in all kinds of newly-opened archives, not only in Indonesia, but in the UK, Japan, the Netherlands, the US and Australia.

Rather than spending a lot of time and paper denouncing the brutal and secretive dictator of 30+ years (in the manner of most academic work on Suharto), Jenkins does a great job of locating him within the turbulent framework of Indonesia's society and politics from the last years of firm Dutch colonial rule, the violent Japanese Occupation, the revolutionary war 1945–49 which ended with worldwide recognition of the country's independence, the creation and downfall of constitutional democracy, the deepening of the Cold War, the overthrow of Sukarno's populist-authoritarian Guided Democracy, the vast massacres of the left in 1965–66, and Suharto's own coming to power.

The most fascinating part of the book is what Jenkins discovered about Suharto's parents, his childhood and (minimal) education, his training in the colonial military, his experiences in the Japanese-formed Peta military, and his activities during the Revolution. He had to ease his way through a vast amount of lies, propaganda, secretiveness, and prejudices. As a much-respected long-time journalist, Jenkins' prose is excellent, without any academic gobbledegook, his analysis is almost always astute and balanced, and his attitude is based on the big questions of how and why a man like Suharto could not only come to power but could also maintain it so long.

*Ben Anderson\**

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\* The late Benedict R. O'G. Anderson was the Aaron L. Binenkorp Professor of International Studies Emeritus at Cornell University. He was a founding editor of the journal *Indonesia* and the author of *Java in a Time of Revolution: Occupation and Resistance, 1944–46* and *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*.

# A Note on Spelling and Names

It is difficult to be systematic when spelling Indonesian names. During the colonial era, Indonesian words and names were rendered in Roman script using Dutch spelling conventions, with the system being formalized early in the twentieth century. The use of these conventions (*dj* for the English *j*, *j* for *y*, *sj* for *sh*, *tj* for *ch* and *oe* for *u*) lent, at least for English-speakers, an air of grace and elegance, not to say romance and exoticism, to place names such as Tjilatjap and Soerabaja as well as a certain heaviness to some of the longer personal names, especially the more elaborate Javanese ones. Between 1947 and 1972 the Indonesian government reformed the spelling system. Some Dutch vowel and consonant forms were discarded and the spelling adapted to the form used in Malaysia, although not consistently. In this book I use the modern spelling for most place names: Jakarta, not Djakarta; Cianjur, not Tjiandjur; Surabaya, not Soerabaja, Yogyakarta, not Jogjakarta. For convenience, however, I refer to Java and Sumatra, not Jawa and Sumatera. Throughout the book the place names employed are those in use today, not those of the colonial period, thus Jakarta for Batavia and Bogor for Buitenzorg, except where these places are referred to in contemporary documents. The island of Sulawesi is referred to as such, not as Celebes. There is a minor convention which uses “Borneo” for the whole of that island (in recognition of the Malaysian presence there) and “Kalimantan” for the Indonesian regions (irrespective of administrative division).

Personal names present more of a problem. The 1947–72 reforms were intended to apply to personal names, which would have seen Soemitro

Djojohadikoesoemo stripped back to Sumitro Joyohadikusumo, Soetjipto become Sucipto, Roem become Rum and Tjan become Can. But many Indonesians, having a sentimental attachment to the old spelling and/or an aversion to the new forms, did not change their names. (Some Indonesians appear to have adopted the older spellings in order to suggest they have a colonial-era pedigree.) This has led to some confusion.

President Soeharto stuck to the "old" Dutch spelling of his name, rather than switch to "Suharto". In November 1965, as he was consolidating his power following a strike by the leftwing September 30th Movement, the army newspaper *Berita Yudha* ran an article under the heading, "The name of the Minister/Army Commander", advising that the correct spelling was "Soeharto". From some time in the mid-sixties, when he altered his signature quite radically, Soeharto deftly avoided the issue of the *oe* or *u* by signing himself "S/Harto". Falling into step, his wife, Siti Hartinah Soeharto, signed herself "T. S. Harto," the "T" coming from "Tien", an abbreviation of "Hartinah." Indonesia's first president had taken quite the opposite tack. While giving instructions that his name was to be written as "Sukarno", he went on signing himself, by force of habit and sentiment, "Soekarno".

Sukarno and Soeharto were each given only one name at birth, a common practice in Java. In a surprising number of books, Indonesia's first Head of State is referred to as Achmad Sukarno or Achmed Sukarno. In his 1966 autobiography, Sukarno explained how that error came about: "Some stupid newspaperman once wrote my first name was Achmed. Ridiculous. I am just Sukarno. Having only one name is not unusual in our society."\* In 1991, after making the pilgrimage to Mecca, Soeharto took the title "Haji" and added the name "Mohammad" to his existing Javanese name.

This book makes one or two compromises of its own on spelling. I have sought, wherever possible, to spell personal names according to individual preferences. This is done not solely out of respect but because it looks more than a little odd to have a caption on a photograph identifying someone as, say, "Murdani" when the individual in question is wearing a plastic name tag saying "Moerdani". It is often difficult to know how one should refer to an individual Indonesian when his or her name is mentioned for a second or subsequent time, or is listed in a bibliography.

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\* *Sukarno: An Autobiography, As Told to Cindy Adams* (Hong Kong: Gunung Agung, 1966), p. 26.

This is especially true when two Muslim names come together or when a Muslim name is paired for example with a Sundanese or Javanese name. While it seems clear that Abdul Gafur cannot sensibly be called Abdul on second reference, Kemal Idris could be either Kemal or Idris. Although Javanese who happen to have more than one name often prefer to be known by their first name (for example, Sumitro, Roeslan, Prabowo), for the purpose of this book I sometimes use their last name, especially in the bibliography. Chinese names are a problem too. Most Indonesians identified as being of Chinese descent trace their origins to the Hokkien, Hakka and Teochew-speaking communities of southern China whose pronunciation of Chinese names is significantly different from “standard” Mandarin Chinese. When spelled using European language conventions, Indonesian Chinese personal names can take many forms. Most Southeast Asian Chinese have resisted adopting the pinyin transcription, and so their names are presented here, as far as possible, according to their known preferences.

The titles of newspapers, periodicals, books and other contemporary written sources are given in their original spellings, as are quotations from such sources. Foreign language terms are italicized throughout the text and footnotes except where these have come into common English usage. Names of organizations are not italicized, even when they include foreign terms. Koran is spelled Qur’an.

The spelling of Dutch has also undergone reform since World War II. In this book I have adopted the modern spelling whenever appropriate. Thus the Dutch colonial army, or KNIL, which returned to Indonesia in 1945, is spelled Koninklijk Nederlands-Indisch Leger, as it was in the late 1940s, rather than Koninklijk Nederlandsch Indisch Leger, its pre-war name. The names of organizations that had ceased to exist by the time the new spelling system was adopted retain the old spelling. Dutch family names are listed in both the Bibliography and the Index without regard to words such as “van” and “de”. When mentioning Japanese names, I follow the Japanese custom and put the family name before the given name. The only exception to this is when a Japanese author, writing in a language other than Japanese, reverses his or her customary name order. In such cases, I list the name in the way it has been given (and recorded in other works), except in the Bibliography and the Index, where the family name precedes the given name, with no comma between the two. Diacritical marks have been omitted.

A Glossary of words and abbreviations used in the text can be found at the back of the book.

# A Note on Military Organization

## LATE DUTCH COLONIAL PERIOD

In 1940, the Royal Netherlands Indies Army (KNIL) had a strength of about 40,000 men, built around a ground combat force of nineteen “field [infantry] battalions”, each of about 875 men, eighteen “garrison battalions”, which were not in fact battalions at all, and a rapidly expanding air wing. Seventeen of the infantry battalions were based on Java, with fourteen earmarked solely for defence against an external enemy and two (or by one account three) engaged in *maréchaussée* (internal security) duties. The other two battalions were stationed in the East Kalimantan “oil ports” of Balikpapan and Tarakan, where they too were expected to provide defence against external attack. In Palembang, South Sumatra, the most lucrative of the oil-producing regions in the Netherlands East Indies, the Dutch would establish a small “mobile battalion”.

Elsewhere in the Outer Islands, the KNIL was responsible essentially for the maintenance of law and order in support of the civil power, although in 1939 it had taken on some external defence responsibilities. Officers were rotated on an individual basis between Java and widely dispersed garrisons and stockades beyond the Java Sea; units, right down to nineteen-man *brigades*, were rotated as units. By December 1941, KNIL numbers had swollen to just over 113,000, with 94,000 men on Java and some 19,000 in the Outer Islands.<sup>1</sup> In early 1942, the colonial army stood at 121,200. But this included 19,000 Indonesians and 8,500 Dutchmen serving as part of a Dad’s Army on plantations and in the cities, and 4,700 elderly soldiers who had been recalled to duty. Also included were 11,400 Dutchmen serving as part of the Home Guard.<sup>2</sup> This force was not, by any

stretch of the imagination, a plausible deterrent to a nation like Japan, which was increasingly intent on seizing the great East Indies oilfields. In an appraisal written at the time, the 1940–42 Australian Chief of the General Staff, Lieutenant General V.A.H. Sturdee, advised that the KNIL “should be regarded more as well-equipped Home Guards than an Army capable of undertaking active operations in the field.”<sup>3</sup>

### JAPANESE OCCUPATION

In March 1942, having gained control of the Outer Islands, the Japanese put 55,000 seasoned troops ashore on Java. In nine days they overwhelmed the Dutch and a small Allied contingent. Five months later most of the Japanese combat forces had been shipped out, to Burma, to the eastern region of the archipelago and to Guadalcanal. To make up for the units that had been redeployed, the commander of the Japanese Sixteenth Army was sent “ten battalions of aged soldiers”, or roughly 10,000 men in all. Short of manpower, the Sixteenth Army established, trained and armed a decentralized Java Volunteer Defence Force, which was known to them as the *Giyugun* and to the Indonesians as *Peta*. By late 1944, *Peta* consisted of sixty-nine Indonesian battalions (*daidan*), with a total strength of about 37,500 men. Sixty-six of these battalions were on Java, the other three on Bali. Each *daidan* had about 500 men and was commanded by an Indonesian *daidancho*, whose rank was roughly equivalent to major. Below the *daidan* there were four companies (*chudan*), each commanded by a *chudancho*, whose rank was equivalent to captain. Each *chudan* consisted of four infantry platoons (*shodan*), each commanded by a *shodancho*, who was the equivalent of a first lieutenant. On Sumatra, the Japanese set up a separate 20,000-strong *Giyugun*, with 150-man *chudan* as the largest fighting units.



ANDAMAN SEA

FRENCH INDOCHINA

THAILAND

SOUTH CHINA SEA

Banda Aceh

Penang

BRUNEI

MALAYA

Medan  
Pematang  
Siantar

Kuala Lumpur  
Malacca

SARAWAK

SUMATRA

SINGAPORE

Pekanbaru  
Bukittinggi

Pontianak

KALIMANTAN

Padang  
Jambi

Muntok

BANGKA

Bengkulu

Palembang

Banjarmasin

INDIAN OCEAN

JAVA SEA

Batavia (Jakarta)  
Bogor

MADURA

Bandung

JAVA

Semarang

Solo

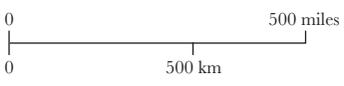
Surabaya

BALI

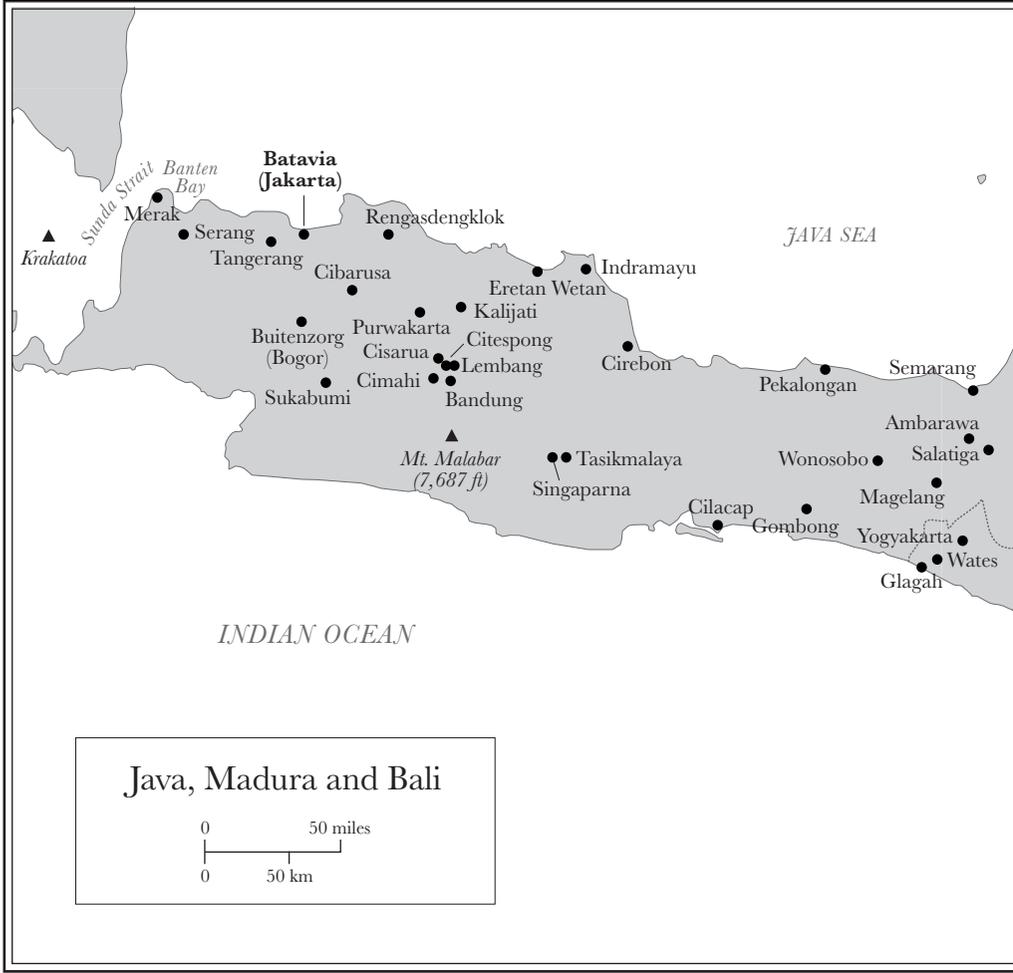
Yogyakarta

Denpasar

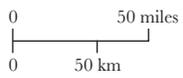
Netherlands East Indies



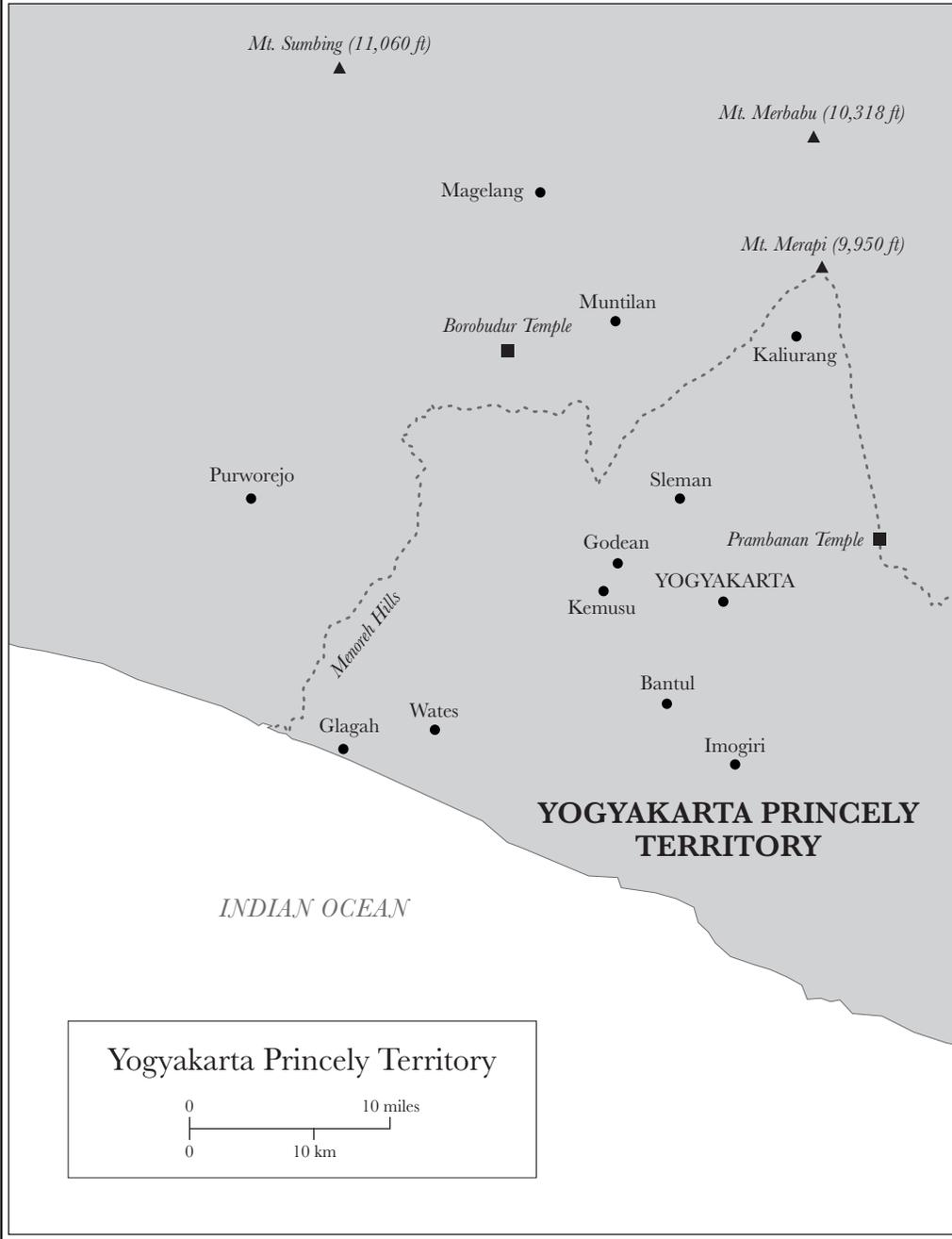




Java, Madura and Bali







*Mt. Sumbing (11,060 ft)*



*Mt. Merbabu (10,318 ft)*



Magelang ●

*Mt. Merapi (9,950 ft)*



Muntilan ●

*Borobudur Temple*



Kaliurang ●

Purworejo ●

Sleman ●

Godean ●

*Prambanan Temple*



YOGYAKARTA ●

Kemusu ●

*Merapi Hills*

Bantul ●

Glagah ●

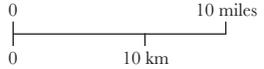
Wates ●

Imogiri ●

**YOGYAKARTA PRINCELY TERRITORY**

*INDIAN OCEAN*

Yogyakarta Princely Territory



# CENTRAL JAVA



● Boyolali

SURAKARTA  
(SOLO)



*Astana Girilayu*  
(Tombs of four later  
Mangkunegaran rulers)

*Mt. Lawu*  
(10,712 ft)



*Astana Giri Bangun*  
(Soeharto Family Mausoleum)



Sukoharjo



*Astana Mangadeg*  
(Tombs of the first  
three Mangkunegaran rulers)

Klaten



Selogiri



Wonogiri



Wuryantoro

*Gajean Mungkur*  
Reservoir



● Wonosari

Pacitan



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# Preface

At around 7:15 a.m. on Friday, 1 October 1965, Lieutenant Colonel Untung, a battalion commander in President Sukarno's Tjakrabirawa palace guard, issued a startling proclamation over Radio Republik Indonesia. A hitherto unknown "September 30th Movement", he declared, had saved the head of state from a CIA-backed "Council of Generals" which was plotting to overthrow the government. What Untung did not disclose was that three or four hours earlier Tjakrabirawa troops had murdered the Army Commander, Lieutenant General Achmad Yani, and two other prominent generals in their homes and had kidnapped and murdered, or were about to murder, three more generals. The Defence Minister, General A.H. Nasution, had narrowly escaped assassination; his five-year-old daughter had been mortally wounded, a young lieutenant seized and murdered. By late that afternoon, Major General Soeharto, the commander of the Army Strategic Reserve (Kostrad), had marshalled a counter force, won over a battalion of September 30th troops guarding key locations in central Jakarta and put a second battalion to flight. A botched and brutal strike against army leaders known for their hostility to the large Indonesian Communist Party (Partai Komunis Indonesia, PKI) had failed. And although there remained a dangerous standoff in Central Java, where many units had come out in favour of the September 30th Movement, the power balance in Jakarta had changed irrevocably.

On the following Monday, a day of strong emotion and high drama in Indonesia, the army recovered the bodies of the six generals and the lieutenant from a disused well known as the Crocodile Hole. The corpses were bloated and blackened, in most cases barely recognizable. Eleven

days later, Soeharto gave a report on recent developments to leaders of the National Front, a left-leaning body Sukarno had established to mobilize political parties and other groups behind government policies.<sup>1</sup> “We have found the bodies of the generals,” he said at one point, in what appears to have been an informal exchange with front members. “But I am also a general and many of you don’t know me.” He then gestured towards K.P.H. Haryasudirja Sasraningrat, a thirty-nine-year-old Javanese aristocrat who was Minister for Water Resources in Sukarno’s cabinet. “If you have any questions about me,” he continued, “well, Mr Haryasudirja can answer you.” Haryasudirja “knows me very well.” This was unexpected. Haryasudirdja was taken aback. “He appointed me!” the former cabinet minister recalled many years later.<sup>2</sup>

Unexpected or not, it was a shrewd gambit by Soeharto. Haryasudirja, a senior prince of the Pakualaman, the minor court in Yogyakarta, *did* know Soeharto.<sup>3</sup> They went back twenty years. A sociable, well-educated man, fluent in Dutch, English and German as well as Javanese, Indonesian and Sundanese, Haryasudirja had been associated with a group of young democratic socialists (and some others more to the left) who met regularly at a house in the densely-settled Pathok quarter of Yogyakarta during the 1942–45 Japanese occupation—a house where Soeharto had, at the age of twenty-four, come calling immediately after the war, seeking to learn something about politics. Their paths had crossed again during the bitterly fought 1945–49 Indonesian National Revolution against the Dutch, who were seeking to regain control of their lucrative Southeast Asian colony. In 1947–48, the prince, by then a first lieutenant in the Indonesian National Army, and several other junior army officers had lived in the same small but elegant Dutch-era housing complex as Lieutenant Colonel Soeharto, sharing with him their rice and *lauk pauk*, the various side dishes that accompany the rice: vegetables and perhaps a bit of meat or fermented soy bean cake (*tempé*). He had, following Soeharto’s marriage in nearby Solo in December 1947, helped arrange a wedding party in Yogyakarta, allowing Soeharto to introduce his wife to his friends and acquaintances, most of them army colleagues who had not been able to attend the wedding.

Haryasudirja’s older brother, Captain Frans Hariadi, had been one of Soeharto’s battalion commanders until he was killed in a clash with Dutch troops in January 1949. On Soeharto’s orders, neatly typewritten at a guerrilla village south of Yogyakarta and carried twenty miles by a

courier who made his way on foot across open country, skirting Dutch outposts and patrols, Haryasudirja had become the acting commander of his brother's battalion. He had led the battalion, one of Soeharto's best, for the rest of the year, participating in heavy fighting against the Dutch. In March 1949, when Soeharto commanded a two thousand-man attack on Dutch-occupied Yogyakarta, Haryasudirja, then aged twenty-three, had led two hundred men into the heart of the city, where they opened fire on a Dutch post in front of the two-storey Merdeka Hotel. At one stage, some of his men were only twenty yards from the Dutch, who returned fire with Bren guns, killing several guerrillas. Haryasudirja and his subordinates survived a heavy Dutch counter-attack by dropping down into storm water drains and scrambling five or six hundred yards to the shallow Winongo River. He found Soeharto, who had left the city thirty minutes earlier, at a forward command post on the opposite bank. As Indonesian troops hurriedly withdrew from the city, Soeharto calmly finished a bowl of *soto babat* (tripe soup).

When, at the end of the year, the Dutch cut their losses, recognized Indonesia's independence and pulled out (while retaining control of mountainous West New Guinea, over which negotiations were to continue), Haryasudirja returned to civilian life and studied engineering. Now, in the complex world of post-coup Jakarta, with tension high and many cross-currents running, this Roman Catholic engineer from Central Java was well qualified for the role that Soeharto had just assigned him. He not only knew the general well; he had six other useful attributes: he was a nationalist, a cabinet minister and a moderate; he was non-Communist, non-party and non-Islamic.

The morning after Soeharto's speech to the National Front, President Sukarno, believing that the dead generals may indeed have been plotting against him, was still downplaying the significance of their deaths. This kind of killing, he had said, was "something ordinary and normal in a revolution", "a ripple in the ocean." But senior army officers remained incensed. They were convinced that the Indonesian Communist Party was behind the Untung "coup." A ruthless purge of the party was already underway. And at the Presidential Palace that day a reluctant Sukarno found himself obliged to formally install Soeharto as the new Army Minister concurrently Army Commander. The atmosphere was icy. Before the ceremony, Soeharto stood with his adjutant in one corner of the marble-floored reception hall, rather reserved, almost shy, not wanting to

push himself forward in a gathering such as this, even as he was moving so decisively on the political stage, drawing enormous power into his own hands. None of the members of Sukarno's hundred-strong cabinet approached him, and the three Communist ministers were noticeably absent. None of the ministers except Haryasudirja really knew him. Haryasudirja was standing that morning with several of his ministerial colleagues. He did not notice Soeharto enter. When someone said to him, "We know that you were with Soeharto during the Revolution. Where is he?", Haryasudirja scanned the room. Spotting Soeharto in the corner, he went over to speak to him, thinking, as he said later, that Soeharto looked "lonely."<sup>4</sup>

As it happened, President Sukarno also knew Soeharto well, had known him in fact almost as long as Haryasudirja had. Unlike his Minister for Water Resources, Sukarno did not particularly like Soeharto: he considered him stubborn, as indeed he was. In 1946, when a group of left-leaning army officers kidnapped Prime Minister Sutan Sjahrir, Sukarno had put Soeharto in an invidious position by insisting that he detain his own divisional commander, an order Soeharto had chosen not to obey. Soeharto had proven hard-headed once again—Sukarno always used the Dutch word: *koppig*—in 1958. While serving as the regional commander in Central Java, he had incurred Sukarno's displeasure by working closely with the staunchly anti-Communist provincial governor and by complaining to the President about the growing influence of the Communist Party. As Soeharto told the story, Sukarno became "rather angry" at his "respectful" expressions of concern and was adamant that the PKI had a legitimate role to play. "And this is my business," the President is said to have declared. "You, Soeharto, you are a soldier. Politics is my business. Leave these matters to me."<sup>5</sup>

Now, seven years later, politics was increasingly Soeharto's business.<sup>6</sup> And now, it was clear, he had no intention of leaving those matters solely to Sukarno. On the contrary, he was moving to sideline the charismatic President, who had been the towering figure on the Indonesian political stage for the best part of forty years and Head of State for twenty. This would, it is true, be a long and drawn-out process—death by a thousand cuts. Sukarno still commanded great support, not least in parts of the armed forces. Cautious by nature, Soeharto had no wish to plunge the nation into civil war, although he was willing to countenance a swift and murderous purge of the left. He took for his motto an old Javanese

adage: *alon-alon asal kelakon* (slow but sure).<sup>7</sup> This caution was to serve him well in the months ahead. “If Yani had lived through that coup attempt in ‘65,” claimed Colonel George Benson, a former US defence attaché who had known the late Army Commander well and who had coached and encouraged him when he spent a year at the prestigious US Army Command and General Staff College at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, “there would have been a civil war right on the spot. He never would have had the patience to deal with the President the way Soeharto did.... He just wouldn’t have had the patience to do it.”<sup>8</sup>

At this time most Indonesians were like the National Front delegates whom Soeharto had addressed on 15 October and the cabinet ministers who gathered at the palace the following day. All they really knew about Soeharto was that he had held a number of centrally important army commands, that he had taken charge of the nation in a time of crisis and that he was now directing a terrifying house-to-house *razzia* against known or suspected Communists—a *razzia* in which perhaps half a million people would be slaughtered, mainly in Java and Bali but also in North Sumatra, with another million consigned to a nationwide chain of concentration camps in what was to become, both literally and figuratively, the Gulag Archipelago.<sup>9</sup>

“In terms of the numbers killed,” the US Central Intelligence Agency would observe in 1968, “the anti-PKI massacres in Indonesia rank as one of the worst mass murders of the 20th century, along with the Soviet purges of the 1930s, the Nazi mass murders of the Second World War, and the Maoist bloodbath of the early 1950s.”<sup>10</sup> At no time, either in public or private, would Soeharto be heard to express a word of regret or remorse for the wave of killing which accompanied his ascent to power.<sup>11</sup> These murders were to cast a dark shadow over the nation he ruled. No one could ever forget who had sent the army out to train, coordinate and incite the anti-Communist civilian death squads, although it is true that many of the vigilantes, especially those in conservative rural Muslim communities, needed little encouragement to hunt down and kill Communists. Nor would the killing end in 1965–66. Ten years later Soeharto would systematically destabilize, and then invade, Portuguese East Timor, creating conditions which lead to the unnatural death of perhaps 100,000–150,000 of the territory’s 700,000 people.

When Soeharto successfully demanded in March 1966 that Sukarno give him full executive authority, Indonesia was a deeply divided nation,

fractured along ideological, class, religious and ethnic lines. The state was barely functioning. The economy was in disarray, wrecked by war, rebellion, agitational politics and mismanagement. Inflation was running at over 600 per cent. Soeharto took over a nation in chaos, the largest in Southeast Asia, almost three times more populous than Vietnam, where the United States was beginning to commit regular army units to fight communism, and transformed it into one of the “Asian miracle” economies—only to leave it back on the brink of ruin when he was forced from office thirty-two years later. As the World Bank noted soon after his fall in 1998, “A country that achieved decades of rapid growth, stability and poverty reduction, is now near economic collapse .... No country in recent history, let alone one the size of Indonesia, has ever suffered such a dramatic reversal of fortune.”<sup>12</sup> In August the following year, Professor Subroto, a dapper, bow-tie wearing economist who had served as a cabinet minister under Soeharto for seventeen years, observed, “The work of the past 30 years has been evaporating before our eyes ... the country could descend into chaos and even break up.”<sup>13</sup>

## II

*Young Soeharto*, although complete in itself, is the first volume in a three-volume series that will chart the rise to power of one of Asia’s most brutal, most durable, most avaricious and most successful dictators—if, in speaking of success, we focus on the relative stability of his time in office and the achievement of 8 per cent per annum GDP growth over twenty years, and ignore the fact that Soeharto left the economy back in chaos when he departed; that East Timor, the only territory he annexed, voted overwhelmingly for independence only fifteen months after his fall; and that he created no political or state institutions but instead undermined the institutions he found, rickety though they were, and kept society suppressed for more than three decades.<sup>14</sup> In tracing the eventful arc of former President Soeharto’s early decades, these volumes will seek to provide not only a fuller, richer, more nuanced portrait of the man himself, but also bring to life the story of Indonesia’s birth as an independent nation. The man who was to become Indonesia’s second Head of State emerges as an outsider who overcompensated for the difficult hand that life had dealt him, who trusted only his family and his closest colleagues, who was obsessive in his attention to detail, ruthless in his pursuit of objectives and indifferent to considerations of propriety.

Astute and watchful, quick to strike down potential challengers, Soeharto remained in power longer than any other major Third World leader apart from Kim Il Sung, Fidel Castro, Muamar Gaddafi and Lee Kuan Yew. During this time, no fewer than seven US presidents occupied the White House. A man of resourcefulness and guile, an enigma even to his closest associates, obsessed with stability, order and economic development, finding relaxation in farming, golf and deep-sea fishing, he was one of the most complex and important Third World leaders of the post-World War II era.

Soeharto was cut from very different cloth, emotionally and ideologically, from an earlier generation of charismatic post-colonial figures such as Sukarno, Ho Chi Minh, Jawaharlal Nehru and Colonel Gamal Abdel Nasser, men who were in varying degrees on the left of the political spectrum, just as Soeharto was on the right of that spectrum. Yet he achieved far more for his nation in material terms than any of those men despite economic upheavals late in his presidency: in 1993 the World Bank began to refer to Indonesia as one of the eight “miracle” economies of Asia.<sup>15</sup> Soeharto’s successful combination of authoritarian rule and firm economic management gave Indonesia, a mendicant among nations when he came to office, a foothold in the global economy. It was an approach taken by a number of other conservative—albeit highly dissimilar—Third World leaders, including Lee in Singapore, Augusto Pinochet in Chile and Park Chung Hee in South Korea. It was an approach taken also by Deng Xiaoping, once the antithesis of a conservative, as he steered China towards a booming market economy.

Under Soeharto, Indonesia achieved impressive economic advances, attracting investment from the United States, Japan and Western Europe. As well as being a goldmine (sometimes literally) for major US resource companies (Caltex, Exxon, Freeport), it caught the eye of AT&T and Nike, amongst others. With the economic wheels beginning to turn and with money flowing at last into the nation’s coffers, Soeharto was able to preside over a Green Revolution, a Family Planning Revolution and a major expansion of the education system. Had Indonesia maintained the fertility rates of the 1950s over the half century to 2020, the population would not stand at about 280 million, as it does today. Instead, there would be an additional 50 to 65 million mouths to feed, children to educate and workers to employ. As the demographer Terence Hull notes, “That is a burden no government would have welcomed.”<sup>16</sup> But

Indonesia also suffered far more than any of its neighbours at the time of the 1997–98 Asian Financial Crisis. In the period after that it became the focus of controversial International Monetary Fund and World Bank rescue packages. Twenty-two years after Soeharto was driven from office Indonesia is growing again and seen by many as one of the most important developing nations in the world, along with countries such as Brazil and India.

Because of its size and location, Indonesia has been courted since independence by most of the major powers: by the Soviet Union, which in the early 1960s provided it with warships and modern, long-range bombers; by the United States, which trained so many of its economists and army officers and which invested heavily in its oil industry, and by China, which courted its first President and Communist Party, only to be locked out for nearly two-and-a-half decades after the turmoil of 1965. A nation born amid violent upheaval, Indonesia has resorted to military force three times to advance its domestic and foreign policy goals—against the Dutch in West New Guinea, against the Malaysians, British and Australians in Malaysia and against the left-leaning Fretilin independence movement in Portuguese East Timor. It has been seen by its neighbours, not least Australia, as restless, volatile and expansionist. It is the only nation to have withdrawn from the United Nations. Sukarno took it out (or at least announced that he was taking it out) at the end of 1964; Soeharto is sometimes said to have taken it back in nearly two years later, although in point of fact Indonesia had remained a member—albeit non-participating—during that time.<sup>17</sup>

### III

This volume traces the story of how Soeharto began his rise to power, an ascent which would be capped by those thirty-two years (1966–98) in office, first as Army Commander, then as Acting President and finally, in 1968, as the President of Indonesia, which was to become, with the collapse of the Soviet Union, the fourth most populous nation on earth.

But this, it is important to stress, is not simply a book about one man.

In recounting how Soeharto rose from poverty to power it seeks to provide an accessible introduction to the complex, but dramatic and often utterly absorbing, social, political, religious, economic and military factors that have shaped, and which continue to shape, Indonesia, a nation which was proclaimed on 17 August 1945, two days after the Japanese surrender,

and which was to weather many intense storms in the years thereafter. This is the story of how a new nation came into being, how it fought for its independence and how it made its way in the world. Indonesia's experiences were replicated, in one form or another, in many other former colonies in the mid-twentieth century. In this book, the focus is not just on individuals and events and great historical forces, vital as they are, but also on institutions—not least educational institutions, including military and para-military training centres—and the role they played in the period of late Dutch colonial rule and of Japanese occupation.

Soeharto did not create modern Indonesia, of course. That honour belongs to leaders such as Sukarno, Mohammad Hatta and the many other nationalists who had been active in the pre-war independence movement and who had in some cases endured long periods in Dutch prisons or in mind-numbing internal exile in remote corners of the Netherlands East Indies. But Soeharto played an increasingly important role as a military commander during the 1945–49 war of independence. Through a fortuitous combination of birth, geography, training and circumstance, he was present at many of the most significant stages of modern Indonesian history, both before and after independence, and not always on the sidelines. That can be said about few other people, civilian or military. For that reason, an account of Soeharto's career serves as a strong connecting thread, linking the events that make up Indonesia's often turbulent and violent history. This volume takes the story from Soeharto's birth in a hamlet in Central Java to his service in the Royal Netherlands Indies Army, his time as a policeman under the Japanese and then as a soldier in the Japanese-created Java Volunteer Defence Force, which was known to the Indonesians as Peta. Subsequent volumes will trace his role as a military commander and guerrilla leader in the late 1940s, his emergence as an important mid-level officer in the Indonesian National Army and his merciless suppression of the Communist Party in 1965–66.

Unlike many of those who rose to prominence during the Indonesian Revolution, Soeharto was "not propp'd by ancestry"; he came from a humble rural background. Unlike others who would go on to hold the high ground in the Indonesian Army, he had not enjoyed a first-rate Dutch high school education. Nor had he attended a prestigious overseas staff college or gained experience abroad as a military attaché. However, Soeharto possessed what Joseph Conrad called "ability in the Abstract." This ability was recognized in succession by the Dutch, by the Japanese,

by his fellow Indonesians (albeit in the latter case with some reluctance), by the Americans, by fellow Southeast Asian leaders and by many others as well.

Although Soeharto ruled Indonesia for so long, little has been written about his early life, his actions during the Revolution, his role as an important army officer under Martial Law in the late 1950s, his central role as the commander of a large, multi-service military operation designed to seize West New Guinea from the Dutch and his subsequent role during Sukarno's 1963–66 "Confrontation" with Malaysia, which saw Indonesian air, sea and land operations against British, Australian and Malaysian forces on the Malay Peninsula and in the British North Borneo territories. Nor has there yet been a full account of his actions during the convulsive political events of 1965. This work will trace the significant events of that life and career. How did Soeharto, a man of such modest social origins and limited education, rise to such a pinnacle of power, supplanting so many better-educated and more sophisticated army officers, to say nothing of highly skilled civilians? How far was his character shaped by the unique cultural, political and religious traditions that govern the life of the Javanese, the dominant ethnic group in Indonesia? Why was his rise to the presidency accompanied by such widespread, centrally directed violence? What part did chance play in his career? What part did money, status, family, authority and friends—if indeed there were many friends—play in his thinking? How, if at all, did his thinking about personal enrichment differ from that of his fellow army officers? And where can the line be drawn in Indonesia between what is excessive and what is acceptable?

To adapt a phrase—and indeed a format—used by Paul Preston in the introduction to his magisterial biography of General Franco, a similar leader in some respects, not least in his willingness to promote the use of exemplary terror, these are important questions with a crucial bearing on Indonesian and Southeast Asia history and they can be answered only by close observation of the man.<sup>18</sup> It is a central thesis of this study that a better understanding of Soeharto's early life and of the kind of man he was is essential if we are to comprehend his later actions, both for good and ill. These volumes seek to recreate the various worlds in which Soeharto lived and worked; worlds which often succeeded one another in quick succession, like sets on a revolving stage, as when the era of Dutch colonialism gave way suddenly to the period of Japanese occupation and

when that, in turn, was replaced by an independent Indonesian Republic, the creation of which brought a whole series of quite separate, rapidly changing and often highly complex environments of its own.

These volumes will place Soeharto within those worlds; they will examine in detail the circumstances of his childhood and his career as an army officer; they will establish where he was at key moments, what experiences he underwent, who he was working with, what orders he issued and how he was regarded by his friends, family, colleagues and opponents, as well as by outside observers. Only by doing this can one hope to understand the factors that shaped the man who was to have such a profound and prolonged impact on Indonesia. Trifles, as Dickens has observed, make the sum of life.

As part of this undertaking the present book will examine the various cultures—Javanese, Dutch colonial, military and Japanese modern—which were, in Ruth McVey's apt phrase, "jostling for influence" in this period, changing and transforming the thinking of Soeharto and his cohorts.<sup>19</sup> One of the main benefits of examining both the milieu and the actions of Soeharto is that it affords us an enhanced understanding of the turbulence of the times and of the cultures that were in play.

In the early years of Soeharto's army-backed "New Order" administration, some political analysts argued that the system of government in Indonesia appeared to be strongly influenced by traditional Javanese political culture. They maintained that Soeharto had recreated the atmosphere of a Javanese *kraton* (royal palace), in which politics was frequently a matter of court intrigue and in which one powerful "prince" was played off against another to the benefit of the ruler. The idea took root that New Order Indonesia was influenced to a disproportionate degree by traditional political culture. It cannot be denied that the rich cultural traditions of Java left an indelible mark on Soeharto. Nor can it be denied that he presided over a latter-day "court", just as Sukarno had done before him. But arguments about the importance of "culture" need to be treated with great care, especially when they impinge on politics. This book argues that we should not place too much reliance on cultural analysis when looking at Soeharto, a leader who, for all his putative "Javaneseness", does not fit comfortably into some of those traditions but who, often enough, deviates from them.<sup>20</sup> The skills that Soeharto brought to the Presidency were not uniquely Javanese or Indonesian political skills. Rather, they were skills that transcended cultural and national boundaries and which

are found in any number of other countries. In Soeharto's Indonesia, Harold Crouch has observed, aspects of traditional culture were applied in a modern setting.<sup>21</sup> The mixture is what counted. Culture reinforced and legitimated behaviour that was not derived exclusively from that particular environment.

It is quite possible, as critics sometimes suggested, that Soeharto's political style had something in common with that of the sultans of Mataram, who dominated East and Central Java between 1582 and 1755. But judging the former Indonesian leader solely by those standards does him a great disservice. As a President seeking to advance his policy goals, and to bring others along with him, Soeharto had far more in common with a number of European and Latin American military officers who assumed high political office—one thinks of Napoleon, Franco and Pinochet—and with a civilian ruler such as Bismarck, although it needs to be added at once that Soeharto, unlike Napoleon and Bismarck, was not a man who had a high regard for workable political institutions or who saw himself as a lawgiver. On the contrary, he was a man who stacked representative bodies with toadies and time-servers and who made a mockery of the notion of judicial independence.<sup>22</sup>

He also had something in common with President Lyndon Baines Johnson, who, although operating in a world of strong institutions, used money and the force of his personality to secure his political goals. There was, as well, one other thing these two men had in common. Johnson, inheriting John F. Kennedy's cabinet, "would remind people again and again that in the chamber where these great decisions were made, there sat the head of the Ford Motor Company, a Rhodes scholar, the dean of Harvard University, and one graduate of San Marcos State Teachers College."<sup>23</sup> Soeharto was not a man given to that sort of boasting, but it was clear to his colleagues that he derived a similar satisfaction from the fact that his cabinets, which were packed at any one time with half a dozen ministers with PhDs in economics or demography or law from prestigious US and Canadian universities, took their marching orders from someone who had never gone beyond the Muhammadiyah *schakelschool* (link school), which was part of the elementary school system for "native" Indonesians, which he attended wearing a *kain* (sarong) and going barefoot. Nor did it displease him that for five years he had as his Vice President, Sultan Hamengku Buwono IX of Yogyakarta, a descendant of the great rulers of Mataram, a man who had lived in Holland for nine

years and had attended the University of Leiden, where he majored in economics.

This book will also examine the place of religion in Indonesia, a country which, although it is neither an Islamic nor a secular state, but something deliberately ill-defined between those two poles, has more Muslims than any other nation. Islam has played a vital—and frequently divisive—role in Indonesian politics since the Proclamation of Independence in 1945, and is central to an understanding of both the nation in general and Soeharto in particular. Soeharto came to the Presidency with a deep scepticism, if not hostility, towards political Islam, although in later years, even before his command over his natural power base in the army slackened, he was to make overtures to the Islamic community. This initial scepticism was shaped partly by his early religious upbringing. While nominally Islamic, this upbringing owed more to Javanese religion (*agama Jawa*), also known as *kebatinan*, a varying mix of Hindu, Buddhist, Islamic and animist elements, than it did to purely Islamic rituals and beliefs. As one scholar notes, many nominally Islamic Javanese refer to themselves as *kejawen* (“Javanist”), practitioners of *Islam Jawa* (Javanese Islam), “with the understanding that they place more emphasis on the mystical than the legal or ritualistic dimensions of Islam.”<sup>24</sup>

But his views were shaped, too, by his experiences as a soldier who had taken part in a frequently bitter post-independence struggle against Islamic extremists. A subsequent volume will look at the role Soeharto played in pursuing and eliminating members of a Central Java battalion which, in the early fifties, threw its weight behind the Darul Islam (Abode of Islam) movement, which sought to create an Islamic state. The intolerance and ferocity of this movement, which was active in West Java, Aceh, South Kalimantan and South Sulawesi, claiming an estimated 25,000 lives, left an abiding aversion to fundamentalism in Indonesia, a nation which had rejected arguments for an Islamic State when the Constitution was drawn up in 1945.<sup>25</sup>

And while the battle against the Darul Islam seemed to have been won by the early sixties, the spore of Islamic radicalism can lie dormant in Indonesian soil for many years. As President, Soeharto would use the army to deal with periodic incidents of Islamic terrorism, almost certainly aware that some of those actions had been secretly funded and encouraged by Major (later Lieutenant) General Ali Moertopo, one of his key intelligence aides, in an attempt to discredit mainstream Islam ahead of a general

election in 1977. Islamic fundamentalism resurfaced with devastating effect in the years immediately after Soeharto's fall in the guise of Jemaah Islamiyah (Islamic Community), a terrorist organization founded by two radical preachers who felt persecuted by Soeharto. Jemaah Islamiyah, which had fraternal relations with al-Qaeda but which was not a subordinate organization, was responsible for a series of deadly terrorist bomb attacks. In the largest of these attacks, in Bali in October 2002, Islamic extremists killed more than two hundred people, including eighty-eight Australians and thirty-eight Indonesians; more than two hundred others were injured. In tracing the origins of the push for an Islamic state these volumes seek to provide a backdrop to an issue that continues to divide Indonesians.

At the same time, this study will focus on the emergence of the army as an increasingly powerful political actor in Indonesia, especially after December 1948, when the civilian leaders surrendered to the Dutch, leaving the army to go on fighting. They will show how the army was created out of many disparate armed groups and how army officers came to believe that the army was entitled to play a central role in Indonesian politics, a belief that ran contrary to those of the nation's early civilian rulers, who accepted as a given the notion of civilian supremacy. These volumes will show how the army officer corps, and in particular General Nasution, played a central role in overthrowing Indonesia's system of parliamentary democracy (1950–57) and was able to gain support for the fundamental principles of Guided Democracy (1959–65).<sup>26</sup> Guided Democracy was a form of authoritarian rule in which the army shared extensive power with Sukarno, even as it sought to curb the influence of a resurrected Communist Party, on which Sukarno, seeking to counterbalance the army, would come to depend. Guided Democracy was to provide, in time, the highly convenient underpinnings for Soeharto's New Order government.

Woven into a subsequent volume will be an account of Soeharto's growing involvement in fund-raising and corruption. In 1949 Soeharto and a freewheeling captain from the Diponegoro Division motor pool established a private vehicle repair shop and a bus and trucking company using four requisitioned military vehicles. This was one of Soeharto's first ventures into the world of business. And although the company was small and set up ostensibly to provide jobs for demobilized soldiers, it would pave the way for a slew of similar, and much larger, ventures in the fifties—ventures with ambitions so broad and accountability standards so opaque that fellow officers in Central Java were soon expressing concern

at what they saw as entirely unacceptable behaviour. The same volume will describe the opium smuggling which military officers engaged in during the Revolution—at the behest, it is true, of Indonesia's civilian government. As he nurtured the Indonesian economy after 1965, drawing in billions of dollars in foreign investment, spinning wealth out of oil and gas, timber and rubber, presiding over a world of monopolies and kickbacks, Soeharto and his family saw their fortunes rise in lock-step. No one knows for sure how much wealth the Soeharto clan accumulated over the years—and much of that wealth was lost during the Asian Financial Crisis of 1997–98—but pre-crash estimates ranged from US\$3 billion to a scarcely credible US\$32 billion.<sup>27</sup>

More broadly, this is a study about the Generation of '45, the generation of Indonesians who fought for their nation's independence, a generation which truly was "bound together by common experiences" from which its fathers and sons were exempt, experiences sufficiently "signal, terrible, inspiring" that they give to that generation a character distinctive to itself.<sup>28</sup>

#### IV

Anyone undertaking a study of Soeharto faces a problem which Paul Preston identifies in his biography of General Franco. "The Caudillo," he wrote, "remains an enigma. Because of the distance that Franco so assiduously built around himself through deliberate obfuscations and silences, we can be sure only of his actions, and, provided they are judiciously evaluated, of the opinions and accounts of those who worked with him. This book is an attempt to observe him more accurately and in more detail than ever before .... [it is] a close study of the man."<sup>29</sup> This life-and-times study of Soeharto's early years draws partly on the rich veins of archival material that are to be found in the Netherlands, the United Kingdom, Japan, Australia, the United States and Indonesia itself. But even more importantly it draws on the "opinions and accounts" of the former president's military and civilian contemporaries, a large number of whom I had an opportunity to interview and whose evidence, it is hoped, has here been judiciously evaluated. That interviewing began during my two postings as a foreign correspondent in Jakarta, first in 1969–70, then in 1976–80. It gathered pace in 1981–82 when I was researching the book *Suharto and His Generals: Indonesian Military Politics 1975–1983*.<sup>30</sup> It slowed considerably but did not cease in the decade from 1983–93, when the Indonesian Government banned my entry into the country following

the publication of that book (which was also banned) and a subsequent article I wrote in the *Sydney Morning Herald* about the financial affairs of the Soeharto family.<sup>31</sup> The bulk of the interviewing, however, was conducted between 1993–2019, when I was allowed back.

If Soeharto emerges from these pages not simply as the corrupt dictator of later popular shorthand but also as a polite, clever and capable young man who carries with him the baggage of a troubled childhood, who is quick to find his way in the world and quick to seize opportunities for self-advancement, who is hardened by parental neglect as well as by war and revolution, and plagued by corrosive greed, then it will be due in large part to this combination of oral history and archival research. Over the past five decades scores of people who knew Soeharto well or who worked with him have shared their recollections and observations of the man.<sup>32</sup> In multiple ways, they have thrown light on important events in Soeharto's life, for which, too often, written records are inadequate or simply non-existent.

Soeharto himself gave few interviews. Although I was to observe him up close many times—at his home, at the Merdeka Palace in Jakarta, on the golf course, in parliament, at military parades, at his ranch in the hills behind Bogor, at ceremonies in Bandung, Jatiluhur, Yogyakarta and Blitar—an interview had seemed quite out of reach when the editor of the Melbourne *Herald* demanded, on a Thursday morning in early November 1969, that I snare just such an on-the-record meeting in a matter of days to “round out” the package of feature-length profiles I had sent him after calling on five prominent Indonesians. As luck would have it, I managed to obtain the required Soeharto interview the following Sunday morning, after politely badgering several presidential aides. We sat under a giant *beringin* (banyan) tree in the lushly expansive grounds of the Bogor Palace, where the President had come to promote a humanitarian project and open a display of artifacts—grass skirts, penis gourds, spears, wooden shields—from West New Guinea, which he, as the military commander charged with preparing a massed assault on the territory, had done as much as anyone, save Sukarno, to wrest from the Dutch. During the interview he was affable but preternaturally cautious. On foreign policy, he expressed views of moderation and restraint, although he clearly retained a deep and abiding distrust of China, which, in his view, had encouraged a Communist lunge for power in 1965. He stressed the importance of regional harmony; he called for closer relations with

Australia. I have always suspected that Siti Hartinah Soeharto, whom I had interviewed at their home a few weeks earlier and who was with him at Bogor that day, helped persuade her husband to give the interview. At our initial meeting, the First Lady had asked how old I was and whether I was married; she had nodded approvingly when I said that I was about to get married. She had gone on to speak at some length about their own married life and their aspirations for their children, aspirations which were all quite conventional.

A month or two later I had another opportunity to observe Soeharto at close quarters, this time at the Rawamangun Golf Course in Jakarta. This was thanks to the late Burt Glinn, an American member of the Paris-based Magnum photo agency, whom I had met at the bull races on Madura, the island off the north coast of East Java. Burt had made his name ten years earlier with an arresting portfolio of black-and-white images of Fidel Castro's triumphant entry into Havana. Now, he had been retained to take a number of formal and informal shots of this ideologically very different Third World leader ahead of his call later that year on President Nixon at the White House. Soeharto, arriving in the front seat of an army jeep, had no objections to my coming along; and for the next couple of hours we accompanied the President and his golfing partner around the course. Security seemed minimal: a couple of slightly-built men with white shirts worn outside their trousers.

Afterwards, the President invited us back for afternoon tea at his house at No. 8 Jalan Cendana, a narrow, tree-lined street in Menteng, only 300 yards from my own house at Jalan Rasamala 4. Madam Soeharto greeted me warmly, reassured to learn that I was now married. Then, quite unexpectedly, the First Lady said she had something for me. An aide disappeared into a side room and reappeared with a bulky, gift-wrapped box. This, it turned out, was a wedding present. A photographer was summoned to record, there in the Soeharto family sitting room, an impromptu presentation ceremony. Later, I walked back to our house, my view of the broken concrete path and open manholes impeded by the package. Inside the box was a twenty-one-piece set of Yogyakarta silverware. There was, I was keenly aware, an ethical dilemma here: a journalist should not accept a gift from a foreign Head of State. But I could not see then, and cannot see now, how it would have been possible to refuse without causing acute embarrassment to the Indonesian President and his wife. There had been no forewarning, no chance to say quietly,

via intermediaries, that while I was deeply touched by the kind thought, this might be a bit awkward. In the years since then, I have comforted myself with that and one other reflection. This, it appeared, was a personal initiative of Ibu Tien Soeharto. It was not as though the President of the Republic of Indonesia was seeking to suborn some stripling from the last major newspaper this side of the South Pole.

As I walked home, carrying this package, I passed, on the corner of Jalan Cendana and Jalan Jusuf Adiwinata, a small, graceful but slightly run-down Dutch villa. This was the home of Raden Darsono Notosudirdjo, a seventy-three-year-old Javanese *priyayi*, or member of the traditional bureaucratic class of Java. In 1917, Darsono had been an enthusiastic supporter of the Bolshevik Revolution. Three years later—and more than twelve months before Soeharto was born—he had co-founded, with Semaun, a railway union activist, the PKI, the first Communist Party in Asia, beating Mao Zedong and his Chinese Communist colleagues by a year and Ho Chi Minh and the Vietnamese (later the Indochinese) Communist Party by ten years. At the time that Soeharto, the Army he commanded and civilian vigilantes destroyed it, “down to the roots”, in the blood-spattered months of late 1965 and early 1966, the PKI was the largest Communist Party in the world outside the Soviet Union and China.

Darsono, who had gone into political exile in January 1926 (he made his way to Moscow), who had resigned from the party in the late 1920s and who had long since abandoned his early Marxist beliefs, was a warm, wise, courtly and reflective man. My predecessor had taken me to meet him within days of my arrival in Indonesia and I had come to know him quite well. Every week or two I would drop in at his house, bringing a pile of foreign newspapers and magazines, which were not widely available then and which he read avidly. Sitting out on his marble-floored verandah in the late afternoon, drinking thick Javanese *kopi tubruk*, listening to his accounts of the great political struggles of the twenties—the railway strike and the pawnbroker’s strike; the time he and others spent in Dutch jails; the internal party squabbles; listening to his recollections of Trotsky’s strong attack on Stalin at a Comintern meeting in Moscow; listening to what he himself had said to Stalin and why he became disenchanted with the Soviet leader; listening to his reminiscences about former revolutionaries and colleagues, whose names, like his, had long been bywords in modern Indonesian history (Tan Malaka and Alimin, Musso and D.N. Aidit), listening to him speak about his years abroad

("I have never seen Sumatra, Bali, Kalimantan but I have seen Vladivostok, Moscow, Berlin, The Hague")—it was impossible not to catch something of the spirit and excitement, the sense of hope and expectation, that had fired the imagination of young Communists and revolutionary socialists during the early years of Indonesia's fight for independence.

And how extraordinary, I always thought as I passed this house or when I caught up with Darsono, on one occasion in the company of Semaun, who had also returned from Moscow, how bizarre, that the man who had co-founded this party and the man who had destroyed it, should be living here only two or three doors from one another, behind the barbed wire street barricades that were dragged into place at dusk each day by heavily-armed members of the presidential guard. At the end of my first posting in Indonesia, Darsono gave me a small farewell present—a glazed plate with a traditional Chinese painting of peony flowers and a small bird, accompanied by a flourish of Chinese calligraphy conveying wishes for good luck and long life. The plate, which was mounted on a wire frame, stands to this day on a shelf in my sitting room. When Darsono died in 1976, the Indonesian Government—Soeharto's Government—offered his family the honour of burial in a heroes cemetery.<sup>33</sup> Needless to say, there had been no such honours in 1965–66 for those who had continued to believe in the party. Their bodies had been dumped in unmarked graves or cast into rivers and left to float downstream.

By the time I began this project I was not well placed to seek further interviews with Soeharto or indeed members of his family. They had taken exception to the 1986 *Sydney Morning Herald* article. This was understandable but unfortunate. I like to think that, had things been different, Soeharto would have enjoyed revisiting many of the matters canvassed in this book and would have been prepared to give his own version of them, a version which, I suspect, would have thrown additional light on subjects not adequately addressed in his rather self-serving "autobiography." That said, he might not have welcomed some of the judgments reached in this book.

The interview material gathered in the course of this project allows us, I believe, to get closer to the inner man than has hitherto been possible. It allows us to see how Soeharto came to be as he was. Unlike the flamboyant and charismatic Sukarno, who lived his life so publicly, captivating mass audiences with his speeches, lingering over breakfast each morning on a terrace at the back of the palace, with cabinet ministers, army officers,

Communist Party leaders, diplomats, hangers-on and assorted young women drifting in and out, Soeharto was a socially reticent man who cloaked his feelings behind a deceptively serene smile, although he, too, had endless meetings with political, religious, military and social leaders, seeking to bend them to his will, as had Sukarno before him. In the words of Roeslan Abdulgani, a close political associate of Indonesia's first president and who, being infinitely adaptable, went on to serve the man who banished Sukarno to soul-destroying house arrest where a Military Police general denied him the medicines he urgently needed, Sukarno was an open book, Soeharto a closed book. And yet it is precisely this inner man which is so important and which needs to be unearthed.

These volumes show how Soeharto's personality and character developed and changed over the years; they show how he thought and acted. In the process, a darker picture emerges. We see a man who, even in his earlier years, was not only more ruthless and more calculating than hitherto imagined but greedier too, caring deeply about the welfare of his family and his subordinates and willing to place great trust in his close associates, but watchful, resentful and vindictive, sensitive to slights and always nursing grudges.

In his three-volume work *The Age of Roosevelt, Volume I: The Crisis of the Old Order, 1919–1933*, Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr. makes the point that the reputation of a commanding figure is often at its lowest in the period ten to twenty years after death. "We are always," he writes, "in a zone of imperfect visibility so far as the history just over our shoulder is concerned [...] There are, however, compensating advantages in writing so soon—in particular, the opportunity to consult those who took part in great events and thus to rescue information which might otherwise elude the written record."<sup>34</sup> This reminder is especially apt in the case of Indonesia where, it often seems, too little is written down and too many "rescue missions" need to be mounted. Indeed, the problem is so great that the author who comes late to a study of the Indonesian independence struggle can often feel as if he or she is engaged in a race against time, hoping to meet as many people as possible while they, and the author, are still on deck. I count myself extremely fortunate that so many of those who played a part, large or small, in the momentous events leading up to Indonesia's Proclamation of Independence and its emergence as an independent Republic have been available, and willing, to spend valuable time giving their accounts of those events. An historian studying the

American Revolution cannot hope, of course, to meet George Washington or Thomas Jefferson. In Indonesia it was possible, when I first lived in Jakarta, and for many years thereafter, to call on any number of men and women who had played a role in the birth of that nation.

While researching this book I had an opportunity to visit many of the places in Java and the Outer Islands where Soeharto lived, studied, worked or fought—Kemusu, Yogyakarta, Solo, Magelang, Malang, Bogor, Glagah, Jakarta, Ambarawa, Banyubiru, Semarang, Makassar and Ambon—as well as the Soeharto family mausoleum, the Astana Giri Bangun, which the President built on a sacred hillside set aside for the tombs of the Mangkunegaran royal family, the smaller of the two Solonese courts. In doing so, it was possible to retrace his footsteps, sometimes literally as well as figuratively.

“If you would like to understand this power structure now,” the late Lieutenant General G.P.H. Djatikusumo, a prince of the dominant royal court of Solo, liked to say when people asked him about Indonesian politics in the early 1980s, “you cannot afford not to study the anatomy of the Peta,” the Japanese-sponsored Indonesian defence force.<sup>35</sup> If you would like to understand something about modern Indonesia more broadly, one might add, it is necessary to study Soeharto.

