

# *Berthold Damshäuser and Indonesia*

**Translation of his German-language essay *Indonesien – zwanzig Jahre einer Auseinandersetzung mit dem "Anderen"* [Indonesia – twenty years of „Confrontation“ with the "Other“**

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## **Indonesia – twenty years of “Confrontation“ with the "Other“**

Probably everyone who deals with Indonesia in any way or has to do with it professionally has been asked more than once the question: "How did you actually come to Indonesia? With time, one is able to answer briefly and routinely, although one becomes more and more tired of the same question and especially of the same answer. At least that is the case with me. Perhaps therefore I have gone over to react to that question more and more frequently with the words "The moon of Wanne-Eickel has caused that". Even the questioners, who are not at all particularly interested in an answer, suddenly show at least increased interest after this statement, and some, who still know the text of the hit from the sixties singing about my hometown Wanne-Eickel "Nicht ist so schön wie der Mond von Wanne-Eickel“ (Nothing is as beautiful as the moon of Wanne-Eickel), ask then for their part: "That was probably at the canal of Wanne-Eickel?" "Yes", I can then answer truthfully, "that was actually there".

So now, in my contribution to the present book, I have also chosen this humorous introduction to answer the question that was also posed to the authors of this book – in a more differentiated formulation, of course. Since I do not intend to write a cheerful or even amusing contribution anyway, I am already allowed a perhaps all too dramatic turn into the serious: I would like to interpret what I will describe in the following, namely the coming into being of my first contact to Indonesia, here: to an Indonesian, as providence or fate.

In 1975, after graduating from high school and before taking up studies in German and philosophy at the Ruhr University in Bochum, I worked for a few months as an unskilled laborer at the Wanne-Eickel inland port. My task was, together with a colleague, to make railroad cars "broom clean" after their cargo of coal had been emptied by shovel excavators. Not a very nice job, as you can imagine, and after just one week I actually wanted to quit. At the end of the first week of work, a new shift schedule was announced, showing who would have to climb into the wagons together the following week. I was assigned a certain Pudiharto Ismojo, a name that did not allow me to draw any conclusions about the nationality of its bearer. When I first saw my colleague, I assumed he was Japanese, but of course – he was an Indonesian, and a Javanese at that. I knew nothing about Indonesia at that time, not even where it was located exactly, and with astonishment I took from an atlas that Indonesia is far larger in area than Japan, for example. I looked also in my geography book from the upper school time in the high school and recognized with relief that in connection with my ignorance about Indonesia mitigating circumstances were to be considered, because in that exploration book on only two pages the region was treated, which was called "Hinterindien" (Farther India) and in which "today also the state Republic of Indonesia lies".

Well, neither my nevertheless not excusable ignorance nor the deficient representation in my exploration book are particularly important in this context. The decisive thing was that Harto, as I called the Indonesian student who then became my good friend, fascinated me so

much by his endearing charisma. It was that charisma that many find so pleasant when they meet Indonesians or Malays, a charisma that is not inadequately described by the clichés of "grace" or "gracefulness." Harto's "whole manner" impressed me and caused me to enjoy even the dull work in the freight car with him as a colleague and to hold out for a longer time as a longshoreman.

Everything else came about by itself: At Harto's invitation, I traveled with him to Indonesia for the first time in 1976. In 1978/79, I spent a total of six months in Jakarta, where I stayed with Harto's relatives and took language courses at Universitas Indonesia. After returning to Germany, I studied Malayology, German Literature and Economic Geography at the University of Cologne. I graduated in 1983 and subsequently received a graduate scholarship from the DAAD (German Academic Exchange Service) and the Indonesian government for one year of guest studies at Universitas Indonesia in Indonesian and Javanese philology. In addition to this study, I taught as a guest lecturer in the German Department of Universitas Indonesia as well as at the Goethe Institute Jakarta. After my return to Germany, I worked as a freelance translator and interpreter of the Indonesian language for several years, until I was offered a position as a lecturer in Indonesian Studies at the Seminar for Oriental Languages at the University of Bonn in 1986. Naturally, I accepted the offer, as it fulfilled my hope of making Indonesia the center of my professional activities. Since I was also fortunate enough to be tenured after a few years, I am happy and grateful that Indonesia will remain the center of my professional life. All this resulted from the above described and meanwhile more than twenty years ago first acquaintance with an Indonesian and the resulting causal chain of events or actions, which ultimately also determined my private life, because my wife Dian Apsari is (of course) Indonesian. And if I already once jokingly said to our two children (Ayu dan Satria): "That you both exist, that is also due to the moon of Wanne-Eickel", then perhaps also because I do not want to accept the mere coincidence as explanation. And is not just the moon in poetry and mythology of many peoples represented as fate-determining power? - Well, enough of the moon ....

"Experiences and impressions in Indonesia" – this refers to another question posed to the authors of this book. Based on this question, I would like to try in this second section of my contribution to present facets of that picture, which I have sketched for myself of Indonesia. In the following third section, I will then go into more detail about my professional activities, before I finally dare to give the "prognosis for the future of Indonesia" requested by the authors of this book in the last section.

My image of Indonesia is, of course, a subjective one. Moreover, it has always changed and will continue to change. Therefore, I will not be able to create a fixed picture, but only describe a process that is not yet finished and probably never ending.

My "confrontation" with Indonesia and Indonesian culture already began in Germany, namely with the above-mentioned friendship with an Indonesian student, which meant that I also got to know many other Indonesians living in Germany. At the beginning of this encounter was an almost rapturous enthusiasm for a country that I did not know at all. It was triggered by the engaging nature of the Indonesians, their cheerfulness, grace and composure, as well as their emphasis on form in interpersonal relationships. One reason for this enthusiasm was probably the uneasiness I still feel today about my own culture or civilization, its joylessness, its overemphasis on the individual, its being out of the loop. In the Indonesians, I saw a successful counter-design to the European man who had lost his naturalness. At that time, as an eighteen-year-old, I was one of those Europeans who were tired of Europe, as they had already been described in detail in European „South Seas Literature“.

My first visit to Indonesia in 1976 hardly changed my enthusiasm for Indonesia, even though I found many things strange and incomprehensible. I still remember my astonishment when, as a guest at a Javanese wedding, I had to realise that my wait for the start of a boisterous celebration was completely in vain. Similar experiences and surprises then

probably contributed to my realization that, despite reading books on Indonesian history and culture, I still knew little about Indonesia.

My uncritical enthusiasm then came to an abrupt end and almost turned into the opposite when I spent six months in Jakarta in 1977/78. As a guest of a Javanese family, I was able to gain intensive impressions of Javanese family life and also to experience how hard life can be in Indonesia and with what great problems of daily life a family of the Indonesian middle class is confronted. An important realization was - and still today it surprises me that I had to realize this first - that contrary to my naive idea of the always prevailing harmony, of course also in Indonesian families or communities great, often suppressed conflicts and problems exist, namely under the surface of that harmony which everybody tries to maintain and which can then nevertheless suddenly shake by sudden eruptions. I experienced that the individual has to endure a lot of suffering in the corset of norms and rules and especially in the tight hierarchical order. That a free development of the personality, which is not striven for in traditional Indonesia (indeed, one would not have thought of such a thought and such a formulation there!), is not or hardly possible in view of the collectivistic constraints. I often heard the sentence *harus dapat menempatkan diri* (literally: one must be able to "place oneself"), by which is meant that everyone must take or accept his place and rank resulting from the social hierarchy. Those who are not willing to do so must reckon with sanctions, in the worst case with the loss of solidarity and the help of the others. The family or community will always provide protection for the individual, and it is to him what insurance systems are to us, but at the same time he is expected to conform to the norms of the community and fulfill the function of the hierarchical level assigned to him. Indonesians are under enormous group pressures, and they experience these not only in family and kinship, but also in the neighborly environment or at work.

What often irritated and even annoyed me in my dealings with Indonesians was their tendency not to express thoughts or wishes directly, but at best to hint at them. It took me a long time to understand this foreign form of communication, which was certainly also due to the fact that my approach, which was contrary to the Indonesian way, was mostly unsuccessful. Sometimes I suffered from such failures and

misunderstandings and condemned the Indonesians' way as insincere. Likewise, I was annoyed, and I still am occasionally, that Indonesians find it very difficult to admit mistakes or sincerely ask for apologies. (Indonesians do, however, "apologize" through certain behavior as well as actions). Sometimes I even suspected that Indonesians cannot even adequately reflect on their own misconduct or are at least masters of repression. My observations at that time were certainly not always inaccurate, but my judgments, which amounted to condemnations, were hardly accurate. They were symptoms of a culture shock that took me quite a long time to overcome – if I remember correctly, I only succeeded after my return to Germany.

Another important finding of my first extended stay in Indonesia was that in Indonesian society, at least in urban society – and life in the capital Jakarta is an excellent example of this – there is an extremely hard struggle for survival. Even for the Indonesian middle class, let alone the large number of poor and poorest people, securing a permanent livelihood is a difficult goal to achieve. To be able to provide school and university education for several children, to have financial reserves in case of medical treatment, which one usually has to pay for oneself, and perhaps even to afford a car, one has to make every effort in the struggle of everyone against everyone, accompanied by an increasingly noticeable lack of solidarity in society. The fact that civil servants are corrupt and charge an illegal fee for even the smallest government service, that judges are corruptible, that one is very often cheated in business dealings (and that means that one cheats very often), proves that – and the anonymity of urban life, where not everyone can know each other personally any more, promotes this – the solidarity demanded on all sides, the traditional behavior of Indonesian society, called *gotong royong* in Javanese, is increasingly lost. It continues to be propagated as an Indonesian characteristic, and it is rightly demanded, though by some not without hypocrisy.

At that time, I experienced a phase of bitterness about what I saw as intolerable conditions in Indonesia and developed a kind of political mission consciousness, perhaps also as a late after-effect of my school education in the spirit of the „Generation of 1968“. Again and again, I forced my Indonesian friends into discussions about political and social

grievances, in which I even called for resistance against authoritarian structures. But I had little success in doing so; they could hardly understand my arguments, let alone my agitation. Perhaps it was the following tragic event in 1983 that finally turned me away from my "conversion attempts": one of my brothers-in-law had been hit on his motorcycle by one of the Metro mini-buses, which were known to drive particularly aggressively. Of course, as we later learned, the driver of the bus had committed a hit-and-run, and hardly anyone else had cared for my seriously injured and unconscious brother-in-law. It took several hours before he was taken to a hospital, where, however, he was merely laid down somewhere. It is not uncommon in Indonesian hospitals that an examination or treatment is not started until an advance or down payment for the costs incurred has been paid. Only eight hours after the accident we received news from the police that my brother-in-law was lying unconscious in the hospital. We rushed to the hospital, and after good coaxing and initial payments, a doctor then agreed to examine the seriously injured man. Bleeding in the brain was found, and an immediate operation was necessary. Unfortunately, this could not be started immediately, because we ourselves had to procure the necessary blood supplies, among other things. So we raced across Jakarta to get them somewhere, and after a few more hours we brought the doctors what they needed. The operation was performed, probably much too late, and my brother-in-law died a few hours after the operation. You can imagine how indignant and upset I was. My relatives, however, showed only sorrow, not anger. They accepted the terrible event as a fate ordained by God. Probably my anger even seemed unseemly to them. And was my anger allowed to be more noticeable than my grief? The aftermath of that event seemed rather grotesque to me. My brother-in-law's motorcycle had been confiscated by the very police officer who had brought us the news of the accident. He used it himself for a few weeks before we managed to get him to return the motorcycle. This required several visits to the official's home, during which the "return conditions" were clarified in a friendly atmosphere. Afterwards, my family thanked him for his great help and support ...

This key experience probably made it clear to me once and for all that my standards of evaluation are only applicable to a limited extent in

Indonesia. After all, people there evaluate from a completely different consciousness, from a completely different attitude to life. And if one wanted to lead the Indonesians to new behaviors, one would first have to change their consciousness and their attitude to life. And wouldn't it be presumptuous to want to do that and to consider oneself capable of doing it? And is the consciousness of a European at all the more mature and higher? (In spiritual terms, for example?) Or is it just a different consciousness?

Indonesia, Indonesian being, Indonesian culture – however one may call it – indeed presents itself to me today essentially as the "Other", as a counter-design to my own self. In relation to this Other, I am no longer concerned with values and judgments – but I am still concerned with comparison – and I hope that by now I have reached the last stage of my confrontation with this Other, a stage that should be characterized by calm observation and acceptance. I owe a lot to the confrontation with the Other. It has contributed to self-knowledge – which is always possible only through the experience of the Other – and also to the relativization of myself. Indonesia, the Other, has also shaped and influenced me; not a little Indonesian has passed into me. And despite all the differences, after all these years, one thing has become clear above all: That which is common to all people far outweighs that which may distinguish them from one another.

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The focus of my professional activities at the Seminar für Orientalische Sprachen (Seminar for Oriental Languages – SOS) of the University of Bonn is my duties as a lecturer for Indonesian language and literature. At best, it is also this area in which I perhaps rudimentarily deserve to be called an "expert". At the SOS, I supervise those students who are being trained as future graduate translators of the Indonesian language within the framework of the "Translation Studies Program". Therefore, the focus of my teaching is on the Indonesian language as well as on the problems of translating from Indonesian into German and vice versa, supplemented, of course, by the teaching of contextual knowledge as an indispensable prerequisite for the process of translation.



When I said in the second section of my contribution that one can only arrive at insights through comparisons, this is especially true for insights into languages. The process of translation, which goes hand in hand with constant comparison and can thus be described as contrastive or comparative, makes it possible – especially in the case of languages as different as Indonesian and German – to gain deep insights into these languages. Especially when translating, the most intensive form of dealing with one's own and the foreign language, one is able to sense the other way of thinking manifesting itself in the foreign language, even the other view of the world incarnating itself in it. Unfortunately, I am far from being able to present this "other view of the world" in a systematic or scientific way, and therefore I would like to share only one, perhaps essential observation here in the context of a small digression: The most striking feature of the Indonesian language from the point of view of a person thinking in the German language (and other European languages) seems to me to be the fact that what must be expressed explicitly in German is often expressed implicitly in Indonesian, or sometimes can only be expressed implicitly. I am thinking here, for example, of the lack of the possibility to indicate tense and mode of action on the Indonesian verb. Thus, in a text without context, e.g., in some poems, it is not clear whether *saya datang* should be translated as "I come," "I came," "I will come," or even as "I would come. (Moreover, this question often remains open even in statements embedded in a context). However, this fact is interesting with respect to Indonesian thinking only when one realizes that for the Indonesian the question of tense and mode – categories which do not exist for him in this form – consequently does not or cannot arise at all. The concrete embedding of an action in a temporal – and also causal or consecutive – continuum does not interest him at all. Does he consequently see and interpret the world differently? At least, in his thinking he does not attach any importance to distinctions to which we are forced. Could one therefore claim that Indonesian thinking is less subject to temporality and perhaps even causality than our thinking? Consequently, if our cognitive processes were under greater constraints, would they be more determinate? In this context, I recall a conversation with the Indonesian poet and philosopher Sutan Takdir Alisjahbana, who died a few years ago. We talked about the possibility of translating German philosophers, it was about Kant and Hegel, into Indonesian. I was

very skeptical and asked Sutan Takdir Alisjahbana the intentionally provocative question whether he could ever imagine that a significant philosophical work would ever be written in Indonesian. He replied very wisely, "It will (or did he mean "would"? – we spoke Indonesian, and he did not have to distinguish ...) a different philosophy than the German one. In some respects a freer and more sublime one."

I have ventured this little excursion into philosophy also because I hope that it will give some idea of how important it is for us Germans in our relations with Indonesians to understand their language and thus their thinking. In many areas – diplomacy, economy, trade, cultural exchange, etc. – such knowledge would be very, very useful to us. The detour via English leads, if at all, only with great delay to the goal.

I have addressed the lack of systematics in my remarks on Indonesian language and Indonesian thought. I believe that in this field, i.e. the contrastive analysis of German and Indonesian, there is still a lot to be done. This would be a task of German Malayology or Austronesian Studies as well as Indonesian German Studies. Of course, the Seminar for Oriental Languages in Bonn also has a duty to do this, and I hope that we will be able to make some contribution after the forthcoming introduction of Indonesian as a main language or main subject within the framework of the translator course – there will then also be diploma theses in Indonesian. We Malayologists or Austronesists should turn more to comparative and linguistic-philosophical topics and – I exaggerate a little now – write less about scientific studies on the prefix x of the Austronesian language y on the island z with its total of 5,000 speakers. There is also a considerable need to catch up in the field of lexicography. For the language pair German-Indonesian, there are still no common language dictionaries that can even come close to the quality and scope of Indonesian-English or Indonesian-French dictionaries, and in the technical language area (business, law, technology, etc.) the situation is even worse. One reason for this is certainly that one is not rewarded with an academic title for writing dictionaries, and thus the necessary incentives are lacking. Also with the promotion of German-Indonesian dictionary projects it does not look too good. I, at least, have so far not succeeded in getting support for a lexicographic project in the field of Indonesian and German legal language, which I had started together with

the Indonesian jurist Rizal Gucci and which, due to lack of financial support, got stuck at the stage of a list of words. As far as the promotion of such projects is concerned, there is ultimately even a connection here with German-Indonesian relations in general. I dare to say that the intensity of the relations between two peoples (language communities) can also be read off from the number and quality of dictionaries for the respective language pair. The same is true, by the way, with respect to the number of literary works translated into the other language in each case, but some more remarks on this below.

In recent years I have been able to devote myself quite intensively to the field of literary translation. That this also resulted in some publications, I owe in particular to the cooperation with the Indonesian poet Ramadhan K.H. Together with him I published in 1990 the first anthology of German poetry in Indonesian (*Malam Biru di Berlin* - German poems from eight centuries). The project was made possible by the grateful support of the German Embassy in Jakarta, which had the book printed. The German poems from the 20th century contained in this bilingual collection have meanwhile (1994) been published in revised translation in the anthology *Kau Datang Padaku* by the publishing house Balai Pustaka and are thus now also available in Indonesian bookstores. The fruitful collaboration with Ramadhan K.H. as co-editor also resulted in two anthologies of modern Indonesian poetry, namely *Am Rande des Reisfelds* (At the Edge of the Rice Field), a bilingual collection published in Indonesia by Pustaka Jaya in 1990, and its revised and supplemented version *Gebt mir Indonesien zurück!* (Give Me Back Indonesia!), published by Horlemann-Verlag in 1994, for which the Indonesian painter Amiasih Amongsari created the cover picture. The texts of the German translations of the Indonesian poems from *Gebt mir Indonesien zurück!* have meanwhile been set to music by the German musician and composer Peter Habermehl – a limited edition CD with the recording of a reading accompanied musically by Habermehl is now available. This is probably the first time that a German musician has created compositions to Indonesian poetry, and it would certainly be appealing to present these compositions live at a reading taking place in Indonesia. But of course this would require the support of sponsors, since interested organizers in Indonesia lack the financial means.

In recent years, a very gratifying and long overdue development has begun with regard to translations from modern Indonesian literature. Modern Indonesian literature is now beginning to be "present" on the German book market - not least thanks to the efforts of the Horlemann publishing house and thanks to selfless translators who forgo an appropriate fee. This has been made possible by continuous efforts and on the basis of the conviction that important bridges between peoples can be built with the help of translations of literary works. Unfortunately, the dissemination of German literature in Indonesia has not yet shown similar continuous efforts. Although some literature has been published sporadically, a coordinated approach, i.e. a large-scale project "Dissemination of Translations of German Literature in Indonesia" is still missing. Would it not be obvious and desirable, for example, if at least some of the works of the German poet who gave his name to the German Institute of Foreign Culture (Goethe-Institute) appeared in Indonesian translation? I sometimes have the impression that there is a lack of firm will to spread German literature in Indonesia. Perhaps it is not sufficiently recognized that a book of German literature in Indonesian translation can be an extremely practical "cultural messenger," as it remains usable and effective for decades when available in thousands of copies. The cost of such a book project is around 5,000 DM, and what is that compared to other, often much more expensive projects, which can have only a "mayfly character" compared to the longevity of the book. Unfortunately, there are also formal and bureaucratic obstacles ("earmarking of funds"). Occasionally it is also pointed out that the Indonesian reader and also Indonesian publishers are not interested enough in German literature. Well, even if this were the case, we would have to arouse this interest through books, with the production costs being borne by the German side. In the dissemination of the German language, we naturally bear the costs, why not also in the dissemination of German literature?<sup>1</sup>

Once again to my activity as a lecturer at the Seminar for Oriental Languages and to my activity as a translator. Perhaps it is not too

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<sup>1</sup> Translator's footnote from 2022: As far as the dissemination of German literature in Indonesia is concerned, the author's hopes could be realized to some extent, especially in the form of the "Seri Puisi Jerman," a series of translations of German-language poetry into Indonesian. See an interview with Berthold Damshäuser: <https://www.ioa.uni-bonn.de/soa/de/pers/personenseiten/berthold-damshaeuser/bild-und-pdfs/seri-puisi-jerman-interview-mit-bd.pdf>

presumptuous to call this also that of a mediator between Germany and Indonesia. At least I see this as one of my tasks. In this context, it was a stroke of luck for me when the Bonn sinologist Wolfgang Kubin offered me in 1991 to co-edit the *Orientierungen - Zeitschrift zur Kultur Asiens*. („Orientation - Journal on Asian Cultures“).<sup>2</sup> The twice-yearly journal, which has now been in existence for almost eight years, endeavors to present the cultures of contemporary Asia, with a focus on Indonesia and China due to the regional orientation of the two editors. As far as the Indonesian-related contributions are concerned, the journal has succeeded in realizing its aim of allowing Indonesians themselves to have their say, so that the representation of Indonesian culture is not left to the Orientalists alone, as was the case in the past. The fact that such important Indonesian intellectuals as Sutan Takdir Alisjabana, B.J. Habibie, Ajip Rosidi, Mochtar Lubis, Soemitro and Goenawan Mohamad could be won over as authors of *Orientierungen* has filled me with great joy, since it was precisely in this way that the journal was able to fulfill the mediating role I had hoped for.

I would like to briefly mention two other translation projects here. Under the title *Soeharto - Gedanken, Worte und Taten* (Soeharto - Thoughts, Words and Deeds), the German translation of the autobiography of the Indonesian president, edited by me, was published in Jakarta in 1994 by the publishing house Citra Lamtoro Gung Persada. This work was an extraordinary translation challenge, among other things because of the ideological terms and the Javanese philosophical background - translator (Thomas Zimmer) and editor worked on it for 18 long months - but the work was always interesting and, moreover, enriching. The book had to be translated! In my opinion, it is an essential basis for understanding the Indonesia of the "New Order" and, of course, a unique document of the ideas and visions of the Indonesian president. The other project is also directly related to President Soeharto.<sup>3</sup> It is the translation of a collection of Javanese *pituduh* and *wewaler* (guiding principles and prohibitions) selected by him, which I translated into German together with my wife. The collection will soon be published under the title "Javanese Wisdom"

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<sup>2</sup> Translator's footnote from 2022: For *Orientierungen* or current information on this journal, see:

<https://www.ioa.uni-bonn.de/soa/de/pers/personenseiten/berthold-damshaeuser/zeitschrift-orientierungen>

<sup>3</sup> Translator's footnote from 2022: In connection with Suharto, see also the following interview with Berthold Damshäuser: <https://www.dw.com/id/suharto-di-mata-penerjemah-jerman/a-53659584>

by the publishing house Citra Lamtoro Gung Persada in Jakarta.<sup>4</sup> As far as I know, it is the first German translation of Javanese literature and philosophy aimed at a broad readership. This is remarkable in so far as just the classical Javanese literature is of outstanding, also world-literary meaning. It is therefore both surprising and regrettable that there is hardly anything available in German translation in this field. I think that Indonesia still has to do something similar to what we Germans have to do with regard to the dissemination of our (classical) literature in Indonesia, and Indonesian state involvement can only be beneficial in this regard. Incidentally, Indonesian foreign cultural policy seems to me to be in an even worse state than that of Germany. So far, Indonesia has more or less limited itself to making its performing and musical arts, i.e. dance, wayang and gamelan, known abroad. Without the translation of the great literary and philosophical works of the various Indonesian cultures, however, Indonesian spirit will probably remain unknown there forever.

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Prognoses often reveal less about the future than about the limited judgment of the person making them. This certainly also applies to my prognosis on the future of Indonesia, in the context of which, however, I do not want to presume to make too concrete predictions, and which will therefore be more a matter of thoughts on Indonesia's present with a view to the future. But even here, what I said at the beginning will apply.

Today, the future of individual states can be viewed less than ever in isolation, because it is highly dependent on global developments that affect our entire planet and make peoples an inseparable community of destiny. Indonesia, too, faces problems or will face dangers resulting from such global developments. Since they seem to me easier to predict than Indonesia-specific developments, I dare in the following to name four such problems and dangers concretely.

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<sup>4</sup> Translator's footnote from 2022: The book was ultimately not published by Citra Lamtoro Gung Persada. It was not until 2020 that it appeared under the title *Javanische Weisheit: Pituduh und Wewaler – Spruchdichtung aus Indonesien* (Javanese Wisdom: Pituduh and Wewaler - Saying Poetry from Indonesia) by the German publisher Regiospectra. See: <https://www.regiospectra.de/buecher/javanische-weisheit-pituduh-und-wewaler-detail>

Firstly, the danger of major wars, including nuclear wars, has by no means been banished. There is no "end of history," as someone has nonsensically put it. It is unlikely that mankind in the 21st century will be spared the catastrophes that the 20th century experienced; indeed, they could be much worse catastrophes. The end of the East-West antagonism and the dissolution of one of the two great power blocs by no means means lasting peace. Nothing guarantees that in the competition for resources and power all states will really renounce military aggression. No one knows what will happen in Russia, and no one knows whether China, contrary to its tradition, will not pursue expansionist goals in Southeast Asia.

Second: In the future, every state will be threatened to an unprecedented degree by what I would like to call "internal terrorism". The spread of knowledge about the manufacture of weapons – chemical, biological, etc. – fostered, for example, by the uncontrollable Internet, poses dangers that I believe can hardly be averted. I fear that attacks like those of the Aum sect in Japan will increasingly become normal daily events. And since they need not be politically motivated attacks at all, but possibly often the irrational acts of a mad loner, they will be neither predictable nor preventable. Of course, such acts have occurred at all times, but never before have weapons with such great destructive potential been available, and never before has it been possible to cause such great effect by sabotage as in our age of dependence on complex and therefore vulnerable systems. (Just think of the consequences of paralyzing sensitive areas, e.g., interconnected data transmission systems). To make a concrete reference to Indonesia in this context, the following questions could be asked: What might fanatical and desperate fighters of the independence movements in East Timor or Irian Jaya be capable of in the future? To poison the water in reservoirs with biological warfare agents? To sabotage the computer systems in Jakarta airport? Or to a suicide mission in a large department store in Surabaya? They would only have to take the actions as a model, which are already being reported today in news broadcasts worldwide. Can they be prevented for all time from obtaining the necessary weapons or the knowledge and material to manufacture them?

Third, and well known: The dangers of global and also population growth-induced progressive ecological destruction.

Fourth, and this point is actually only of secondary importance in view of the horror scenario resulting from the previously mentioned points: In the future, it will be less and less possible for individual states to pursue independent national policies because of their ever greater integration into supranational systems. This will be especially true for non-major powers. Moreover, the primacy of politics is increasingly coming to an end, in favor of the economy. In the future, important decisions will be made by multinational corporations to an even greater extent than is already the case today, presumably in exclusive orientation to economic, i.e.: materialistic, goals. All of this will increasingly restrict the Indonesian government's freedom of decision and reduce the possibility of pursuing an independent Indonesian path.

I would like to discuss possible future and specifically Indonesian developments in the following and at the end of my contribution. In doing so, I will express thoughts that were inspired in particular by the discussions I had with Indonesians. These were discussions with Indonesian personalities from - as I sometimes call it to myself - "opposing camps", namely that of the "dissidents" and that of the "establishment". (In all these terms, the quotation marks are very deliberate.) My first contacts with representatives of the "dissident camp" date back many years and came about as a result of my involvement with modern Indonesian literature. These are writers, journalists and humanities scholars who, not least because of long stays in Europe or the United States, are very familiar with Western culture, and who also publicly take a critical stance with respect to the social and political conditions in their country. It was not until the 1990s that I had the opportunity to get to know representatives of the Indonesian government and military, i.e. the "other camp". This was made possible by my work as an interpreter for the Indonesian president during his visits to Germany in 1991 and 1995, which not only gave me deep impressions of President Soeharto's ideas and goals and enabled me to build up a relationship with him that could almost be described as personal, but also meant that I learned a great deal about their view of Indonesian reality in conversations with members of the Indonesian delegation on the fringes



of those state visits. Of course, this view was more or less the antithesis of the thesis of the "dissidents. To create a synthesis out of it would perhaps be the most "elegant" solution, but at the same time also a difficult undertaking. In the following, however, this is not the point at all, because I will, without concretely going into the opposing points of view that were communicated to me in the discussions with Indonesians, express thoughts to which these discussions have inspired me. They will be unsystematically expressed thoughts, which want to go out on the topic "Indonesian identity".

What has been achieved and built in Indonesia during the now thirty-year "New Order" phase is the starting point and foundation for Indonesia's future development. In many respects, the "New Order" policy under President Soeharto has been extraordinarily successful: Economic development was successfully advanced on the basis of national stability; economic growth resulted in an increase in living standards and an improvement in the material living conditions of all strata of the population. Indonesia has transformed itself from a famine-stricken agrarian state into a dynamic newly industrializing country that plays an increasingly important role internationally and is regarded as a reliable partner. Moreover, its economic growth potential is not nearly exhausted, so that the Indonesian economic miracle will continue in the 21st century with even greater success if - and this is the absolute prerequisite - national stability and national unity can be maintained in the future.

The political system of the new order is not infrequently described by Western observers as "authoritarian," "autocratic," and even as a "military dictatorship." The fact is that Indonesia does not have a liberal democracy on the Western model, but a consensus democracy based on the Pancasila philosophy of government, and the fact is also that Indonesia has achieved national stability and economic success with precisely this form of democracy, which may indeed be a form of democracy appropriate to the consciousness and worldview of Indonesians. Indonesia has consciously gone its own way here, and it has done so with the goal of preserving its national identity, which was propagated by the "New Order".

The preservation of this national identity – I am leaving aside here the fact that this identity may not yet be adequately defined even in Indonesia itself – as one of the goals of the "New Order" is, however, exposed to great dangers by the opening to the outside world that was pursued at the same time and was necessary for economic reasons (there was no alternative!). In my opinion, Indonesia finds itself in a dilemma, the consequences of which will be clearly felt in the coming decades. After all, how can the national identity be preserved if the country is exposed to external, i.e., Western, influences, as it has been for years?

Perhaps two forms or levels of Western influence can be distinguished. One is the influence of the broad masses by the consumption-oriented, decadent and culture-destroying lifestyle, a kind of "American way of life", which is spreading everywhere in Indonesia today. (The fact that the American channel MTV can now be received in Indonesia is for me a striking high point on the road to cultural confusion). On the other hand, there is the influence on the philosophical-ideological level, which affects a not insignificant part of the Indonesian intellectual elite, and within the framework of which the ideas of Western liberalism spill over into Indonesia. In its entirety, it is ultimately a matter of being influenced by capitalist-liberalist (practice shows that these two things actually belong together like two sides of the same coin) views, which are also secular and materialistic. In short, the value system is transported here, which is currently having its full effect in the Occident as well.

The international discussion about human rights, which is becoming increasingly heated in Indonesia itself, is also part of this problem. It is not unjustified in itself, because there is no question that the Indonesian individual must be given greater freedom and released from too strict hierarchical structures in order to be able to fully develop his creativity. It seems to me that this is even necessary in view of Indonesia's economic development, and it is not without reason that intensive thought is being given in Indonesia today to improving the quality of "human potential." In addition, and this also has to do with human rights, I believe that Indonesia will not be able to avoid implementing the principles of social justice, separation of powers and the rule of law in a more perfect form than has been achieved to date.

Nevertheless, I view the attempt, also by some Indonesians, to adopt the liberalistic overall concept of human rights that has emerged in the West, with its strong emphasis on individual rights, very critically and with great skepticism. Yes, I ask myself whether a concept that puts rights so much in the foreground and does not mention duties at all is at all appropriate or (in the long run) conducive to Asian cultures - and perhaps also to European cultures themselves. Everybody's right is always somebody else's duty. Rights and duties are inseparable. Should one, in order to prevent excessive claim thinking, not better formulate duties? Would people - contrary to a tendency that can be observed more and more in our country - then perhaps insist less vehemently on their "good right" and thus not infrequently curtail the right of another? Traditional ethical systems, e.g. the religions, emphasize the duties of man towards man, which are always also duties towards God. This is the case in Islam, Christianity and also in the *adat* (traditional) societies of Indonesia. Do Asians perhaps miss the inclusion of God and duties in the Western concept of human rights as an outgrowth of secular thinking, and do they perhaps reject it for that reason as well? The Buddhist monk Sulak Sivaraksa, one of the winners of the alternative Nobel Prize in 1995, writes - and his statement reminds me strongly of assessments by Indonesian friends - about the Western concept of human rights: "They are useful in an atmosphere of dissent between conflicting forces, but nothing more. They spring from notions of separation and division, struggle and strife. But they are not sufficient to lead man to true harmony and lasting peace." - In Javanese ethics, the striving for harmony and peace is paramount as a prerequisite to finding God, and derivable from this are duties, for example, those of the ruler to the subject, of the rich to the poor. According to Javanese conception no rights would have to be emphasized, certainly not those of the individual (which does not mean that he has none!), in order to create a just society. In the Indonesian state philosophy Pancasila, by the way, the background of Javanese-Indonesian thinking is clearly recognizable. But shouldn't the implementation of own ethical and moral ideas up to the level of laws be a goal of the Indonesians? This would not be easy, but it has not been sufficiently attempted so far. The centuries-long foreign domination of Indonesia has also prevented it, but must it remain for all time?

The incompatibility of Western ideals with Indonesian ideas can perhaps be illustrated particularly clearly by the example of the Indonesian state philosophy of Pancasila. I am concerned with the pluralism of values that can be indirectly derived from the emphasis on individual rights, which allows everyone – in theory, of course, only if he thereby harms no one – to live according to his own values. Could Indonesia, in the final analysis, commit itself to a pluralism of values? Wouldn't the first principle of the Pancasila, according to which the Republic of Indonesia is based on the "High One Divine," i.e., on the belief in a divine order, then already have to be dropped? And where would a pluralism of values lead to in Indonesia? Perhaps, and as with us, to a value relativism? And if everything is then relative, what would be left of generally valid values? Freedom is a great risk and can be a great burden, especially when it is misunderstood. Isn't this an experience that we "free" and hedonistic ego people in Western societies are currently making?

I have often asked myself, as well as Indonesian and German friends with experience of Indonesia, where it is more dignified to live as a human being: in Germany, the country with a free democratic basic order and social security systems, or in Indonesia, where such systems do not exist. The fact that everyone finds it difficult to answer this question alone is of some significance. An exhaustive answer is perhaps hardly to be expected. Many answer that children and old people in Indonesia have a better life, despite all poverty. I also think that this is the case. Indonesian children laugh more often than German children. And old people are revered by their relatives, whereby this is even a "blessing" of the (age-related) hierarchical order, because they have to be revered because of their mere age, even if they do not accomplish anything anymore and have become a "burden". But what about the right of the elderly to a dignified life? And what about the right to a dignified death? (In a article in German Magazine *Spiegel* in April 1996, the German Minister of Social Affairs, Blüm, was quoted as follows: "We die more miserably in this country than the poor in the South American favelas"). Are we not talking about some of the most fundamental human rights? What about the practice of human rights in our country, which the West propagates and demands everywhere in the form of its concept of such rights?

With regard to the subject of "death," I remember a conversation with the Indonesian writer Goenawan Mohamad. I don't remember how we came up with it, but we both said that dying in Indonesia was certainly easier than in Europe. And we were both thinking not only of the lonely death one dies in Europe. We had in mind that the way of life in the modern industrial societies of Europe, a way of life far from God, without contemplation and transcendence, suppresses death and no longer prepares for it.

What **really** important things could the secular and materialistic Western world of the 20th century still give to Indonesia today? Is the West not even preparing to take away from Indonesia – and not only Indonesia – what it has long since lost itself? Indonesia no longer has any reason to orient itself to the West, which has long since lost its own orientation. Indonesia has the right and the task to reflect on its own, its "soul," on its way into the future without foreign teachers and to adapt it to the new time. And if it succeeds in this, I am full of hope that in the Indonesia of the future, albeit in a different and new guise, all that Rudolf Gramich has described so vividly in his contribution to this book and whose loss he – hopefully too soon! – laments.

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