

Berthold Damshäuser and Indonesia

Translation of his German-language essay "Zweite Heimat Indonesien. Nach fast 40 Jahren ... [Second Home Indonesia. After almost 40 years ...].

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Second home Indonesia. After almost 40 years ...

(Berthold Damshäuser)

About two years ago I met Michael Rottmann. From the rather chance encounter a friendship developed. Sometime in 2013 he suggested me to publish together with him a "successor" of the book I had published together with Ulrike Muntenbeck-Tullney in 1996, namely *Nelkenduft in Wolkenkratzern – deutsche Experten über Indonesien*¹ (*Carnation scent in skyscrapers* *Carnation scent in skyscrapers – German experts on Indonesia* in the following referred to as "Nelkenduft"). I was happy to do so. Already in "Nelkenduft" I answered or tried to answer those four questions², which were also put to the authors of the present book. Even though answering the questions is not obligatory, I would like to go into them again,

¹ *Nelkenduft in Wolkenkratzern – deutsche Experten über Indonesien*, with contributions from: Dieter Bielenstein, Bernhard Dahm, Berthold Damshäuser, Rudolf Gramich, Adolf Heuken, Fritz Kleinsteuber, Josef Königsmann, Dieter Mack, Franz Magnis-Suseno, Heinz Okken, Karl-Heinz Pampus, Rudolf von Sandersleben, Friedrich Seltmann, Rüdiger Siebert, Rita Widagdo, ISBN 979-8060-49-0, Jakarta: Katalis 1996.

² How did the contact with Indonesia come about? In which area did you deal with Indonesians and what experiences did you have? What future prognosis would you give for your field? What prognosis with regard to the development and future of Indonesia in general would you like to make? See also the remarks of Michael Rottmann in the foreword of this book.

focusing, of course, on the developments of the last twenty years. In particular, as far as the first question is concerned ("How did the contact with Indonesia come about?"), I would like to refer to my essay at that time.³ There I have explained in detail how this contact came about, what my first impressions of Indonesia and Indonesians were, what experiences I had made until then.

In the meantime, I look back on almost forty years of involvement with Indonesia, which I visited for the first time in 1976 at the age of nineteen. Since then, not a day goes by that I do not "deal" with Indonesia. When I converse with my Indonesian wife, it is as often in German as in Indonesian. I no longer perceive which language we have unconsciously chosen. If I were asked whether I had just spoken Indonesian or German, I would not be able to answer. In my contribution for "Nelkenduft" I called Indonesia "the Other", in which I recognized "the Own". That happened rightly. In the meantime, however, I no longer think and feel so dichotomously.

Not only privately I have to do daily with Indonesia and Indonesians, also professionally this is the happy case. I have been teaching Indonesian at the University of Bonn since 1986, and I perceive this as a true vocation. Not only teaching, but also working on projects⁴, especially in the field of literary translation, and editing the journal *Orientierungen – Zeitschrift zur Kultur Asiens*.⁵ A lot has changed at the university in the last twenty years. The Seminar für Orientalische Sprachen (SOS, Institute of Oriental Languages, SOS), where I taught for about 15 years, was dissolved, and the course of study "Translation" with Indonesian as one of the Asian languages offered was abolished. Since then, there has been no translator training in the German-speaking world for the language pair Indonesian-German. Indonesian is now an elective language within the framework of the bachelor's and master's degree programs in so-called Asienwissenschaften [literally: "Asian Sciences"]. Institutionally, Indonesian language training is anchored in the Abteilung

³ Translator's footnote from 2022: A translation of Berthold Damshäuser's contribution from the book "Nelkenduft in Wolkenkratzern" with the title "Indonesia - twenty years of a confrontation with the Other" is available on the following website: <https://www.ioa.uni-bonn.de/soa/de/pers/personenseiten/berthold-damshaeuser/berthold-damshaeuser>

⁴ Translator's footnote from 2022: For projects and publications see: <https://www.ioa.uni-bonn.de/soa/de/pers/personenseiten/berthold-damshaeuser/berthold-damshaeuser>

⁵ Translator's footnote from 2022: Journal *Orientierungen* see: <https://www.ioa.uni-bonn.de/soa/de/pers/personenseiten/berthold-damshaeuser/zeitschrift-orientierungen>

für Südostasienwissenschaft (Department of Southeast Asian Studies) of the IOA = Institut für Orient- und Asienwissenschaften (Institute of Oriental and Asian Studies).⁶

Thus, Indonesian is learned in Bonn especially if one studies *Asienwissenschaften* ("Asian Sciences"). Consequently, I am involved in the education of *Asienwissenschaftler* ("Asian Scientists"), even though I am not one myself and do not want to be one. This subject "Asian Sciences", which has replaced such established subjects as *Sinologie*, *Japanologie* or *Orientalistik* at Bonn University – these subjects are now "departments" of the IOA – is something quite curious. Mockingly, I like to call it *Halbwelt-Wissenschaften* ("Half-World Sciences" also in the sense of "Demimonde-Sciences"), since it deals with almost half the world. Its logical counterpart would be "Occidental Sciences". Operating under a plural designation ("sciences"), it seems to be a bundle of sciences which are somehow applied here. Or is it possibly just simple *Asienkunde* (Asian Studies), and the designation *Asienwissenschaften* ("Asian Sciences") would then be a kind of imposture? The students – as well as many lecturers – are usually not bothered by such questions, they study blithely, learn various Asian languages, listen to this and that about the whole of Asia. Many then earn a Bachelor's degree in *Asienwissenschaften*, which officially is *berufsqualifizierend*, which means "qualifying for a profession" ...

I myself am, as indicated above, a member of the *Abteilung für Südostasienwissenschaft* (literally: Department of Southeast Asian Science), a "science" that self-consciously gives itself a singular designation and thus underscores its claim to actually be science. Not, for instance, just "studies" or at best a bundle of sciences dealing with a – perhaps even arbitrarily defined – region. In English, our subject is usually called "studies," which is more honest. In the Department of Southeast Asian Studies, I work with excellent and dear colleagues, none of whom are graduates of a "Southeast Asian Science" discipline. They are real scientists – ethnologists, forest scientists, etc. – who now (have to) call themselves *Südostasienwissenschaftler* ("Southeast Asian Scientists) i.e., representatives of a "science" that has so far failed to define itself adequately.

⁶ So, in the official translation into English, it is "Studies". In German, however, it reads *Wissenschaft* and *Wissenschaften* which means „Science“ and “Sciences”.

Such a "scientific environment" has thus emerged for me, the Malayologist, in the last twenty years. In practice, however, less has changed than was to be feared. In the context of the "Bologna Process", modularization, etc., many things have only changed their names. Moreover, contents are pliable. Thus, in the Indonesian modules, I am supposed to teach only language. But that doesn't stop me from also talking about Indonesian culture and especially Indonesian literature. Even poetry translations sneak into my classes. Working with good students continues to be a pleasure, and the same goes for exchanges with colleagues. I often talk with my colleague Christoph Antweiler, for example, not about institute matters (usually such things are more like gossip), but – which is rather rare among academics – about scientific topics, about projects we are currently working on. That is fun. So much fun that I don't like to think about my retirement, which is less than ten years away.

It seems to me anyway, as if I always had a lot of luck. Whereby the coincidence or the fate (?) to have met an Indonesian in 1975 and to have won him as a friend has been the initial point of my vita determined by Indonesia. Together with him I traveled to Indonesia for the first time in 1976, from which everything else resulted as a logical consequence. The study of *Malaiologie* (Malayology), the profession, also my "Indonesian" family: my wife Dian Apsari, my children Ayu and Satria. What would have become of me without Indonesia? Would I have become a teacher of German literature and philosophy, as I had originally planned, and would I now be teaching at some high school? I would not have experienced so many things, it would have been a less eventful life. The "exotic" profession of a Malayologist and the "exotic" language skills, for example, meant that I was even able to participate in "big politics". In the 1990s, I was the interpreter for the German chancellor and the Indonesian president on four state visits. I even developed a relationship with Suharto that could be described as personal; several times I was a guest in his private house, the last time after his resignation in 1998. At that time, the (good) relationship also ended, because I asked him why he had given his children such great advantages in their entrepreneurial activities. Then his expression froze, he answered only briefly ("My children were quite normal entrepreneurs") and remained silent. He was in no way receptive to criticism, especially as far as his family was concerned. Someday I will

record my experiences with Suharto; some of them may be worth reporting.⁷ The fact that I knew Suharto personally and did not condemn him on principle got me into some trouble. An acquaintance called me, though not publicly, a "friend of the butcher of men and despot". That hit me. I was in a moral predicament, because of course Suharto was involved in the mass murders of 1965/66. There is no use in pointing out that the hindsight of history is sometimes mild and more objective, as evidenced, for example, by that important European prize named after the Saxon butcher and despot Charlemagne. I was certainly not Suharto's "friend" – he probably had no friends at all – but I have indeed tried to understand him and his politics from the context of Indonesian culture and history, including his Javanese thinking. That he resigned in 1998 and refrained from defending his power with military force filled me with great relief. Perhaps I had not completely misjudged him after all, namely (also) as an Indonesian nationalist who had the welfare of his people at heart. I know that such a positive assessment outrages more than a few.

Apart from Suharto, I met other Indonesian politicians, including several state presidents and ministers. However, a closer contact existed only – and still exists today – with B.Y. Habibie, Suharto's intimate and self-confessed admirer for many years. As Suharto's successor, Habibie was credited with replacing the authoritarian system of rule in Indonesia with democracy based on the Western model.

My contacts with Indonesian politicians, however, always remained sporadic, having come about mainly by chance as an interpreter during state visits. The situation is different with Indonesia's cultural scene, namely its literary scene. This is the focus of my Indonesian "activities", of course, because modern Indonesian literature is my malayological focus. Another reason is my activity as a literary translator. Already in the nineties I cooperated closely with an Indonesian writer, namely Ramadhan K.H.⁸, with whom I translated German poetry into Indonesian

⁷ Translator's footnote from 2022: So far, the author has only shared such "experiences" in an interview. See: <https://www.dw.com/id/suharto-di-mata-penerjemah-jerman/a-53659584>

⁸ Ramadhan K.H. (1927-2006), who is regarded in Indonesia as the founder of a literary genre, namely the novel biografis (biographical novel), is incidentally also the "author" of Suharto's autobiography. This fact contributed to the fact that I published a German version of this autobiography, namely: *Soeharto – Gedanken, Worte und Taten, eine Autobiographie aufgrund von Schilderungen gegenüber G. Dwipayana und Ramadhan K.H.*, German translation: Thomas Zimmer, Verlag: PT. Citra Lamtoro Gung Persada, Jakarta 1994, ISBN: 979-8085-01-9, 608 pages. By the way, Ramadhan K.H. was very critical of Suharto's so-called "New Order".

and edited several anthologies of German and Indonesian poetry. His successor, so to speak, is the Indonesian poet Agus R. Sarjono, with whom I have been working closely since 2002, among other things on *Seri Puisi Jerman*, a series of German-language poetry in Indonesian translation, which I would like to discuss in more detail in a moment. Through Ramadhan K.H. and Agus R. Sarjono I got to know almost all prominent Indonesian writers and numerous artists personally. Through publications – I publish mainly in Indonesia – through readings, lectures, through my work as editorial member of the literary magazine *Jurnal Sajak*, I have meanwhile achieved a certain degree of recognition in Indonesia's literary scene, and have become part of this scene myself. With all the associated risks and disadvantages, as I will describe later.

Somehow it is strange. I now regularly meet the older Indonesian writers whose famous names I first heard during my studies, whose poems I tentatively began to translate into German at that time. I am their guest, have confidential conversations, let myself be asked by one (very prominent poet) whether I am clear about the fact that the attack on the World Trade Center was in no way a jihadist terror, but an action of the Americans themselves, with the aim of discrediting Islam, to be able to wage war against it. My pointing out that Al Qaeda had after all boasted of this attack could not shake the poet's conspiracy theory. An isolated case? In relation to the literary or intellectual elite, yes, but otherwise not at all.

But back to *Seri Puisi Jerman*, the series of German poetry in Indonesian translation, which is certainly the most important project I have undertaken to date. Within the framework of this series, bilingual volumes of poetry by the following German-speaking poets have been published in Indonesia since 2003: Bertolt Brecht, Paul Celan, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, Hans Magnus Enzensberger, Friedrich Nietzsche, Georg Trakl and Rainer Maria Rilke. A decisive prerequisite for the publication of such a series was the willingness of an Indonesian poet to work with me on the translations into Indonesian. In Agus R. Sarjono, one of the most important contemporary Indonesian writers, I found a partner who was willing to commit himself as co-translator and co-editor of the series. This was certainly a stroke of luck for the dissemination of German-language poetry in Indonesia, because only within the framework of such a collaboration could translations or reinterpretations be produced that

correspond to the German poems in poetic-aesthetic terms as well, at least as far as this is possible.⁹

The publication of the individual volumes of *Seri Puisi Jerman* was always accompanied by reading tours¹⁰ that took Sarjono and me to numerous Indonesian cities. At universities, cultural centers, museums, etc., we usually read in front of hundreds of listeners. To date, or in the last few years, a total of about 10,000 people have attended our events on German-language poetry. Often, well-known Indonesian writers have participated as moderators, reciters or discussants, among them Dorothea Rosa Herliany, Abdul Hadi W.M., Goenawan Mohamad, Taufiq Ismail and Jamal D. Rahman. The Goethe readings in March 2007 were particularly successful, even spectacular, when Sarjono and I visited various *pesantren*, Islamic educational institutions. In the *Pesantren Al Amien Prenduan* in Sumenep on Madura we were given a great reception. The *Kiayi*, the spiritual head of the *Pesantren*, personally participated as a reciter in the reading, which took place in a kind of "Audimax" of the *Pesantren* campus. Four to five thousand *santris* – pupils and students – had gathered there to hear Goethe poems in German and Indonesian. The *Pesantren's* music group had set several poems from the Goethe volume to music, including the love poem *Woher sind wir geboren?* (Whence Are We Born?). As a catchy pop song, whose refrain "dari cinta" ("from love") was sung along by thousands of *Santris*. This Goethe reading will remain unforgotten to me, also because the *Kiayi* recited just the poem from the Goethe's West-Eastern Divan, which ends as follows: *Daß aber der Wein von Ewigkeit sei, / Daran zweifl' ich nicht; / Oder daß er vor den Engeln geschaffen sei, / Ist vielleicht auch kein Gedicht. / Der Trinkende, wie es auch immer sei, / Blickt Gott frischer ins Angesicht.* (But that wine is from eternity, / I do not doubt; / Or that it was created before the angels, / Is perhaps also not a poem. / The drinker, however it may be, / Looks God fresher in the face.) I commented on the poem by pointing out that I personally like to follow the indirect invitation contained in it frequently, which prompted the *Kiayi* to tell the *Santris*, his students, with a smile, that it would be better not to follow my example, however. No less impressive

⁹ On the translation process and the cooperation with Agus R. Sarjono, see: <https://www.ioa.uni-bonn.de/soa/de/pers/personenseiten/berthold-damshaeuser/bild-und-pdfs/seri-puisi-jerman-interview-mit-bd.pdf>

¹⁰ Photos from these reading trips can be found at: https://www.facebook.com/berthold.damshaeuser/photos_albums

was the Goethe reading at Pesantren Cipayung in Tasikmalaya, West Java, whose cultural activities are led by the writer Acep Zamzam Noer. There, too, intensive preparations had been made for the event. The theater group of the pesantren presented a dramatized or staged version of Goethe's poem *Erlkönig*, and several writers from Tasikmalaya took part as reciters.

The *Seri Puisi Jerman* has found a broad echo among the literary public in Indonesia. I myself was particularly pleased that musicians, visual artists, and choreographers also engaged with the transmissions of German poetry. Songwriter Ari Kpin set Nietzsche's poems to music, and dancer Ine Arini – inspired by poems by Paul Celan – staged a dance theater performance entitled *Phallus Tarung Atau Candu & Ingatan* (Phallus Contest or Opium & Memory). The most impressive artistic response to our transmissions certainly came from Bandung painter Herry Dim, who created a cycle of paintings based on Celan's poems. At that time, the Celan volume of *Seri Puisi Jerman* was to be accompanied by an audio CD with musically accompanied recitations of the original German texts, and for this purpose I had sent the Indonesian publisher the studio recordings I had made in Germany with the musician Peter Habermehl. When I arrived in Jakarta in 2005 and Agus R. Sarjono showed me the just published book with enclosed CD shortly before the presentation event for the Celan volume, I was surprised to discover that it was a video CD. German recitation and music by Peter Habermehl had been supplemented by animations by Herry Dim, which he had worked out on the basis of his Celan picture cycle. A wonderful surprise, a multimedia work of art, an Indonesian-German collaboration that had been created without the knowledge of the German side.¹¹

For myself, the *Seri Puisi Jerman* is primarily concerned with the dissemination of great German-language poetry, i.e. linguistic works of art in the sense of *l'art pour l'art*. The worldview of the poets or even the subject matter of their work were not decisive in the selection. I chose Brecht neither because of nor in spite of his Marxism, Celan not because of the Holocaust theme, and Nietzsche not because of and not in spite of his atheism as poet of the *Seri* volumes. However, the theme and ideological message of the poems have a great significance in their

¹¹ Some of these videos can be found on youtube: <https://www.google.com/search?client=firefox-b-d&q=Habermehl+Dim+youtube>

dissemination in Indonesia. Already within the framework of the prefaces or the introductions in the respective volumes, I have tried to explain to the Indonesian reader that there is no reason even for opponents of Marxism and atheism to close their minds to the literary works of Marxists or atheists, that one should show a fundamental intellectual openness. During the Nietzsche readings, which as always were followed by extensive discussions with the audience, I pointed out that as a "non-atheist" I have no problem with atheist texts, that Nietzsche has enriched me, that there are many atheists among my friends. With such statements one touches taboos in Indonesia, of course, and in some circles one should beware of that. Before a Nietzsche reading in Malang, at the OHD Museum of the Chinese-born art collector Oei Hong Djien, the organizer received a series of text messages saying that they were "alert to the fact that a non-Muslim was organizing a reading of poetry by an atheist on the very first day of the fasting month of Ramadhan". The press had obviously received similar text messages and questioned me about "hidden" intentions I was pursuing with the *Seri Puisi Jerman*. However, the matter turned out well.

Within the framework of *Seri Puisi Jerman*, some enlightening messages could certainly be conveyed. This also applied to Goethe, whose great sympathy for Islam is clearly expressed in many of his poems. Audiences at Goethe readings were enthusiastic when I quoted Goethe's famous saying that he himself "did not reject the suspicion of being a Muslim". For many, including some Indonesian media, it was then certain that Goethe was a Muslim. I always pointed out that this was not a significant question for me, that I was rather interested in which Islam Goethe was enthusiastic about. And then I could explain that Goethe was close to Sufism, to the mystical and undogmatic Islam. That he liked to drink a lot of wine. Some Indonesians were also enthusiastic about the fact that Goethe was opposed to Christianity, that he did not believe in the Sonship of Christ. They asked how it was still possible that Goethe was so revered in Germany. I replied that this was indeed remarkable, especially since Christian circles in Germany liked to call him a "heretic" or "heathen." But that this had just not disturbed the majority, i.e. the enlightened public. This certainly makes an impression, similar to the fact, which is surprising for many Indonesians, that the Goethe-Institut, as part of its promotion of the *Seri Puisi Jerman*, has also made known the works

of the Jew Paul Celan, whose poems are about the victims of the Holocaust, an undeniable crime – the reference to this is very important in Indonesia – committed by Germans.

A project like the *Seri Puisi Jerman* can only be carried out in the long term if it is subsidized. Even if I myself waive any translator's fee and Agus R. Sarjono is satisfied with a fee per volume that corresponds to what one can earn in Germany by translating about ten Indonesian school reports, subsidies are needed, especially in the form of printing cost subsidies for the publishers. In this respect, the *Seri Puisi Jerman* was supported by various sponsors, namely the German Embassy Jakarta, the Swiss-German University in Bumi Serpong Damai and, of course, the Goethe-Institut Jakarta. These institutions supported when their responsible persons appreciated the importance of such a project in the context of the dissemination of German culture in Indonesia. This was true for Gerhard Fulda, the former German ambassador in Jakarta, his cultural advisor Hendrik Barkeling or for Jürgen Grüneberg, the former rector of the Swiss-German University. At the Goethe-Institut Jakarta, which also financed the reading tours, it was Marla Stukenberg and Katrin Sohns as heads of the program department and above all Franz Xaver Augustin, who headed the institute until 2013. He was the most important supporter of the *Seri Puisi Jerman*, and was also personally committed to it, providing translators with working space and overnight accommodations in his house in Jakarta's Menteng district. Augustin was the most important and successful director I experienced at the Goethe-Institut Jakarta. Equipped with a flair for really important projects as well as the drive needed to realize them, he contributed, among other things, to making the exhibition curated by Werner Kraus of works by Raden Saleh (1811-1880), the first Indonesian painter, a spectacular national cultural event in Indonesia. Another example is the biography of the German-Indonesian missionary Franz Magnis-Suseno, sponsored by the Goethe-Institut and written by Heinz Schütte, which was published in 2013. The idea for it, of course, came from Franz Xaver Augustin. In one of our many conversations, I had pointed out to him that the experiences and assessments of Magnis-Suseno, as an important figure in contemporary Indonesian history, should be documented. He immediately recognized that it was precisely a biography that could accomplish this, and thus had the decisive idea that I had not come up with.

Whether the *Seri Puisi Jerman* can be continued in the future without the support of a Franz Xaver Augustin is uncertain. The Goethe-Institut Jakarta only wants to commit itself to one more volume, the one with poems by Hermann Hesse, which is to be published in 2015. It is said that one cannot always promote the same "constellations," by which apparently the translator duo is meant. If this were the case, there would be a misunderstanding, because the *Seri Puisi Jerman* is not about promoting translators, but about promoting German poetry in Indonesia. About the works of Hölderlin, Eichendorff, Novalis and so many other German-speaking poets whose works are still unknown in Indonesia due to the lack of translations.

Anyway: Agus R. Sarjono and I will continue to translate German-language poems into Indonesian together, and if necessary we will publish them in our Indonesian poetry magazine *Jurnal Sajak*. We will continue this work also because we enjoyed the struggle for the apt word, rhythm and rhyme. In the hundreds of hours we spent together, we experienced what writers, unlike musicians, for example, are not usually granted: joint artistic creation, specifically: the production of linguistic works of art in the Indonesian language. Agus and I became friends in the course of such work, in December 2003, when we spent long Berlin nights translating Brecht into Indonesian.

I was able to learn a lot in the process, not only about the Indonesian language, but also about the German language. In my article in "Nelkenduft" I already mentioned that the process of translating, which involves constant comparison and can thus be described as contrastive or comparative, enables deep insights into the respective language pair. I wrote: "It is precisely in translating, the most intensive form of dealing with one's own and the foreign language, that 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. The most striking feature of the Indonesian language from the point of view of a person thinking in the German language 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 Indonesians the question of tense and mode - categories that do not exist for them 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 answered very wisely: "It will be (or did he mean 'would be'? we spoke Indonesian, and he did not have to distinguish there ...) a different philosophy than the German one. In some respects a freer and more sublime one."

Nietzsche said: "As if all words were not pockets, into which soon this, soon that, soon several things were put at once!" The speakers of Indonesian have filled their pockets to the brim, quite differently than the speakers of German. Indonesian words are characterized by a high ambiguity, especially in comparison to German ones, which alone and quite apart from the lack of tense, mode etc. leads to a (relative) incompatibility of the language pair Indonesian-German. Since Indonesian is semantically diffuse - at least in comparison to European languages - automatic translation programs, which by now deliver reasonably comprehensible results when translating from European into other European languages, will continue to fail miserably when translating from Indonesian or into Indonesian. Unless, of course, artificial intelligence should at some point become equivalent to human intelligence. Or to put it another way: if computers were capable of

convincingly translating the intentions of Indonesian texts into German, then they would be like humans, understanding the world.

One of the most famous Indonesian sentences can be used as an example of the character of many Indonesian texts. This almost incomprehensible sentence is the fourth of the five principles of the Indonesian state ideology Pancasila.¹² A close textual translation into German could be as follows: "People's affairs guided by the power of wisdom in consultation/representation." The first semantically diffuse word translated here as "people's affairs," *kerakyatan*, an abstract noun based on *rakyat* (people) – i.e., actually "peoplehood" – can also be interpreted as "democracy" according to the Standard Dictionary of Modern Indonesian, i.e., as a rare synonym of the Indonesian word *demokrasi*. The word *permusyawaratan*, which I translated as "consultation," and which, interestingly, is not included in the standard Indonesian dictionary at all, could in principle also mean "place of consultation." I repeatedly asked native Indonesian speakers, including many intellectuals, to explain to me in detail the meaning or intention of the fourth principle of the Pancasila. Nearly no one was able to do so, many admitted after failed attempts to explain that they only now realized what they had always suspected: that they did not really understand this sentence. Most agreed with the interpretation of the sentence that I proposed: representative consensus democracy. But is this really the statement intended by the authors, the founding fathers of the Republic of Indonesia?¹³

In such and similar sentences, which are by no means an exception in Indonesian texts, two things come together: The semantic ambivalence of Indonesian words and the way many Indonesian authors formulate them, which takes no account of this. As a result, understanding Indonesian texts is sometimes extremely difficult, even for native speakers. And in this respect, it is of course a fairy tale that Indonesian is an "easy" language, as is repeatedly claimed by those who can babble a bit of Indonesian but have hardly ever studied Indonesian texts in depth. In

¹² The Indonesian "sentence" is: *Kerakyatan yang dipimpin oleh hikmat kebijaksanaan dalam permusyawaratan/perwakilan*.

¹³ Translator's footnote from 2022: In this context, see Berthold Damshäuser's essay published in 2019 on the text of the Pancasila:
file:///D:/0%20Buch%20PANCASILA/Damsh%C3%A4user%20The%20Text%20of%20the%20Indonesian%20State%20Ideology%20Pancasila%20%E2%80%93%20A%20Small%20Exegesis.pdf

the past, when I was teaching translation, I had students who were learning two Asian languages, for example Mandarin, Japanese or Arabic, in addition to Indonesian. All of them complained about the difficult comprehensibility of Indonesian texts at the latest from the main study period and assured me that this was not such a big problem in their other Asian languages.

Translating from Indonesian is a particular challenge even with understood texts, since Indonesian diction or saying can almost never be transferred into German, which is especially true for literary translations. To a much greater extent than in translations from European languages, the translator must possess great linguistic creativity and must also compensate for the technical weaknesses of Indonesian texts, for example, a lack of cohesion or weaknesses in logical structure, deficiencies that are not uncommon even among famous Indonesian writers. Incidentally, language-conscious Indonesian authors complain about this very much.¹⁴

As far as literary translation from Indonesian is concerned, I have concentrated almost exclusively on modern Indonesian poetry. Over the past decades, hundreds of translations into German have been produced, which I would like to publish soon as part of a large anthology of Indonesian poetry of the 20th century, preferably in time for the Frankfurt Book Fair in October 2015, at which Indonesia will be the Guest of Honor.¹⁵ I will probably not translate so much literature or poetry from Indonesian in the future, and so such an anthology would also be a capstone. In the meantime, translating poetry from Indonesian is actually only great fun for me if the author is willing to cooperate, as my friend Agus R. Sarjono does. Then all open semantic questions of the ambiguous Indonesian text can be clarified, and furthermore one can involve the author in the process of re-poetry, for example with regard to a very free design of the German version. As a translator, one feels comfortable when the author of the source text has agreed to such an approach, or even encouraged it. In collaboration with Agus R. Sarjono, this approach has led to the creation

¹⁴ I have commented on this topic, as well as on the characteristics of Indonesian, several times in recent years in contributions to a column in the Indonesian news magazine *Tempo*. These (Indonesian-language) contributions are accessible on the following website:

<https://rubrikbahasa.wordpress.com/category/menurut-penulis/berthold-damshauser/>

¹⁵ Translator's footnote from 2022: Such an anthology then appeared in 2015, see:

<https://www.regiospectra.de/buecher/sprachfeuer-detail>

of new poems with which I am very satisfied.¹⁶ Philological small minds, however, would triumphantly discover a whole series of "translation errors" in them.

Even if I translate less from Indonesian in the future, I will remain closely connected to modern Indonesian literature, not least as editor of the poetry magazine *Jurnal Sajak*. Of course, also in view of the Indonesian appearance as Guest of Honor at the Frankfurt Book Fair 2015. As a member of the National Indonesian Committee for the preparation of this appearance, I am trying to make a contribution to ensuring that Indonesia and its cultures are finally given the interest in Germany that they deserve. That it becomes known that Indonesia is a literary treasure trove, with rich oral and written literatures, traditional, classical and modern, which still await discovery in our country. I sincerely hope that Indonesia's honorary guest role at the 2015 Frankfurt Book Fair will be a turning point in the perception of Indonesia as a cultural and literary nation.

I have already mentioned above that I have achieved a certain degree of notoriety in Indonesia's literary scene, that I myself have become part of this scene. In addition, I indicated that this can occasionally be unpleasant. This referred to "events" at the beginning of 2014 that irritated me greatly. The trigger was the publication of a book of over 700 pages on modern Indonesian literature¹⁷, of which I count a total of eight authors. All of the authors were also members of a "team" referred to as Tim 8, chaired by Jamal D. Rahman, the editor-in-chief of the literary magazine *Horison*¹⁸, which met in 2013 to answer the question of which personalities could be described as the most influential or impactful figures in modern Indonesian literature. Jamal D. Rahman had told me that he should set up such a team on behalf of the H.B. Jassin Literary Documentation Center. I had gladly accepted his request to become a member of the team as the only foreigner, especially since most of the other members, writers and literary scholars, were well known to me. According to Jamal D. Rahman, the primary aim of the book is to show, through the examples of 33 characters, that modern Indonesian literature has had a great impact on social, historical, and intellectual developments in Indonesia through the

¹⁶ Translator's footnote from 2022: These translations were then published in book form: <https://www.regiospectra.de/en/books/gestatten-mein-name-ist-truebsinn-en-detail>

¹⁷ Jamal D. Rahman et. al: 33 Tokoh Sastra Indonesia Paling Berpengaruh [The 33 Most Impactful Figures in Indonesian Literature], Kepustakaan Populer Gramedia, Jakarta 2014.

¹⁸ *Horison* is the most important and highest-circulation Indonesian literary magazine, published in Jakarta.

works and activities of writers, as well as literary critics and scholars. The contributions of the authors of the book about the selected 33 figures have tried to prove this. The selection of the figures was based on specific criteria outlined in the preface. Moreover, the preface explicitly pointed out the subjectivity of the selection and also clarified that it was not based on results of a scientific investigation. For, of course, even a bundle of sciences would not have been able to prove qualitatively or quantitatively the respective degree of impact power or influence.

It was clear to me that not all of the 33 figures would meet with approval, that the selection as a whole would meet with rejection from part of the literary public in Indonesia. However, the reactions exceeded everything that could have been expected. In the social media, the very day after the presentation of the book, there was a phenomenon known today as a shitstorm. Before the book could even be read, a flood of abuse and vituperation poured down on the authors. I myself was insulted and threatened on my publicly accessible facebook page. I was a "destroyer of Indonesian literature," I should no longer dare to go to Indonesia, I was - alluding to the *Seri Puisi Jerman* - a "cultural imperialist," and I could be bought, as the selection of 33 characters proved. But the weeks-long shitstorm - a thoroughly interesting and valuable experience - was not all. A few weeks after the presentation of the book, there was a petition calling on the Indonesian government to ban the sale of the book, among other things on the grounds that the book falsifies literary history and poses a danger to future generations. Moreover, the selection of the 33 characters was not based on scientific grounds, and the book was an unacceptable attempt at canonization. What was irritating was that this abstruse and, of course, unsuccessful petition had been written by a professor of literature and some (second-rate) writers, i.e., people who were supposed to have a certain intellectual level. The Indonesian public then did not attach any importance to the petition; it was supported only by so-called "literary activists." These disseminated caricatures of the authors, pinned their wanted posters on walls and continued to insult them. It is said that there was even a public burning of the book. Demonstrably, there was an invitation to do so, although this led to a discussion on social media as to whether this was not going too far. One of the authors of the petition, a writer married to a German (!), commented on this with the words, "The filthy book should be burned and the authors should be deported to

Auschwitz.”¹⁹ This almost bizarre climax to a public discussion about literature is indicative of the intellectual level of part of Indonesia's literary scene. It is irritating and also depressing. I am not referring to the many outstanding Indonesian writers who will represent Indonesian literature at the Frankfurt Book Fair in 2015.

Even if, in retrospect, the shitstorm was only a storm in a teacup, the social media, the feeling of a threat arose at times. The Goethe-Institute in Jakarta was also worried, as the events for the tenth anniversary of *Seri Puisi Jerman* were planned for March 2014, with reading tours to a total of five Indonesian cities. After all, one had to expect disruptions to the events. However, all fears proved to be unfounded. Although some "literary activists" and those involved in the shitstorm appeared at the readings, none of them asked any questions, and many greeted me in an exceptionally friendly manner, as if nothing had happened at all. This astonished me. But finally I was met in person now, not on the Internet, not under the protection of the collective and the mob.

The furor of the actions against the book, the authors and even against some of the 33 selected characters is understandable against the background of the widespread frustration of marginalized people in Indonesia, which can quickly turn into sheer hatred. This is especially true for more educated circles, for example, second- and third-rate writers, "literary activists" or unsuccessful artists. People are certain that they are unjustly marginalized, that they are deliberately marginalized by a financially strong (literary) elite (in Jakarta), and they smell behind every project, every activity of the "elite" an attempt by the latter to further expand their position of power.²⁰ The book is also evaluated in this way by the marginalized, and thus one feels legitimized to wage a "fight with all means" against it. Of course, this is also an attempt to gain attention, to escape marginality.

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¹⁹ *Buku sampah itu sangat layak dibakar dan para penyusunnya dibuang ke Auschwitz*. I carefully keep the screen-shot sent to me of this comment posted on facebook.

²⁰ An example of this is the hatred that the marginalized people have for the cultural centers in Jakarta, Teater Utan Kayu and Salihara, which are regarded as elitist. In particular, the writer and intellectual Goenawan Mohamad, who works there as a curator, was repeatedly the target of personal vilification, with some of the authors of the petition against the book on the 33 most influential figures in modern Indonesian literature coming forward in a particularly negative way.

What future prognosis would they give your field of activity? What prognosis with regard to the development and future of Indonesia in general would you like to make? These are the third and fourth questions submitted to the authors of this book for optional answers. I would like to begin with the incomparably simpler third. By "field of activity" I mean the professional-institutional one. I will limit myself to a few remarks.

As mentioned, despite my affiliation with a department of Southeast Asian Studies, I do not consider myself a Southeast Asian Studies scholar, but a Malayologist. As such, I belong to the guild of those who deal philologically with the Malay (= Indonesian) language and literature. I have the impression that it is a dying guild. This is not only indicated by the fact that there is no longer a subject called "Malaiology" at German universities²¹, but also by the general decline in interest of future Indonesianists in philological questions, both linguistic and literary, with the latter often being replaced by diffuse "media studies". This trend, which seems to be spreading in Oriental Studies in general, is accompanied by the triumph of "regional studies" subjects with non-philological emphases such as economics, history, politics, development cooperation, and so on. Of course, there are also pragmatic reasons behind this, because presumably one actually needs more development cooperation workers than specialists in Indonesian literature. Perhaps one should not lament such developments too much.

But what I also notice is certainly of greater consequence. Namely, the decline in the willingness to acquire comprehensive or excellent knowledge of the Indonesian language. This is probably due to the fact that there is a strong tendency in regional studies to avoid reading texts in the languages of the respective regions. For example, contemporary Indonesian history can be studied in many regional science bachelor's and master's programs solely on the basis of English-language sources, and successfully so in terms of formal degree completion.

I occasionally tell my students that to really know Indonesia - I can't think of a better word than "know" - they need to have spent hundreds of hours speaking in Indonesian with Indonesians from all walks of life. That they need to read Indonesian texts every day, and not just the daily

²¹ For example, at the University of Cologne, where I studied Malayology in the 1980s, Indonesian philology (Malayology) can now only be studied as part of a course in "Languages and Cultures of the Islamic World".

newspapers. They understand what I mean and agree. But the study regulations have made it possible for them to earn a master's degree even if they have only studied Indonesian for a total of three semesters (three modules).

In science, English dominates, and German as a language of science is increasingly abandoned even by German speakers. We are moving in the direction of monolingualism, and not only in science. Should this prevail in relations between Germans and Indonesians, then Indonesians and Germans will no longer be able to really get to know each other in the future.

Another problem I have to deal with professionally is the now often lamented lack of university entrance qualifications of not a few students. It seems to me that this is a particularly serious one in our subject "Asian Studies", which could be due to the fact that there are many among our students who prefer to study a supposedly easy non-numerous clausus subject than, for example, natural sciences or law. They prefer to "do something with languages and cultures." That's certainly legitimate, but it's a little disturbing when about half of the participants in a language course don't know the difference between "transitive" and "intransitive," or when some of those who have signed up for an Indonesian language module don't even know where exactly Sumatra or Java are located. Yet they all carry small devices with them that could help them retrieve almost all of humanity's knowledge in seconds. These devices also seem to promote an addiction to the shortest texts and images, which is not necessarily conducive to scientific study. Of course, I should be wary of making overly broad generalizations. There are still many excellent students. Nevertheless, I am concerned because the problems I am talking about have increased in recent years. My prognosis is also pessimistic: The trends I have described will not be stopped, at least in the short term; rather, they will intensify.

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What prognosis with regard to the development and future of Indonesia in general would you like to make? "None," you should answer, because a prognosis is, after all, the (scientifically based) prediction of a probable course of events, for example, in terms of "weather over the next five days." Despite all their scientific nature, even such prognosiss are not

always reliable. Moreover, our modern world is at least as complex as the weather, its non-linear dynamics make predictability almost impossible, and this also applies to its controllability.

In May 1998, after Suharto's resignation and the collapse of the authoritarian system of the "New Order," I told my students with a serious face that it was highly uncertain whether Indonesia would still exist in its present form in ten or fifteen years. If I am honest, these words should certainly be taken as a kind of prognosis. At the time, I feared years of chaos and even the disintegration of Indonesia's multi-ethnic state. Even if such worries were not completely unfounded, one thing is certain today: It was not Cassandra who was speaking at the time, but someone who was completely off the mark.

With the "prognoses" in my contribution in "Nelkenduft" I may be more content. There I named four "problems and dangers" as global framework conditions for shaping Indonesia's future as a member of an inseparable community of destiny of all states and peoples: *First: The danger of large-scale, even 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, every state will be threatened in the future to an unprecedented degree by what I would call "internal terrorism." The spread of knowledge about the manufacture of weapons - chemical, biological, etc. - aided, for example, by the uncontrollable Internet, poses dangers that I believe can hardly be averted. 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 [Papua] 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? Third, and universally known: The dangers of progressive ecological destruction worldwide and also due to population growth. 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 the individual states to pursue an independent national policy due to the ever stronger 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. In my view, these "problems and dangers" have not changed; they still represent the framework conditions for future developments.

When reading my further remarks in "Nelkenduft", two things astonished me: My doubts at the time about the meaningfulness of value pluralism for Indonesia, and the fact that I said almost not a word about Islam. As far as the doubts were concerned, which were also accompanied by a noticeable skepticism about the Western value system - and not only as far as its transferability to Indonesia is concerned - I now have a different view²², one could almost say a less tolerant one, even presumptuous to a certain extent. I mean by this my present conviction that the thinking inspired by the European Enlightenment represents the climax reached so far of an evolutionary development of human consciousness in general. Specifically, I mean: freedom of the individual, equality of rights, rational and skeptical thinking, humanism, pluralism. I support the universalistic claim of all this and would like to assert it against culturally relativistic views. Perhaps it was even developments in Indonesia, especially the first-hand experience of the strengthening of dogmatic-religious thinking, that brought me to this conviction. As never before, I appreciate the culture that has put the question mark and the search in the center to a very special degree, the western-western culture. From this comes what I hope for Indonesia. The following reflections or

²² This does not apply to all my remarks in "Nelkenduft", namely not to my criticism of the Western overemphasis on (individual) rights to the detriment of a morality of duty as well as the strong materialistic component of modern Western thinking.

"prognosis" with regard to Indonesia will therefore also be about whether and to what extent I trust the country to follow the appropriate path.

My failed forecast from 1998 (imminent disintegration of Indonesia) shows that my expectations were not particularly high. From my then so pessimistic view, Indonesia has taken a very positive development since 1998. This applies not only to internal stability and the economic situation, but also to the departure toward democracy, the latter being directly related to what I have described above as evolutionary development. After the collapse of the "New Order," Indonesia succeeded in establishing a Western-style democracy in a very short time. A party democracy with free elections, a free press, separation of powers. This is a great success. However, it does not justify the euphoria occasionally expressed in the Sunday speeches of Western politicians.

There are a number of serious grievances in Indonesia, in its actually existing democracy, that one could not really expect after the turnaround of 1998 and the beginning of the so-called Reformasi era. For example, the fact that corruption, the fight against which was one of the main concerns of the reform forces or the main reason for the demand for Suharto's resignation, has actually increased.²³ Cynics say that corruption has "democratized." Today it can be carried out by more people, not only by those in power in Jakarta, but also-as a result of the weakening of the central state through the laws on regional autonomy-by those in power in the thirty or so provinces. And perhaps this is precisely what contributes to the internal stability of the multiethnic state, because sated local elites have no reason for separatist aspirations.

Also of great concern is the anachronism that the positive democratic developments of the post-Suharto era have been accompanied by a general decline in tolerance and pluralism. Religious discrimination against Muslim minorities (Shiites and Ahmadi), Christians, Buddhists and adherents of state-recognized religions and worldviews has increased. Excesses sometimes occur, for example in December 2011, when hundreds of Sunni Muslims attacked a Shiite community in Sampang on Madura, burning houses and committing other violence. In this context, scholarly analyses point out that the Indonesian government has promoted the strengthening of a conservative Sunni Islam and has

²³ At least, this is what is repeatedly said, both by Indonesian and foreign experts.

driven conflict through its passive behavior with regard to violent excesses.²⁴ A fundamentalist Islamist regime is tolerated by the Indonesian state in its province of Aceh, where Sharia legislation is in place, imposing corporal punishment for gambling, drinking alcohol, or dating a partner who is not a spouse, brother, or sister; where women are required to wear headscarves and homosexuality can be punished with up to one hundred lashes; where stoning for adultery is soon to be introduced.²⁵

Ultimately, the question arises as to how stable Indonesia's young democracy actually is. The victory of Joko Widodo in the 2014 presidential elections is generally seen as proof of the stability of democracy. However, it was a very narrow victory. The losing candidate, ex-general Prabowo Subianto, who openly advocated a return to authoritarianism, received 47 % of the vote. His alliance of conservative and Islamist forces was thus only about 3 % short of the vote. It would probably have won if the camp of the more secular forces had not had such a popular candidate as Joko Widodo.

It is also worrying that the election campaign was conducted in an extremely dirty manner, especially by the Prabowo camp. The latter repeatedly played the "religious card," for example in the form of the absurd accusation that Widodo was a "handmaiden of the Christians" or even of world Jewry. Moreover, this kind of confrontation did not end with the election campaign. Currently, Jakarta's governor, who is of Chinese descent and Christian, is facing similar accusations. Islamists are calling on the population to oppose political leadership by a pagan, and are certainly finding support in some circles. From such things, one can see how difficult it will be for the Widodo government to push through a secular agenda, if it seriously intends to do so at all. Above all, however, it is clear from this that Indonesia is in the midst of a cultural struggle that - according to my prognosis - will determine the next decades in Indonesia. This is characterized by the conflict between secularists and Pancasilaists²⁶ on the one hand and religious dogmatists (Islamists) on the

²⁴ See: Amanda Kovacs: Religiöse Diskriminierung in Indonesien – ambivalente Rechtslage und politische Passivität, in: GIGA Focus, Nummer 11, 2012. (www.giga-hamburg.de/de/system/files/publications/gf_asien_1211.pdf)

²⁵ See: <http://www.dw.de/strenger-halbmond-%C3%BCber-mekkas-veranda/a-18148028>

²⁶ Pancasila (The Five Principles): The state philosophy Pancasila, consisting of five principles, prescribes a religious pluralism. [Translator's footnote from 2022: In 2022 Damshäuser published a book on Pancasila. See: <https://www.regiospectra.de/en/books/mythos-pancasila-en-detail>

other. This is the cultural struggle that is currently being fought in almost all states with a majority Islamic population, a struggle that can end in war or civil war and is currently destabilizing an entire region, the Middle East, or even leading it into chaos. Fortunately, Indonesia is not threatened by this to the same extent as the states of the Middle East or North Africa. Nevertheless, a division in Indonesian society is discernible, which could have negative repercussions for the country's internal stability. Not without reason, secularists and pluralists in Indonesia feel exposed to the danger that religious dogmatism will rise to the level of religious fascism, which could take hold of all of life - even into private everyday life - and which, in this respect, would be even more dangerous for the individual striving for freedom than a military system of rule, which - as the example of Egypt shows - seems to be the tragic alternative to religious fascism.

One could also describe the culture war in Indonesia as a clash between liberalism and authoritarianism. But regardless of the terms one chooses to label it, the crucial question facing Indonesia should be unmistakable: Does Enlightenment thinking and humanism prevail or not?

Can this question be answered in the context of a prognosis? Probably not. But I have hope that things could develop for the better in Indonesia. The country's leading intellectuals are generally enlightened pluralists. The same is true of the majority of leading Islamic intellectuals and theologians. Therefore, I believe that the pessimistic view of the Syrian poet Adonis is not applicable to Indonesia, according to which a democratic development of the Arab world requires a radical break with Islam²⁷. The mindset of Indonesians, particularly that of Javanese culture as Indonesia's guiding culture, differs markedly from what might be called Arabism. The Islam practiced in Indonesia was and still is, as a rule, a non-dogmatic and also mystically (Sufi) oriented one. And that is why Indonesia is in a better position than many Arab countries to use its own example to demonstrate the compatibility between Islam and democracy.

Whether this will succeed is, of course, by no means certain. The development of Indonesia's education system is crucial. Unfortunately, there is some cause for concern here, because globalization has led to "education exports," especially from Saudi Arabia, the effects of which are

²⁷ See: „Schrei nach Freiheit“, Spiegel-Gespräch mit dem Dichter Adonis, in: Der Spiegel 51/2014, S. 134-136.

already becoming apparent. If the influence of Salafist or Wahabi ideas on Indonesian youth is not stopped, dangerous tendencies could intensify and ultimately turn Indonesia into a country that breaks with its pluralistic traditions. In this context, I hope for important measures from the Indonesian government under the hopeful Joko Widodo, who can count on the support of the strong secular or pluralist camp here. Fortunately, Prabowo Subianto, who may run again in the next presidential elections, is not entirely wrong when he claims that "Indonesia is a Western product that can hardly be repaired."²⁸ At least, if - as I suspect - he also means by this that the (Western) modernity that has come to Indonesia from outside is not limited to the objects of consumption and technology, but has also decisively (irreversibly?) advanced the development of the individual in the direction of autonomy and freedom. And that would be a very important prerequisite for the positive outcome of the culture war now taking place.

Of course, Indonesia's economic development will also play a decisive role. So far, the Indonesian economic model, which is essentially based on the exploitation of natural resources and cheap labor, has worked. Despite the ever-widening gap between rich and poor, it must be admitted that the living conditions of the broad masses have also improved. However, the sustainability of the economic successes depends on whether Indonesia also makes progress in technological terms. This depends on improving the education system, because only then will Indonesia produce more engineers, inventors or scientists, etc. in the future.

Economic crises are possible at any time, and could also result from external influences, for example a collapse of the world financial system or other global crises. Should Indonesia then see the impoverishment of broad segments of the population, anything is politically possible, including, of course, a negative outcome of the culture war, including the establishment of a military or religious dictatorship. The possibility of such scenarios quickly leads to a hopeless pessimism from which I cannot entirely absolve myself. After all, a look at current geopolitical events makes such scenarios seem quite realistic. And actually I am an

²⁸ See:

<http://lipsus.kompas.com/indonesiasatu/read/2014/06/29/0824212/Prabowo.Sebut.Indonesia.Produk.Barat.yang.Susah.Diperbaik>

unconvincing pessimist in end-time mood, someone who thinks that "all this can't end well", that mankind is meanwhile facing a mixture of problems that can no longer be solved.

Of course, pessimism makes no contribution to shaping Indonesia's future positively. Fortunately, according to my impressions, the mood in Indonesia is also rather optimistic, especially among the democratic, secular and pluralistic forces. When I told an Indonesian friend of my concern that the most terrible catastrophes, nuclear and other terrorist attacks, could soon be triggered precisely by people who firmly believe in God, paradise and hell, he said that he was sure that this was currently the last defensive battle of dogmatic fanatic thinking, a battle that this thinking could never win.

Either way, I hope that in the future the mostly bourgeois Indonesian progressive forces will not only advocate for their personal liberties in a democratically elitist way, but will also pay more attention to the idea of social justice. Sometimes I think-without being a communist or recommending Indonesia turn away from a market economy-that Marxist analysis would do Indonesia's oligarchic economic system good. Leftist thought, however, remains taboo in Indonesia, and this is evident not only in the ban on the dissemination of Marxist-Communist ideas that remains in place. This is probably not conducive to the emergence of greater social empathy, which I believe is necessary in Indonesia.

My remarks are reflections, the prognostic comes too short. But questions such as the outcome of what I call the "culture war" defy any prognosis. That it will last for decades, I dare to predict. Another prediction is that the Papuan conflict²⁹ will present the Indonesian government with ever greater problems in the future. It could develop into a problem similar to that which existed in the former and now independent province of East Timor, especially if the independence

²⁹ This conflict is taking place in West New Guinea, which was (de facto) annexed by Indonesia in 1963. There are separatist efforts, especially on the part of the Organisasi Papua Merdeka (Free Papua Organization), which is fighting for the establishment of an independent state and considers itself the representative of the indigenous Melanesian population. A novel published in January 2015 under the title *Isinga, Novel Papua* by the Java-born writer Dorothea Rosa Herliany (a translation into German is planned) is dedicated to the recent history of Papua and describes, in particular using the example of the *Isinga*, the women and mothers of Papua, the suffering of the Melanesian population under the violence of the Indonesian military, to which tens of thousands of Papuans fell victim.

aspirations of Papua's indigenous Melanesian population were to be supported by foreign states.

To end, I would like to speculate little. And start with a clarification: Unlike Prabowo Subianto, quoted above, Indonesia is of course by no means "a Western product". Indonesian culture, or rather the identity of what was only conceptually established at the beginning of the 20th century and then formally established in 1945 with the founding of the state of Indonesia, could be described - at least in general terms - as a syncretism *sui generis*, as a synthesis of indigenous animism, Hinduism, Islam and Western modernity. A fascinating syncretism, as it is most clearly and convincingly expressed in modern Javanese culture. And it is precisely because of this that Indonesia possesses a rich intellectual potential that is actually predestined to contribute to the important philosophical and scientific discourses of the present day, and possibly to the evolution of human knowledge.

What am I thinking about, what am I speculating on? I observe that the leading or most influential representatives of modern sciences - for example theoretical physics, evolutionary biology, brain research - promote a thoroughly materialistic view of man, deny any transcendence and recently even the existence of free will. The latter, in particular, would bring about a virtually Copernican turn in the self-understanding of man, which would ultimately shake the concept of freedom of the Enlightenment, the core idea of Western thought.

In the debate about the postulates of the latest scientific discourses, the voices of the representatives of religious-dogmatic systems, for example those of the Abrahamic religions, are for understandable reasons only rarely heard. Perhaps it is time that representatives of mystical thinking intervene in these discourses, a thinking, as it has produced in Indonesia especially the Javanese culture in its specific mysticism (Kebatinan) and for which a non-dogmatic view on the spiritual, the transcendence, is characteristic. In Javanese mysticism, the systems of the book religions are considered non-binding. This is a good condition for a free metaphysical philosophizing and the argument with materialistic views. Yes, even for making a significant contribution to the further evolution of human thinking, to the compatibility of materialistic and spiritual knowledge.

But of course: Before Indonesian thinkers can join the current scientific-philosophical discourses, they would have to rise to the level of these discourses, overcome their - in the phrase of the Indonesian poet Afrizal Malna - "intellectual autism". Only then will one escape cultural-intellectual marginality. But why should this not be possible?

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In the title of this essay, I refer to Indonesia as my "second home". Not because I lived there for a long time - I never lived in Indonesia for more than a year - but because I feel just as at home there as I do in Germany, just as at home in the Indonesian language as I do in the German. I felt how great my connection to Indonesia and Indonesians is in Beijing, which seemed foreign and strange to me. I visited the Indonesian department of a university there. When I was introduced to the Indonesian lecturer working there, I hugged him, relieved and happy. Finally, a "compatriot"! We were immediately best friends, retired, smoked clove cigarettes, drank *kopi tubruk* (Indonesian coffee), ate spicy nasi goreng, listened to gamelan music. We were at home.

(Bonn, January 2015)

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