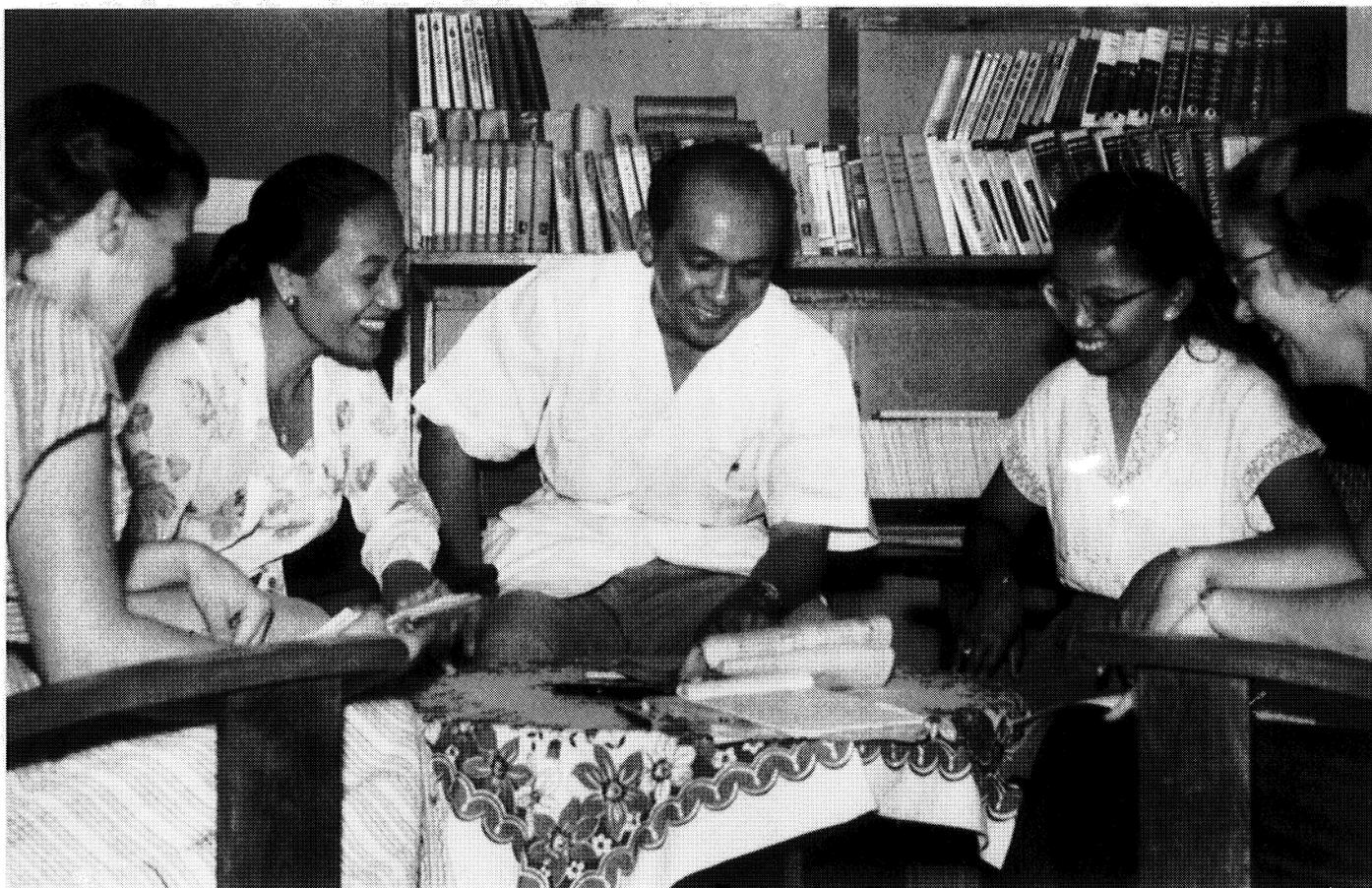


IN MEMORIAM:
JO KURNIANINGRAT SASTROAMIJOYO
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In August 1954 I arrived in Jakarta as a new member of the Australian Volunteer Graduate Scheme for Indonesia pioneered by Herb Feith. He was returning to the Ministry of Information while Betty Feith and I were about to join the English Language Inspectorate of the Ministry of Education, Instruction, and Culture formed in 1953 to introduce English, in place of Dutch, as Indonesia's first foreign language, a colossal if unspectacular task. The inspectorate was headed by Mr Fritz Wachendorff, a part-Minangkabau Indonesian nationalist and linguist, who had clear ideas about how to achieve this switch in language and also about the problems of teaching English as first foreign language. As an individual he could sometimes be impatient with delays and did not suffer fools gladly. His colleagues were Mrs. Nini Rudolph, who had studied as a Fulbright scholar at Barnard College and Columbia University Teacher Training College, and his deputy, Miss Jo Kurnianingrat, then in her mid-thirties, who always dressed immaculately in *kain* and *kebaya*. Only later did we appreciate that, in immediately inviting us to call her "Jo," she had followed our custom rather than hers to put us at ease. We soon noted that she achieved the same amount of work and discipline from the office staff without raising her voice, creating a relaxed atmosphere through her restrained dignity and air of authority. We learnt much later what we never suspected initially, how hesitant they were about employing two unknown foreigners on their team.

When preparing for my first visit to Indonesia, I had carefully studied George Kahin's *Nationalism and Revolution in Indonesia* but failed to connect his reference to "two courageous Indonesian girls, Jo Abdurachman and Jo Kurnianingrat" (p. 338) with this gracious, considerate woman assisting our acclimatization in a new job and a new society. After the Dutch repudiation of the Renville Treaty by renewed military action against the Republic, the two young women helped an American—George Kahin himself—convey to the outside world the final pre-invasion speeches the Republican leaders were prevented from broadcasting. Kurnianingrat, with other Indonesian women, established clandestine "rice kitchens" for civil servants unwilling to collaborate with the Dutch (p. 397).



Jo Kurnianingrat (2nd from Left) 1955

Also (from Left to Right) Betty Feith, Frits Wachendorff, Harumani Rudolph, Ailsa Zainu'ddin

Photo courtesy Betty and Herb Feith

We knew “ningrat” indicated aristocracy. Jo was the only aristocrat we young Australians had ever met, let alone known as a friend. When, through reading Kartini’s *Letters of a Javanese Princess*, I “met” and later wrote about this other bupati’s daughter, there was much of Jo Kurnianingrat in my image of Kartini. Jo, like Kartini, seemed interested only in “two kinds of aristocracy, the aristocracy of the mind and the aristocracy of the soul—of those who are noble in spirit.” Some found her aristocratic bearing and self restraint intimidating. Although unintimidated myself, it took a decade before I realized she was not, as I had believed, taller than I was.

In 1980 Jo wrote, in an article unfortunately still unpublished:

I was born in an environment similar to that of Kartini, pioneer of women’s emancipation in Indonesia, but forty years later. In the 1920s, the *kabupaten* no longer confined girls within its walls; it was a centre from which youngsters went forth to pursue their studies. Many cousins of mine, boys as well as girls, came to live in the *kabupaten* and we grew up together as equals. Never were the girls made to feel that the boys were superior and the younger did not have to humble themselves before the older. Whereas Kartini craved the opportunity to get Western schooling, we were encouraged to learn as much as possible about Western culture.

This began early. When she was three she attended the village school alongside her father’s *kabupaten* at Ciamis and was sent, when four, to board with an Indo-European family in Tasikmalaya to learn Dutch. At five, with sufficient Dutch to enter European primary school, she was sufficiently advanced for the second form. At seven she was sent to Bandung. At the school run by the Ursuline order, she had no friends among her classmates, so spent her leisure time at the cinema, becoming a film fan, learning German, and improving her spoken English. She boarded with Dutch-speaking families during the week but spent weekends at the Bandung *kabupaten* to keep in touch with her Sundanese background.

After completing Junior High School she undertook teacher training, obtaining her Hoofdacte. In about 1938 she began teaching at a Dutch-Chinese school in Jakarta. Through Dahlan Abdullah, an elderly Sumatran colleague, she learned about the nationalist movement and began observing some of the injustices from which she had, till then, been protected. She also became engaged to a cousin, Jusuf Prawira Adiningrat, a law student, son of the Patih of Weltevreden but, although her father was prepared to accept her choice of partner—as Kartini had envisaged but had not achieved—Jo was then “transferred on request” (of her father!) to the Purwakarta European primary school where she could be properly chaperoned by siblings! When the Japanese invasion threatened, they agreed that Jus would join Jo in Purwakarta should the Japanese come. This he attempted to do but, after a long, agonizing wait, she discovered that, on his way, he had been killed by villagers who thought he was Chinese. Almost fifty years later she wrote, “Isn’t it strange that, after all those years, Jus’s family still consider me one of them? To them I am still the older sister I would have been had he not died.”

During the Japanese occupation her father’s pension ceased. Jo, seeking employment in Jakarta, met Dahlan Abdullah, whose prewar anti-Dutch stance enabled him to find her a job at the Municipal Offices. Later she taught psychology at a girls’ teacher training school (SOP) in Yogya. Initially, teaching in Indonesian was hard. She first translated each lesson, then learnt it by heart. In her memoirs she commented wryly that this was “a good way to master Indonesian” and, fortunately, the students asked no questions.

Under Dutch and Japanese rule contact with the outside world was minimal. After independence, when the Republican government transferred to Yogya, “all of a sudden it

was as if the doors to the outside world were thrown open." In 1946 Jo began teaching senior high school English, also reading the Voice of Free Indonesia's English language broadcasts to that outside world. With her fluent English, aristocratic bearing, and quiet dignity she was in demand at state dinners for foreign visitors. She has recalled "the general atmosphere of real friendship. We were all equals, only some got more important tasks to perform than others; but we appreciated each other. Nobody, no matter how high in rank, felt superior. Nobody felt poor in spite of the many deprivations." At the same time she emphasized that family networks continued to link those on opposite sides of the independence struggle. Of her father, whose pension was restored by the Dutch, she wrote, "I could not help being glad for him; he had suffered enough in his old age."

In 1947, "flabbergasted but elated" to be chosen, Jo went to Jakarta as a secretary in the Indonesian delegation to the Renville negotiations, a nerve-racking but exciting introduction to secretarial duties. Back in Yogya she was woken on December 19, 1948 by the Dutch bombing of the airport as they launched their second military attack. Many students, both young men and young women, left to join the independence fighters. The Dutch closed Republican schools but few Indonesians were willing to attend Dutch-run schools. Instead clandestine lessons continued at the homes of former high school teachers. When not teaching, Jo undertook administrative work for the Indonesian Red Cross. Her house was also a depot for parcels for the guerrilla troops. Twice she narrowly escaped detection by Dutch soldiers.

When the tide turned in favor of the Republic and life became more settled, Ali Sastroamijoyo, minister of education, offered Jo a Colombo Plan scholarship for one year's study in Australia. "Not even in my wildest imagination," she later wrote, "had I ever dreamed of going to study abroad. . . . It was really a miracle!" She left for Sydney in November 1949, studied psychology, saw many schools, read extensively, visited Victoria and Tasmania, and made many friends, as well as totally confusing one Scout Leader whose odd behavior, she learned, was because he "had not expected to see such a sophisticated woman from Indonesia."

Two years after returning home she became first deputy head of the small but active English Language Inspectorate, which coordinated the work of two British Council officers and a team of Ford Foundation teachers in planning and trying out an English language syllabus for Indonesian post-primary schools and institutions. It also controlled the two-year English courses for secondary teachers throughout Indonesia and ran conferences for expatriate teachers. One met at Puncak in 1955 as delegates swept past to the nearby Bandung Conference, chaired by Prime Minister Ali Sastroamijoyo.

By 1956 the original IPBI team had dispersed. Jo went to Cornell University on a Ford Foundation scholarship to study English Literature and Linguistics. She took full advantage of her two years in the States, attending or auditing both regular and summer courses on various periods and genres of English literature and aspects of linguistics—as well as learning Russian—while writing her thesis on Shakespeare in Indonesia. Initially she missed her network of friends in Indonesia—"people here are so busy that they have not got time to be *really* friendly," she noted—but she enjoyed the independence of her own self-contained apartment. By her second year she was a central figure in the growing Indonesian community at Cornell adding entertaining and even visiting the sick to her busy schedule.

On her return she taught in the English department of the University of Indonesia, taking over as head in June 1960. In 1970 she married the widowed former Prime Minister and Nationalist Party leader, Ali Sastroamijoyo (b. 1903). She wrote: "This change in my life

was the greatest surprise for myself. I never planned to give up my life as I had shaped it, but you see that things always turn out quite different from what we expect." Five years later Pak Ali died. Jo wrote: "Now that I belong to the older generation I'm expected to pay more attention to all family events and affairs, both in Pak Ali's and in my own big families. It's surprising how much of my time goes into it." A year later she reflected that "my ideal of a quiet life has not come true yet. Especially with the grandchildren growing up I have to give a lot of attention to them." They remained her concern for the rest of her life.

With courage and dignity she faced the handicaps of increasing age. She continued private teaching, though failing eyesight and hearing made this progressively more difficult. She began learning Braille. She was persuaded to write "Other Worlds in the Past" as a last story for her grandchildren and maintained contact with her extended families and her many friends worldwide. Although she insisted that she was "just an ordinary woman with no outstanding achievements at all," my own first impressions—of her innate dignity; her calm poise; her sensitivity to the needs of others; the sense she gave that the whole of living was an art which she had mastered—have only been confirmed. The fortitude with which she faced life and the role model she provided to other young women were far from ordinary. She was an independent woman whose life and example contributed significantly, although unobtrusively, to the new Indonesian nation, while she was also a central figure in the networks of family, students, and friends whose lives she enriched.