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# THE WORLD OF SERGEANT-MAJOR BUNGKUS

## INTRODUCTION

It is a commonplace among historians that people are fundamentally formed by the generation to which they belong. But the visceral truth of this commonplace only hit me personally when I was finally allowed to re-enter Indonesia in the time of President Habibie, after a twenty-seven year “exile.” For the first time I could empathetically imagine Tan Malaka’s state of mind on returning to Java in 1942, after twenty years of his own exile. In Djakarta, everything had changed; outside, surprisingly little. I had escaped the entire *Neues Ordnung* period, except its initial savage phase. Still in my early thirties in 1972 when I was expelled, I returned in my early sixties. It came to me suddenly, and with great clarity, that I belonged to a disappearing world: the peculiar world of the very few Indonesianists who encountered the country first in the six years during which Soekarno was the authoritarian-populist *Pemimpin Besar Revolusi* (Great Leader of the Revolution) of Guided Democracy. Who else was there? Jim Siegel in Atjeh, Bill Liddle in Medan-Pematang Siantar, Mary Somers (later Heidhues) in the worlds of the Indonesian Chinese, Jim Peacock in Surabaya, and perhaps three or four others. Immediately before us were those who had first experienced Indonesia as a shaky constitutional democracy. After us, those who arrived in the time of Soeharto. The generation I belonged to was only half a decade wide.

Since at least two generations of younger Indonesianists knew the New Order far better than I, what was I to do when finally allowed back into the country, except play the part of an occasionally interesting fossil? The logical answer was: talk to those of my generation of Indonesians who were even more radically separated from their juniors than I. So I decided, without any clear research agenda, to find as many such old-timers—people of my generation—as I could manage.

What struck me immediately, when I started talking to people in early 1998, was this: Those who really remembered the late Soekarno time were also paleoliths—people who had been in the New Order’s prisons for its first half and had lived on its persecuted margins in the second. People on the winning side in late 1965—and this covered a huge spectrum from Gunawan Muhammad over to Ali Moertopo—had been fundamentally transformed, by freedom, by power, by money, and by habit. Life had taken them away from wherever they had started. But the

regime had ensured that they reassembled under its dark umbrella. This realization made it clearer than ever to me why Megawati, Gus Dur, Amien Rais, Akbar Tandjung, Wiranto, and Habibie were so similar, so chummy, below the surface of immediate, contending political interests. The basic oligarchic mindset was the same. They were all, in different degrees, "*anak Harto*."

There was also another pinprick guiding me. In early January 1966, I had joined with Ruth McVey and Fred Bunnell in writing what became notorious as the "Cornell Paper." After Harto's fall, wasn't there a responsibility to use the new opportunities to talk with people who had been silenced for three decades and discover what they could say about the abiding mystery of October 1, 1965? By 1999, the "Cornell Paper" was thirty-three years old. How far could one still say it was at least closer to the truth than the pile of paper issued by the late Titular Brigadier-General Nugroho Notosusanto and his staff? Talking with surviving, fairly high-ranking members of the Communist Party was revealing in some ways, but what became clear was that, like civilians in most societies, they knew very little about militaries. Yet the actors on October 1, 1965 were overwhelmingly soldiers. Alas, every single name-recognizable officer who had been active that day on the losing side had long since either been tried, convicted, sentenced to death, and executed, or had been "disappeared" very early on. The single notable survivor from the army officer class was Col. Abdul Latief, who had lived through almost unimaginable suffering. By the time I got a chance to talk to him, however, a severe stroke had slurred his speech close to unintelligibility. What survived was his remarkable defense speech of the early 1970s, which put Harto squarely in the dock.

Then, greatly to my surprise, I found that a certain Sergeant-Major Bungkus, who had led one of the squads sent to arrest or kill the seven targeted generals of the alleged coup-plotting Council of Generals, had not only survived ghastly tortures and thirty-four years on death row, but had given a couple of brief interviews to the newspapers after his release by President Habibie. But how to find him?

Then a fascinating accident (as far as I was concerned) happened. The "Cornell Paper" had single-mindedly focused on Javanese military men from the Central Java Diponegoro Division with which Harto had been intimately involved for all his pre-presidential career. Its analysis was partly based on various assumptions about Central Javanese culture. This was not entirely mistaken. But after talking with a well-connected former Air Force officer, who was Madurese, I got a startlingly revised picture. There was evidently a long-standing (dating from the Revolution) loose network of Madurese in the Army, the Air Force, the Marines, and President Soekarno's Tjakrabirawa Security Guard, stretching from senior officers down at least to the level of the NCOs. Most were not from Madura itself, but had grown up in the heavily Madurese populations of Surabaya and what the Dutch once called the *Oosthoek* of East Java. There were also officers and subalterns who, though Javanese, had been born and grew up in that same Madurese-inflected East Java environment. This was a huge surprise to me, as I had long easily submitted to the standard stereotype that Madurese, if they were not discredited aristocrats pretending to be Javanese, were

devoutly Islamic, entrepreneurial, hostile to hierarchy, and the bureaucracies of the state, and in any general sense politically insignificant.

Our interest in a possible “Madurese Connection” in relation to the events surrounding October 1, 1965 was whetted by one item in particular, the mystery surrounding the career and fate of Madurese First-Lieutenant Dul Arif, who was in direct overall command of the squads of Tjakrabirawa troops that moved against the members of the supposed Council of Generals. For while the top figures in the September 30<sup>th</sup> Movement—Brigadier-General Supardjo, Colonel A. Latief, Lieutenant-Colonel Untung, and Air Force Major Soejono—were all arrested and put on trial (all but Latief were then executed), Dul Arif had simply vanished without a trace. Why? Madurese Air Force Lieutenant-Colonel Heru Atmodjo (who was also tried, but not executed) very much surprised me by telling me that Dul Arif had been a trusted subordinate of—of all people!—Ali Moertopo, Soeharto’s legendary spymaster, in the Banteng Raiders campaign against the Darul Islam rebellion of the 1950s in parts of West and Central Java. This was the first indication I had been able to find that Moertopo had close, long-standing contacts with a key player in the September 30<sup>th</sup> Movement. If so, Dul Arif could have been a Moertopo mole within the movement, so that the Soeharto’s circle knew all along what was afoot. A man of this kind would be difficult to put on trial, for obvious reasons. Perhaps that was why he had vanished without a trace? Beyond that, Heru told me that there was another Madurese survivor of October 1, a man whom he called Djahurup, who had disappeared, rather than “been disappeared.” This background may help readers to understand our special interest in asking Bungkus what he knew of these two men, and of the Madurese community more widely.

Eventually, through Pak Heru, I was able to locate Bungkus, who was living quietly in an Islamic *kampung* off the “main drag” in the quiet East Javanese town of Besuki. On March 20, 2002, after being assured by telephone that he was open to being interviewed at length, I and my great friend Arief Djati, native to East Java and fluent in the East Java version of Javanese, as well as Madurese, went to talk to him. Everything about him was a surprise. I had half expected to find a human wreck, not an hospitable seventy-five-year old grandfather surrounded by wife, children, and grandchildren, erect, with a huge chest and brawny arms, and looking every inch a healthy old soldier. Madurese have the reputation of being *kasar*, short-tempered, and direct. But Bungkus was extremely polite, well-spoken, and by no means always direct. Had he become a “good Muslim” after his long confinement, either sincerely or for protective cover? He was frank about this: living in a pious neighborhood, wanting good relations with his neighbors, he did what was religiously required of him. But he never mentioned a word about Islam in the course of a long interview then (or in a follow-up interview on December 12 that same year).

He was expecting us to ask him about October 1965, and, I imagine, had prepared himself for this. But what struck us immediately was a different set of questions: how did an eighteen-year-old Madurese boy, still in primary school in a small East Javanese town at the end of the Japanese Occupation in 1945, come to play the role he did in Djakarta twenty-years later? So initially, I think to his surprise, we asked him dozens of questions about his early life and experiences during the Revolution, later in East Indonesia, West Sumatra, and Central Java, and finally in Djakarta itself when he was

almost forty. His lengthy and forthcoming replies opened up to us a world about which almost nothing has ever been printed, the world of a seasoned, battle-hardened Indonesian NCO, highly intelligent but never formally educated beyond primary school, with a wide experience of Indonesia itself, but none outside.

He had been quite willing to be taped as he talked, and the longer he talked to us the more extraordinary his world turned out to be. I also came to realize that though he was nine years older than I, we belonged, in a strange way, to the same generation. I was old enough to catch his casual references to events, institutions, and people of the early post-revolutionary era, which time and Harto had erased for younger generations. Perhaps he felt this too, since he almost never gave explanations of these references, as if we, or perhaps I, needed none. Concerning the events of October 1, 1965, he was pretty frank, but there were certainly some questions that he either really misunderstood or sidestepped. Inevitably too, as he himself told us, his memory was not always reliable, so that sometimes he shifted in his narrative from one period to another and back without noticing the slippages.

Arief and I called on him again that December, together with our good friend, Khanis Suvianita, and my old Tjirebonese friend, Djudju Djuanda, and his youngest son, Ganang, on our way back from an exploratory trip around Madura. It was partly to show our appreciation of the first interview, but we also wanted to ask him about certain obscurities which that interview had not cleared up. Perhaps because he was now familiar with us, he was on some points more forthcoming than in March, but the general narrative was essentially the same.

In translating these interviews, we therefore decided to stick with the full text of the first, inserting in italics only those parts of the second which were “new” or which significantly differed from what he said the first time around. It has to be said that the translation proved a formidable task. Anyone who has worked with tapes, as opposed to focused notes written up immediately after an interview, will know why. Tapes follow the contours of everyday speech—with digressions, half-finished sentences, odd jumps from topic to topic and time to time, inaudible mumbles, repetitions, and so on. Sergeant-Major Bungkus’s language gave us further difficulties. He told us that he had had to learn what he called *bahasa Melaju* after he became an adult, while his everyday languages were Madurese and (East) Javanese. Quite often, therefore, we were unsure whether he was thinking in these languages (as Sjahrir thought in Dutch, and Soekarno in Javanese) and then, as it were, translating into the Indonesian language. (We were fortunate that Arief Djati was leading our team, since, though Javanese, he understands Madurese from growing up in Malang and living many years in Surabaya.) Bungkus is also a military man through and through, and his style of speech shows this clearly, if not always understandably. We could perhaps have made our task easier simply by taking notes on what we considered immediately important in what he had to say. But what we would have missed is atmosphere. What forms of verbal politeness Bungkus used, to whom and about whom. Who was referred to as *pak* and who not, who deserved *beliau* and who not. How he demonstrated a skill which I had always thought to be peculiarly Javanese, of ventriloquizing—without a break in the flow, let alone any signaling—the voices and arguments of others. How he used, or didn’t, the exclamatory vocabulary of (East) Javanized Indonesian—*Wah! Wong, Lha wong, Kok, Lho! Aduh!*—and ways of expressing irony or skepticism through

intonation. We have decided to include these Javanisms in the text, untranslated, so that readers can better “hear” how the old soldier spoke. What even the tape cannot convey, however, is—to use the vulgar phrase—body language. As a result of all these factors, too often parts of these interviews which seemed quite clear to us as we listened turned out in transcription and translation to be full of difficulties and obscurities.

In the transcription and translation we have tried to provide the explanatory footnotes perhaps needed by readers of younger generations. We have not tried to “analyze” or “know better than” the Sergeant-Major, except in a few obvious places where his memory for dates was seriously mistaken. We would like, as far as possible, to make Bungkus and his world available to anyone interested, especially Indonesians, and to subsequent generations, without the sooty burden of a 2004 AD interpretation.

Note: In the text that follows, we have used italics for everything that came out of the second, follow-up interview, inserting relevant bits and pieces of it where they seemed best to fit with the grand narrative of the first. We use square brackets to denote words or phrases needed to fill out Bungkus’s sometimes telegraphic style of talk, with half-sentences left incomplete, etc. Phrases in brackets should be read as Bungkus still talking. Parentheses are used for short explanations by Arief and me of terms, idioms, abbreviations, and so forth used by Bungkus. They are thus glosses on the text.

Furthermore, as is well known, Javanese, and to a lesser degree Madurese, are languages saturated with social hierarchy, and some of this hierarchy tends to be imported into Indonesian by speakers of these languages. Bungkus, a real barracks man, typically avoided anything that smacked of High or even Middle Javanese, but in his use of personal pronouns, especially the second-person singular, we can sense the pull of hierarchy. It also striking that though he served in Djakarta for over three years, we could detect only a few signs that he had assimilated the characteristic slang of the capital city.

Finally: Indonesian is a wonderful language in many ways, but it is impecunious in terms of the expressive exclamations of everyday speech, whereas Javanese is very rich in this respect. So here is a list of the characteristic interjections to be found constantly in Bungkus’s narration.

*Aduh!* (also *Waduh!*) Exclamation of dismay, grief, pain, or embarrassment. “Oh no!” “Omigod!” “Ow!”

*Ayo!* Exclamation with the connotation “Let’s ...” or “Go ahead”

*Kan* Short for *bukan* (no, not). Exclamation asking for agreement or understanding on the part of the interlocutor. “You know.” “Don’t you know?” “Don’t you agree?”

*Kok* Exclamation indicating surprise, either real or feigned, ironic. “Would you believe it?” “I couldn’t believe it!” “Didn’t you know?” “Wow!”

*Lha* and *lha wong* Exclamations meaning something like: “Surely you know ... after all . . .”

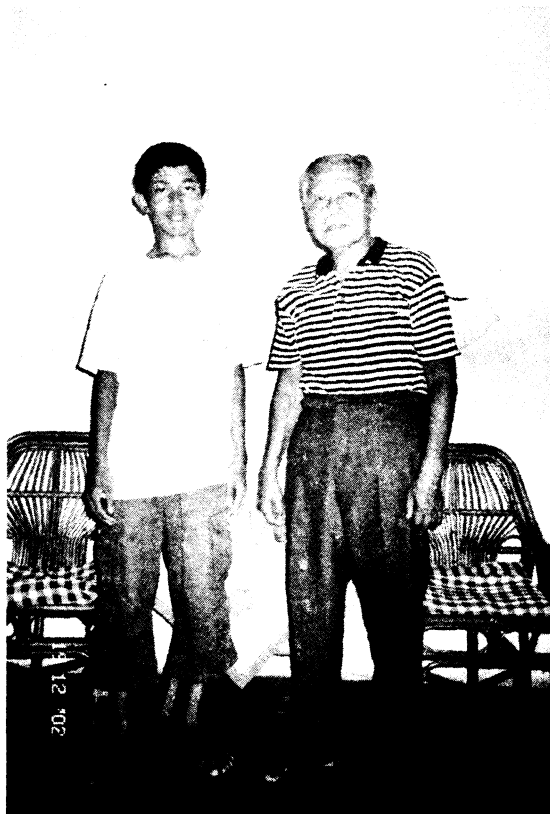
*Lho* Exclamation of surprise, startlement

*Nah* Exclamation with the sense of "So you see . . ."

*Wah!* or *Wa!* Fairly close to "Wow!"

*Wong* Exclamation with a meaning close to "Everyone knows that . . ." "It's common knowledge that . . ."

Benedict R. O'G. Anderson



Sergeant-Major Bungkus with members of his family