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# “I AM A SINGER”: A CONVERSATION WITH JOHAN SILAS, ARCHITECT AND URBAN PLANNER IN SURABAYA, INDONESIA

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Professor Johan Silas (b. 1936) is an architect and urban planner closely linked to the development of the city of Surabaya. His career has been remarkable in many ways. He established the Department of Architecture of the Institut Teknologi Sepuluh Nopember (ITS) in September 1965, coincidentally at the same time as the Thirtieth of September Movement's (*Gerakan 30 September*, G30S) failed *coup d'état* (September 30–October 1, 1965). In the following weeks and months, the army seized control of the city government. At that point, the newly appointed mayor, Lieutenant Colonel Sukotjo, called in Silas to develop a master plan for Surabaya, and ever since the ITS Department of Architecture has maintained an exceptionally close collaboration with the city government. The current mayor of Surabaya, Tri Rismahartini, for instance, is a former student of Silas's.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> To state that I am immensely grateful to Johan Silas for his precious time, many stories, and warm hospitality is an obvious understatement.

The collaboration between ITS and the city government began at an ill-fated moment in Indonesia's history, when alleged communists—suspected of being complicit in the failed *coup*—were being rounded up and murdered by the thousands. In this climate of intense social conflict and fear, Silas stood up for ordinary *kampung* [*kampung*] people and tried to preserve low-class neighborhoods in the city center by promoting so-called “*kampung* improvement programs.” The combination of a position close to the center of power, and empathy for people with relatively little political clout, offered Silas the opportunity to influence the development of Surabaya, the second largest city of Indonesia, in its own peculiar direction, distinct from that of Jakarta. He demonstrated this uncommon combination again when he mobilized resources and organized reconstruction work in Aceh and Nias after the 2004 tsunami.

Johan Silas has a strong international orientation and received part of his training in Britain, the Netherlands, Japan, France, and Germany. In appreciation of his work, he was invested with the French order of *Chevalier de l'ordre des arts et lettres* in 1989, won the Memorial Prize of the International Year of Shelter for Homeless two years later, was included in the UN Habitat Scroll of Honor in 2005, and has been the recipient of various other awards. The importance of his work has been acknowledged by Indonesian and foreign scholars alike,<sup>2</sup> but it is most visible on the street in Surabaya.

Johan Silas has worked as architect, urban planner, and teacher at the ITS. Apart from his architectural designs and contributions to town plans, he has also published many books and articles, including those for an international audience and columns in the *Surabaya Post*.<sup>3</sup>

In this interview, Silas talks about the close cooperation between ITS and the city government, and gives a unique, insightful view on the functioning of city government and urban development in Surabaya. Through the entry point of urban planning and *kampung* improvement in Surabaya, we learn a lot about issues of broader societal relevance to Indonesia as a whole: social inequality, the precarious relationship between government and the real-estate sector, and the use of scientific knowledge as a basis for good governance. Arguably, the most valuable part of the interview, however, is that in which Silas explains how patronage worked, in practice, under Suharto, and Silas's description of the way the army took over city government in the

<sup>2</sup> See: Howard W. Dick, *Surabaya, City of Work: A Socioeconomic History, 1900–2000* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2002); Muhammad Faqih et al., *Prof. Ir. Johan Silas: Sebuah Kenangan Masa Tugas, 1965–2006* (Surabaya: Laboratorium Perumahan & Pemukiman, Jurusan Arsitektur, FTSP, 2006); and Robbie Peters, *Surabaya, 1945–2010: Neighbourhood, State and Economy in Indonesia's City of Struggle* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2013).

<sup>3</sup> See: Johan Silas, “Structures de l'espace et architecture à Surabaya: Histoire et développement [Structures of space and architecture of Surabaya: History and development],” *Archipel* 36 (1988): 217–26; Johan Silas, “Toll Roads and the Development of New Settlements: The Case of Surabaya Compared to Jakarta,” *Bijdragen tot de Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde* 158, 4 (2002): 677–89; Johan Silas, “KIP (Kampung Improvement Program) in Surabaya,” in *Human Settlements: Formulations and (Re)Calibrations*, ed. Viviana d'Auria et al. (Amsterdam: SUN, 2010), 72–75; Johan Silas, ed., *Kampung Surabaya Menuju Metropolitan* [The kampungs of Surabaya becoming metropolitan] (Surabaya: Yayasan Keluarga Bhakti dan Surabaya Post, 1996); and Johan Silas et al., *Kampung Surabaya Menuju Abad 21: Kajian Penataan dan Revitalisasi Kampung di Surabaya* [The kampungs of Surabaya entering the 21st century: Planning and revitalization of Surabaya kampungs] (Surabaya: Pemerintah Kota Surabaya, 2012).

aftermath of the failed 1965 coup. Although Silas is reluctant to talk about himself, we also gain insight into the career of this influential urban planner, which in itself is enough to warrant this interview.



Johan Silas in the courtyard of ITS's Department of Architecture  
(author's photo)

I have known Johan Silas since the 1990s. We usually speak in Dutch when we meet, but on the occasion of this interview we spoke in English, sprinkled with the occasional Indonesian or Dutch phrases. The first talk took place in a restaurant in a mall on April 16, 2015, and the second conversation was at his home on April 19, 2015. The photograph, above, of him in the courtyard of ITS's Department of Architecture and Planning was taken a few days later. As a follow-up to the interviews, Johan Silas sent me two emails on June 26 and 28, 2016, responding to additional questions. I have marked all fragments slipped in from the emails that are longer than one sentence.

When making a full transcript of the interview, I was struck by the careful way he formulated his sentences without the interspersions of "uhs" and "ahs." Nevertheless, I had to make several changes to produce an easily readable article. I have shortened the text by about 50 percent by deleting repetitions, leaving out most of my own words, and cutting two topics completely: his explanation of a particular architectural style (*arsitektur jengki*) and reconstruction work in Calang (Aceh) and Nias after the 2004 tsunami, because these topics strayed from the central theme of urban development. The biggest editorial change has been to reshuffle parts of our conversation and to add headings to make a logical order for the topics addressed. I have made a few grammatical corrections, which are necessary to make a written text from spoken language, but have maintained the present and past tense of the verbs as

Johan used them during our conversation. Nowhere have I changed the vocabulary. I have placed my own additions between square brackets. I have edited Pak Johan's emails as I did the interviews.

## The Interviews

### To Begin: The *Kampung*

I want to start, there is always this question: Why do I work for the people in the *kampung*? It is a simple question, but very difficult to answer. I think, it was based on two different things. One is that I like history. You cannot find the history of the city in modern housing. The place to learn the history in the form of legend is in the *kampung*, and that fascinates me.

The other reason is I like the indigenous architecture. I am not so much interested in modern architecture. To me, it is more fascinating to see how people resolve their architectural problems. Not necessarily in terms of traditional architecture. That is nice, but there is no struggle, because there is more homogeneousness in the villages. [In the villages] things go slow; there is no dynamic and I was in the city, so why not go to the [*kampung*] in the city? A topic that has been neglected ... To some extent, the name *kampung* has a negative connotation. [To some] *Kampung* means "no good."

We can uncover the history of the city in the *kampung*. If you relate one legend to the other, you link them, then suddenly you get a very interesting story [of] how Surabaya was actually built. Surabaya is the only city where you have this story [of] how the city has come about. Because there is an *adipati* [ruler], Jayengrono, and he has a beautiful daughter. The princess wants to get a man. One is strong but ugly, one is weak but handsome, and she cannot make a decision. So she said, "okay, I will have a competition. If you can build a city for me, I will take him as my husband." The ugly prince almost wins the competition. The weak prince gets the support of a boy, whose mother is selling *jamu* [traditional medicine] and she knows a well where you can get strong vitality. It is called Banyu Urip and this prince won the competition. But the princess knows he is cheating, so at the end of the day she marries this Joko Jumpu, the ordinary man. The beautiful princess marries a common man.

*Q: If you ask kampung people about this legend, do they know it?*

Yes. But different *kampung*s have different parts. It took me a field survey of almost two years. I sent all my students into the *kampung*s. I always ask my students, find a *punden* [holy place], find the good days—*hari baik*, the ceremony, the offering, and the legend. That [kind of research] should be done by an architect. What is the legend in the *kampung*? What is the sacred place to them, what are the so-called good days? The sacred place can be a graveyard, it can be an old tree, it can be a *masjid* [mosque], anything, even a *punden*, a place that is considered as something special by the people.

*Q: How do you connect this work in the kampung to the architecture of the city?*

You need to know the people before you can understand architecture. It is not like a design by an artist. So you need to know. You cannot detach people from the building. That is, I think, a mistake that many people studying traditional architecture

make. You need very much to understand who [the users] are. And then you can understand their buildings.

If you talk about this modernization, it is very interesting to see that the development of real estate also influences the type of building [in the *kampung*]. Because some of these people in the *kampung* work as carpenter, or bricklayer, and when they renovate their [own] house, they take this idea [from a house they built for the real-estate sector]. I mean, that is something living. It is not something static. For example, you can see those nice, cast-iron fences. It is not for protection, because [the fence] is always open. It is just a symbol of being modern. It is different in the real estate where they build all these strong fences to protect themselves. In the *kampung* it has a different meaning.

*Q: Many of these cast-iron fences have a lion similar to the old symbol of the Netherlands?*

*Je maintiendrai!*<sup>4</sup> That is a symbol of success and power. It used to be [on] the coin and the banknote. There are so many things Dutch that people use and they don't understand. It is interesting to record also the noises of the city. You know the call "hoit ombreng?"<sup>5</sup> People that buy second-hand goods, you know how they call themselves to attract the attention? *Hoit ombreng*. It is a Dutch word, *oudheid rondbrengen* [carry around old stuff]. Other than throwing [old stuff] away without getting any money, you give [it] to a *tukang ombreng* [junk dealer] for any price.

*Q: When did your interest in kampungs begin?*

My childhood in Surabaya is in front of a *kampung*. And when I bought my first house, I was surrounded by *kampungs*. That was in 1971, I think. That is the reason the *kampung* is there in my mind, without really realizing there is something [going on that I will see] later on.

## Education and Early Career

*Q: When did you commence your studies in architecture?*

In '57 I went to [Institut Teknologi] Bandung, for six years, still doing the old curriculum. Six years, *bouwkundig ingenieur* [civil engineer]. The boundary between *bouwkunde* [civil engineering] and architecture [was not yet drawn]. During my time I still had to learn how to construct a road, construct a bridge. Yes! And I had to know how to calculate the price, the timber price, iron price. Then it is moved to pure architecture and they eliminate all these unnecessary subjects. We still have two Dutch professors at the time. When they left we had professors from Austria and some American. That is also the reason why we needed to be able to speak English. I finished in '63.

I was accepted in an architectural office in Jakarta, of Silaban. He designed the mosque [Mesjid Istiqlal] in Jakarta. Then I am not really happy in Jakarta, so I decided to go back to Surabaya. First I worked in a construction company [where] I learnt my trade as a contractor.

<sup>4</sup> The Dutch heraldic device: "I will persevere!"

<sup>5</sup> I heard "hoit ombreng," but when I asked Silas how to spell the words, he wrote down "ouit rombreng."

Then with a friend, we established the school of architecture. The most important person was Suharjo. He worked for the Jawatan Gedung-Gedung [State Building Service]. He is a Sukarnoist; he suffered very much during these early days of Suharto. He asked me to join him and we started two schools of architecture, at ITS and Universitas Merdeka. It was called Universitas Bung Karno and then they changed it into Universitas Merdeka. Later, I was also responsible for the School of Architecture at Universitas Petra. September 2015 will be the golden anniversary of the architecture department at ITS. I have been staying there for fifty years long. It is crazy. And I am still teaching. So I have been in Surabaya also for fifty years.

*Q: Later you went to Institut Teknologi Bandung to complete your own education with a PhD.*

My supervisor was Professor Hasan Purbo, the co-supervisor was Professor Sugijanto Sugijoko. When I was presenting to Hasan Purbo, my research on the *kampung*, he said: “Why do you study this *dangdut* science? Why do you care, as scientist?”<sup>6</sup> And when I finished, I submitted my dissertation and then they said: “Actually, we cannot evaluate, because nobody understands.”

*Q: Did Hasan Purbo say this or was it Sugijanto?*

No, the graduate program. Both [supervisors] said: “Okay, it is finished; you can submit your draft dissertation.” But the graduate school said: “We cannot form the evaluation team. Nobody wanted to evaluate your dissertation.” So I was stuck for three years. My rector [chancellor at ITS] said: “You should be a professor by now. We cannot wait. ITB [Institut Teknologi Bandung] does not give any solution.” So I submit my ... I had written in six books, internationally published, and then I pass. It was okay. I fulfilled all the criteria.

*Q: So you got your PhD without your thesis being assessed?*

What is better? If your thesis can be evaluated or your thesis cannot be evaluated by ITB-ers?

*Q: What was the thesis about?*

On housing in the *kampung* and in particular how people generate their resources. That is the topic of my dissertation, the resource generation in the *kampung*.

*Q: What has been the influence of Hasan Purbo and Sugijanto Sugijoko on your work?*

When I receive my professorship I explain to the audience that my teachers next to Purbo and Sugijanto were John F. C. Turner and the people in the *kampungs*. I spend more time with Turner [who] became my friend until we lost track of him. When he visited Surabaya, he stayed in my house. When I was in London, he always [took] me around [to] the part far from the tourist area.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>6</sup> *Dangdut* is a particular style of pop music. In this recalled conversation, Hasan Purbo used the term in a derisive way to indicate a low-class culture.

<sup>7</sup> This paragraph comes from email correspondence of June 26, 2016. Turner was a major theoretician, who argued that slum dwellers should be given the “freedom to build,” because they know better what is good for them than do central governments. According to Turner, if governments want to tackle the so-called “problem” of slums, they do better to upgrade slums than to evict squatters and/or build low-cost housing. John F. C. Turner and Robert Fichter, eds., *Freedom to Build: Dweller Control of the Housing Process* (New York: Macmillan, 1972).

### G30S and the Involvement of ITS in the Urban Planning of Surabaya

Q: You said you set up the Department of Architecture at ITS with Suharjo and that he was a Sukarnoist. The school was established in 1965, so that was most unfortunate timing.<sup>8</sup>

Yes.

Q: How did you see the impact of Gerakan 30 September and the prosecution of communists?

That is the basis for my involvement in the city. [Sukotjo], the commander of *Kodim* [*Komando Distrik Militer*, Military District Command], I knew him before September. As I said, I worked in this construction company, and we were building mainly for the navy. All these big companies need to have so-called civil defense, *hansip*, and in this company, because I am the only graduate, he asked me to be the commander. So I was the commander of this *hansip*. Of course, you need to train, and people from the *Kodim* sent their staff. I don't know why, maybe fate, maybe history, I am close to this commander of the *Kodim*.

When this coup happened, maybe 90 percent of the staff in the civil service belongs to this communist party. Some very severe, some not so strong [members], but basically it is very difficult to get the city government running. This [*Kodim*] commander was, as in all cities, appointed acting mayor.<sup>9</sup> And then he remembered me. He called me. Early in the morning the jeep from the *Kodim* comes to my house and I went to the [acting] mayor's house. But my neighbors were curious: "Maybe he was taken away by the *Kodim*?"

[Sukotjo] said, "I was trained as a soldier. My training is to fire a gun. I don't know anything about a city. But now I am here. I need to run the city." I just remember what he said. He was also Dutch educated. "There are two similarities between being [in] an army and running a city. Both need plans. When we go to war, we always prepare a plan, because when we start a battle, we need a plan. I know how to make a plan to fight the enemy, but I don't know how to make a plan to run a city. You are trained at ITB, so you should know," he said, "I cannot do it by myself. I don't care as long as you prepare a plan for me."

So I said: "Okay. I take my friends from ITS, IKIP, and [Universitas] Airlangga"—that is social-economic—"and then I can be in charge." I said, "Take the senior students from the civil department and architecture and make them as your staff and give them a scholarship. I guarantee that in two years' time they are finished. They graduate. And you can get a good staff that understands the planning as well." And this is actually the origin why ITS is so close to the city government until now. I get together people and staff for a master plan.

<sup>8</sup> As noted earlier, in 1965 the army seized power from the national and most provincial and municipal governments after a failed *coup d'état*, called *Gerakan 30 September*. In the following months, hundreds of thousands of communists were killed and many more imprisoned. (The actual number of those murdered is unknown but has been estimated between 78,000 and a million; see Ulf Sundhaussen, *The Road to Power: Indonesian Military Politics 1945–1967* [Oxford University Press, 1982]). Leftist-leaning and then-President Sukarno was replaced by General Suharto.

<sup>9</sup> Sukotjo would be appointed for two terms, from 1965 to 1969, and from 1969 to 1974.

[And] because he said, “I need a plan that I can sell to the foreigners,” we need to make the master plan also in English. Somewhere he got a young *planoloog*, a planner from UK, and he worked with us and prepared this English version.

[Sukotjo] was really consistent. While we were in the process of planning, he moved his office close to us, in order to know the progress, to make decisions. He said: “I don’t want to make a decision that later on is wrong. I need to be sure that my decision is in line with the process of getting a master plan.” It was very strange for an army colonel, because normally the army [makes] a decision and then they straight carry it out.

Sukotjo was supposed to be the commander that killed Tan Malakka, according to the Dutch scholar.<sup>10</sup> But I didn’t have the chance to ask him whether it was true or not. He had already died. But I am very close with him, with the family, with the children. So we get really very close. And that is how ITS gets involved [in] the city.

*Q: Do you think such a close relationship is good, or can it also be too close?*

So far, as you have seen for yourself, Surabaya is doing well. Better than any other city in Indonesia. And I don’t see any reason why ... you can learn from this kind of experience.

*Q: Let’s go back for a minute to the history of ITS.*

We didn’t have a building yet. We were in a *loods*, a storeroom behind this big plantation company. At the back there are two *gudang* [warehouses] and there we set up the school. Much later we get a building, a nice building in Baliwerti, that is a Chinese school taken over during this *Gerakan 30 September*. But for the first three years, the classes were given in a storeroom. Very, very bad. And you know that some of my students [are professors] already? Every time we could send somebody to Holland, America, the UK—my last was in Japan, Tokyo University—they pass without any big difficulty. It means that the standard is quite good.

*Q: How did you design the curriculum?*

Copy from ITB. We just copy in the beginning. No big deal.

*Q: And books?*

The same.

*Q: I was thinking about how you sent your students into the kampungs to collect data for the master plan of Sukotjo.*

That was for the *kampung* improvement; the study was made in the turn from ’60s to ’70s.

*Q: Okay, but for the master plan you also sent your students to the field to do a survey.*

Yes, to some extent, because we cannot cover all these areas.

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<sup>10</sup> Harry A. Poeze, *Verguisd en Vergeten: Tan Malaka, de Linkse Beweging en de Indonesische Revolutie 1945–1949* (Leiden: KITLV, 2007), 1463–67.

*Q: But then I wonder, the army went into the kampungs to search for communists, and vigilantes went into the kampungs to search for communists, so I am wondering what was the response of the kampung people when your students went into the kampungs to do a survey?*

You have to look at the time frame. When the military and vigilantes come in, that is a very short period, I think until '67, '68. Very short period. After that, military [was] using the intelligence to find the communists, but basically there is no such thing. Things did happen, but in a very short time. I was there in 1969, things are quite normal. They have the PON in 1968, Pekan Olahraga Nasional [National Sports Week, a national sports event], Surabaya is quite normal already.

*Q: So when you carried out surveys, kampung people were not afraid, or reluctant to give answers?*

No, no, not at all, especially when students come there. That is also one of the reasons, to get more genuine information. And the other thing is, I want the students to know what the *kampung* is doing.

*Q: There is another fact I would like to check with you. Robbie Peters remarks that, after 1965, the city population declined by half a million people.<sup>11</sup>*

Nobody [knows] exactly. We have difficulty when we need to prepare this statistic. [It is] not only that papers are gone from the *kelurahan* [smaller administrative territory within the municipality], [there is also the problem of] people going out and going in. It is always like that. At [that] time also. Some people don't feel safe in their village, they move to Surabaya. [Conversely], there are communists that were, maybe, going down, not because they run—some do run—but some are just taken away somewhere and nobody knows. Mostly, I heard, they have been killed in Pasuruan, but I don't know for sure whether that is a fact or not. Anyway, there is a decline, but not that much.

*Q: And did you lose students that way?*

I don't really recall.

*Q: You said your friend Suharjo suffered greatly, what happened to him?*

His career is blocked, he doesn't really have a clear job to do, and his family is being threatened, things like that. I mean, the reason is not only political, it can be jealousy, it can be competition. Anything can happen during this chaotic situation. But until he retired, he never had a good, clear position. He is not even happy to do his job. He is a good architect, he was trained in ITB as well. I regard him as a good and clever person, but he was not properly used. He is a strong follower of Sukarno. This is the only thing, he was not a communist. I don't care about communists, but he admired Sukarno very much. And I think there are a lot of people like him. It is not fair. Why this friend of mine suffers?

*Q: Did you encounter problems because your friend Suharjo was accused of being a Sukarnoist and did that cause problems for you?*

Not at all. It has nothing to do.

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<sup>11</sup> Peters, *Surabaya, 1945–2010*, 72.

### The Master Plan Made for Mayor Sukotjo

*Q: We have talked about why you were asked to make a master plan for Sukotjo, but you haven't talked about the content of the plan.*

Basically, there are three basic elements. The first thing, we wanted to keep the old city as good as possible, without really interfering. We put the *kampung* as an integral part of the old city. As I said, because—maybe I am the only one at the time who said *kampungs* should be there—again because the history, the legends, the culture, the characteristic, they are all in the *kampungs*. We said: let's keep the *kampung* as it is. Make that as a kind of heritage. You are even not allowed to change the name of the *kampungs*. Although here and there we lost some nice old buildings, basically the inner city is still more or less intact. But you have to fight.

The second thing is that we need to establish the structure of the city. Basically the structure is determined by the river, that you cannot change, and the main roads connecting Surabaya to Sidoarjo, Surabaya to Mojokerto, and Surabaya to Gresik.<sup>12</sup> So the structure is there.

The main functions have also been fixed. You have the harbor, you have the naval base, the city government center, but then we go away from this kind of Le Corbusier model where you have the CBD [central business district]. We divide [Surabaya] into cities with multi-nucleus and we allow a more equitable spread of development activities. But, we set priorities. In the beginning, we thought that to the west is the best place for development. Just encourage the city to develop to the west. And this was well responded [to]. In fact, the development in the west is much faster than what the city can control. So, now they try to reorganize the west. The trigger to the west was in fact done by Perumnas [Perumahan Nasional, National Housing Agency]. Perumnas started with housing, because they were given some part of the land and they started building. Once Perumnas is there other developments follow. I have one [other] reason also why I proposed the west should be developed first. Because the condition of the soil [ground] is *karst* [a kind of limestone] all the way to Tuban. So it is always moving and in dry season it cracks, in rainy season it closes. You need a good land rehabilitation before you can build anything.

We don't encourage, but we don't restrict the development to the east. We let the east grow naturally, because it is restricted by the coastline. And then after the year 2000, we allow Surabaya to grow to the south [in the direction of Sidoarjo]. So most of the new development is then in the south. I was afraid Surabaya would be connected with ribbon development to Sidoarjo. So that doesn't happen, because we restrict the development to the south. So basically that is what Surabaya is doing. The infill is a little bit free, but the structure is there.

*Q: Let's again go back to the plan for Sukotjo. You've said it was also written in English for foreign investors, what was in the plan for investors?*

We don't have many investors. For instance, at the beginning there is an interest by a joint venture between a local—not even from Surabaya actually, he was from Manado—and a Hong Kong-based company. He wanted to develop housing, real estate, at the time maybe the biggest, 730 hectares [under three square miles]. But

<sup>12</sup> These roads lead, respectively, to the south, southwest, and west of Surabaya.

then in the end it doesn't work and they have to split the idea into three companies. And then it works. That is Darmo Grand, Darmo Satelit, and Darmo Permai.

*Q: Then I found in the book by Robbie Peters a page—which is also about you—where he writes that Mayor Sukotjo wanted to move informal settlers from the Chinese graves in Banyu Urip.<sup>13</sup> What happened exactly?*

In 1965, the government understood that [to fight] the communists you should fight [poverty], because they are embedded [among] the poor. And most of the poor are living in [squats]. So they clean the squatters. *Nou ja* [well], squatters' places. But when [the squatters] arrive to the graveyard, then I did some studies on them, because my grandfather was buried in that area, so I know the area. And people actually have been living there quite normal and well-organized also, although they squat. Even the leader has the same size of plots as the other [squatters]. And that is the reason when I discussed with Sukotjo that we need to move these people, I said: "What is the show for you: to move the dead or the living people?" He said: "Are you kidding?" "No, I am sure, I am serious," I said. And he said: "Yes, certainly it is easier to move the dead." So I said: "If that is your position, do we [really] need to move people from this Chinese graveyard?" [Sukotjo replied:] "You mean that?" "Yes, because people have been living there. Some of them have been fighting for the city. So, why don't you just move the dead out?" I said. And he was thinking: "Why not?" I said: "You just make a mayor[al] decision that you close the area and you ask the families to move the graves in two years' time, and if they don't move [them] then they will be moved by the city government."

Then I was asked by [unintelligible]: "Do you have a case that we can expose in this International Year of Shelter for the Homeless?" So I said by the stroke of a pen, these people can be homeless, ah! Not homeless. That was the case and you can find the case in the Yearbook Urban Community by Bertha Turner. She was the second and last wife of John [Turner]. She edited the papers of cases presented at the celebration of [the] Year for Shelter for the Homeless in Berlin.<sup>14</sup>

*Q: That was a turning point in the state approach to kampungs?*

To some extent, yes.

*Q: Why to some extent and not completely?*

There are still people that believe squatters should not be tolerated.

*Q: But you have also relocated kampungs in Surabaya, for instance, along the Kali Brantas [Brantas River].*

Yes, because, the reason first, they have reduced the capacity of the [river's] current and that is very dangerous. Secondly, it is not stable land. Anything can happen any time. And thirdly, because there is also the difficulty to maintain the river.

<sup>13</sup> Peters, *Surabaya, 1945–2010*, 74.

<sup>14</sup> Bertha Turner and John F. C. Turner, eds., *Building Community: A Third-World Casebook: A Summary of the Habitat International Coalition Non-governmental Organizations' Project for the International Year of Shelter for the Homeless, 1987*, in association with Habitat Forum, Berlin (London: Building Community Books, 1988).

Sometimes it is necessary, because there are functions that you have to maintain, otherwise the city will not be running.

Now, they are not being evicted as such, but they are offered some choices. [They] can choose whether they want to build a new settlement, or whether they want to stay in a flat, or want to move into [a close-by] *kampung*, or they just want to receive compensation money and leave. But they rejected that and then some years later they came back to me [and said]: “Okay we will accept that solution.” I said: “You are crazy, because the government has changed and the head of department is somebody new, so forget it. Now there is only one option: you go to the flat or you’ll be evicted.” Still, not just evicted, but moved into a flat. Surabaya is very lenient to that.

*Q: How about kampung improvement?*

Surabaya had not yet started [with *kampung* improvement], but they have a lotto [lottery]. The Lotto Surya was established, because Surabaya was assigned to do the sport festival PON, the Pekan Olahraga Nasional, in [the] late sixties, with no money from the central government except a license to conduct the lotto. And nobody has money. So, the military commander, Komandan Resort Acub Zainal, initiated this lotto.<sup>15</sup> Then Sukotjo said: “Okay, we do also the lotto, but Lotto Surya, to support the funding for construction and so on.” The mission was to bring development to the front door of the poor. That was how *kampung* improvement was initiated. I always said it was a reintroduction, because Surabaya did that in 1924, during the colonial times ... You can read this in your *Under Construction*.<sup>16</sup>

As I said, Surabaya doesn’t have the money, [unlike] Jakarta. But this was a blessing in disguise, because then Surabaya has to work with the people. “So okay,” we said, “we can provide you with the materials, but you have to assemble the materials yourself.” It is very simple. This is participation, but not people participating with the government, but the government participating with the people. And in order that the people get their say, we made an evaluation of all *kampung*s in Surabaya. There was a survey. Each year, they always pick the highest [on the list of *kampung*s] for improvement when we get this [funding] from the World Bank. When Jakarta started, it was assisted by the World Bank in ’74. Surabaya in ’76. When we get the World Bank [loan], we still continue this participatory [approach], because some *kampung* does not want to wait, because “I am at the bottom of the list.” So we say: “Well then, if you pay part of it, you can jump the queue.”

The other difference [with Jakarta] was the standard of the program. Jakarta considered [itself] as an international city, meaning every house should be served with a vehicle road. Surabaya said: “Why do you need a road? We don’t have [a lot of cars]. Other than wasting money by building a road that people don’t need, let’s build footpaths.” But with a width of two meters, so that an ambulance can enter. And [at a maximum distance of] three hundred meters you need to have [a] vehicle road, because a fire engine cannot enter. The [distance] that they can reach [with their fire-

<sup>15</sup> Komandan Resor Acub Zainal was higher in the chain of command than Komandan Distrik Sukotjo.

<sup>16</sup> Freek Colombijn, with Martine Barwegen, *Under Construction: The Politics of Urban Space and Housing during the Decolonization of Indonesia, 1930–1960* (Leiden: KITLV Press, 2010).

hoses] is one-hundred-fifty, so with three hundred [meters distance between vehicle roads] all parts of the *kampung* can be reached. So that was the standard.

What happened in Jakarta when the vehicle road was built, people started buying three, four, five houses, and put them together.<sup>17</sup> So there is no *kampung* [remaining] in Jakarta. Finished. At the time, we don't know. The reason was we only don't want to waste money for building a vehicle road that people don't need, but the unintended outcome in Jakarta of gentrification didn't occur in Surabaya.

*Q: So you send students into the kampungs, and you want to design for the people, but do you also design with the community?*

Yes.

*Q: How do you involve people in making designs?*

For instance, when we want to improve a road, we plan the road technically, and then we bring back the plan and discuss it with the community. We put marks on the ground in the *kampung*, so that they exactly know what is going to happen. Where and what will be affected. And then they give feedback to us. For instance, each footpath needs to have a gutter on both sides. But in case the *kampung* is very dense, we tolerate one gutter in the middle instead of on both sides. They can propose [changes], as long as it does not affect the budget, because we have fixed budget every year. [Our plans are] well understood, well accepted. All these people [who] say that if you talk to the people, you [waste] a lot of energy, you [waste] a lot of time. That is not the case whatsoever. They can make any proposal, and if it is a good one, we accept.

### Cooperation with the Current Municipal Government

The [current] mayor was my former student. She was trained in ITS.<sup>18</sup>

*Q: This year she received a doctorate honoris causa from ITS.*

For this [Silas nods his head in the direction of a book on green spaces in Surabaya].<sup>19</sup>

*Q: Is her interest in green spaces a direct result from your classes?*

I have students, maybe more than a thousand by now. There is a special character within herself. She is stubborn, hard-working, never gives up, and she does not reject doing something that is uncommon.

You know, in the beginning, I don't like urban renewal.<sup>20</sup> But at one point, in Dupak, there is a pocket [small area], very, very bad. I cannot improve that in a

<sup>17</sup> That is, the widened and improved roads stimulated gentrification and the joining together of small houses into one large property.

<sup>18</sup> Tri Rismaharini; her name is usually shortened to "Risma" or "Bu Risma." She was elected in 2010 and re-elected in 2015.

<sup>19</sup> Johan Silas, Wahyu Setyawan, Rita Ernawati et al., *Ruang Terbuka Hijau Kota Surabaya: Menuju Metropolitan yang Cerdas, Manusiawi, dan Ekologis* [Surabaya green spaces: Towards smart, humane, and ecological metropolitan] (Surabaya: Pemerintah Kota Surabaya, 2014).

<sup>20</sup> By "urban renewal," Johan Silas means demolition of existing houses and building new dwellings.

normal way, like *kampung* improvement, because, so dense, and so bad.<sup>21</sup> The only thing that I can do is renewal. I said in the beginning, I hate to do it, but this is something that I have to do. Like it or not. So I did a two-year study with my students and one of the students that did the study was Risma. [The pocket] was in part also inhabited by prostitutes. When we came to this part, she said I am going to help you also to do this research. I said: “You are crazy!” [She said:] “No. I will do that.”

I wanted to show that you can design a flat, for people in the community. It was in 1986. At the time, [builders] reject making a flat. I think [my idea] was the first flat that people accept as a solution. Because first I want to know how they work, how they use the space, how they create urban facilities. We look at the pattern, how they share the well, how they share the kitchens, how they create the communal space and the small space that they use for their house. Then the flat size depends on the size of the original house. If your ordinary house was big, then they get a bigger flat. So we use modules, two by three [meters, and] you can get two, three [modules]. So, people are very happy and said: “Okay we accept it.” I want to show that if you really want it, you can do it [design a flat]. And we did it.

*Q: She also has a reputation for designing green spaces.*

That is more as a hobby in the beginning. Then she specialized in it. She knows almost every plant. The characteristics and so on. Don't debate on trees and plants with her. You lose. You never win.

*Q: Did this concern for green spaces also come from you?*

No. I am just teaching my students that you have to take care of the environment.

*Q: I remember that two years ago we were driving around in Surabaya and you were showing me that, at zebra [pedestrian] crossings, the road had just been heightened to the level of the pavement. Where did this idea come from?*

I challenged her at the time she was responsible for building a *trottoir* [sidewalk or pathway]. I hate walking the *trottoir*, going up and down because [when you pass the entrance to a building or a car park, the pavement is lowered to street level to] allow the car to drive smoothly and as [a pedestrian] you go up and down. Why don't you *geef voorrang* [give right of way] to the walkway? Actually, I didn't have in my mind that people crossing the road have to be at the same level. But she did that. [I said:] “You are crazy!” Yes. Nobody complains. So that is her character. Very unique about Risma. She dares to do something. You never see that in any city in the world.

You know the Middle Eastern Ring Road? In the beginning, the former mayor wanted to call it “Jalan Sukarno-Hatta.” But Sukarno was born in Surabaya and Hatta has nothing to do with Surabaya. You know what she did? She made the whole road from start to end “Jalan Sukarno.” That's Risma. And you know that the name of the road needs the consent of the council. And she gets it. Nobody complains.

*Q: Talking about Sukarno, he claimed he cared about kampung people, marhaen [the proletariat], but at the same time, if you look at him as a planner, he made a bit a mess of it. So I see two sides to him, one must look attractive to you and the other unattractive.*

<sup>21</sup> Dupak is an area in North Surabaya.

I see him as a national leader. Not as an engineer at all [but] I don't care. He is a national leader. I think that is very important. Although there are a lot [of] weak points [of] Sukarno. He was forced to declare the Independence. It was not by himself. No, he was forced. But at least, then we got a leader at the time. And I cannot imagine Indonesia without Sukarno.

Q: *You still see Bu Risma regularly?*

Yes.

Q: *And you can freely express yourself to her and say: "You are crazy?"*

We had a visit from the secretary-general for human settlement, Joan Clos, very high decision [maker] in [the] UN. He wanted to visit Surabaya. During an open discussion [he asked Risma:] "Where did you study?" "I am his student," because I sat next to her. [Silas acting like he is the mayor and gestures to an imaginary person sitting next to her.] She said: "I am his student." In a public [forum].

We have the Adipura Kencana.<sup>22</sup> I was involved with the Adipura since the early eighties. When in 2004 President Megawati instructed her minister for the environment to restart Adipura after it was stopped in 1997, I was asked to work with his staff at the central government. Under the new Minister for Environment and Forestry, selected towns and cities that might receive the award should explain the work in their respective city or town. In one meeting in Jakarta for this Dewan Pertimbangan Adipura [Adipura Assessment Council], [when Surabaya had been nominated], people asked [Bu Risma]: "why do you want to be a mayor of Surabaya?" You know what she said? "Ask him." But don't write that down; it has nothing to do [with this interview; with the topic of our talk]. But just to show her character. I think it is important to her person, the respectfulness. I just see it as a general phenomenon that people need to respect [their] teacher. Adipura has never been used to get votes, rather it was a means to evaluate the performance of a head of local government. If the city or town managed to receive the Adipura, for sure the head of the local government will get a second term of office. Now Adipura is still a [prestigious] achievement.<sup>23</sup>

Until the beginning of this week, for more than two weeks I was in the Dewan Pertimbangan Adipura, of which Pak Sarwono and I are the oldest members in tenure. This time we evaluate 133 towns and cities and Surabaya achieve the highest [score] (almost perfect) leaving other cities and towns far behind. Jakarta last year (2015) did not received any Adipura for its five municipalities. In fact many ideas from Surabaya were adopted in Jakarta, such as the e-procurement, urban gardens, etc.

And another interesting phenomena is that you seldom see buses in Surabaya. A bus carries a lot of people for [a] long distance. We have *kampungs* everywhere. You can find *kampungs* with a cheap housing supply for those working in any part of the city. So people don't need a bus. The number of [buses] in Surabaya [has never exceeded] one thousand. A tram did exist until [the] mid-seventies. That is also the reason we reject the busway; we build our tram. But we will have small bus as feeder.

<sup>22</sup> The Adipura Kencana is an award for the cleanest city in Indonesia, awarded by the Ministry of Environmental Affairs.

<sup>23</sup> This paragraph and the next come from email correspondence of June 26, 2016.

*Q: But if you just explained people don't need a bus, because they only have to cover short distances, why do they need a tram?*

A tram can do both, short or long distances. We need this mass transit, because the traffic is now very bad, even the *bemo* [small motorized vehicle used for public transportation] is suffering, because people are driving a motorcycle. Maybe we have to ban the motorcycle to have way for the tram.

At one time she [Risma] called me. "I get an offer [from the Ministry for Transportation]. I will be given three hundred buses. Shall I accept?" I said: "No! You have already made your decision, you have voted for a tram. Be consistent." And she reject. The next year the offer was five hundred big buses free of charge. I believe that this is the way [the] car industry tries to control the means of transport. Once we [opt for] the bus, we never can get rid of it and Indonesia will never be able to build the buses. The tram will be designed by ITS and built by local company such as Inka or Bukaka.<sup>24</sup>

I hate this bus. I have seen the tram in France. So we need to look to the future. A bus is harmful. A bus takes more space on the road. A lot of accidents. A bus can never be made in Indonesia. It is a very special type of industry. Forget it. But the tram is easy. It is nothing. And I hope that the tram in Surabaya will be designed and built in Indonesia.

*Q: What will the route be in the city? Will it be the old route again?*

Almost. Not all. Darmo all the way to Jembatan Merah and then extend to Perak.<sup>25</sup>

*Q: Is it an ambition to make Surabaya a global city?*

We don't care very much actually. If you really ask the mayor, [she'll answer] "I want to do the best for the people." And the people need the city, and the city [needs] to be strong. The vision of Surabaya is a smart city, a humane city, a civilized city, and an ecological city. That is all very doable. You can be smart and humane. That is part of this national report for Habitat III, next year.<sup>26</sup> But, and this is very important, the smart city can only be achieved if you have smart people.

You know the mayor has this mini iPad. She can control the city. She can control the traffic on line. She can control how [much] waste is being disposed in the final [rubbish dump]. [She can see] when there is a training. She can check whether the PAM [fire brigade] station is working or not. She can check her staff, because every day they have to fill in what they did that day, before they close [down the computer]. If an important letter comes in, they will scan it, send it to her, and she can decide what to do.

This e-government, you can submit your request for a permit using the internet. You can pay your due[s] to the government through the internet and so on. The question is, are you sure that ... ordinary people can use the internet? So what she did—this is her ideal—we need to have, what she calls, this broadband learning

<sup>24</sup> About half of this paragraph comes from email correspondence of June 26, 2016.

<sup>25</sup> In a short, second email on June 26, 2016, Silas informed me that construction would begin in August 2016.

<sup>26</sup> Habitat III Conference, Quito, October 17–20, 2016.

center, where at least there are twenty computers, well-connected to the internet. Everybody can use that free of charge. On holidays, Saturdays, Sundays, there will be an instructor and you can learn anything. The instructor will teach you, free of charge. In all big parks, free Wi-Fi.

She said: "I want to make my people smart." School is free. By law, it is only [free] until the [junior] secondary. But in Surabaya until the [senior] high school. And if you are poor, the city will buy you a [school] uniform, will buy you shoes, will buy your bag. So [it is] guaranteed that people can study. That is part of being smart. Being humane, you know that the poor elderly person gets fed by the government. Three daily meals. It is like in Europe.

*Q: Does the welfare on offer attract a lot of migrants? If this is such an ideal city, you expect that people from other places ...*

We need people. You know how many taxi-drivers we have in Surabaya? Ten thousand.

*Q: That is not enough?*

That is not enough. [Even] today about five hundred taxis from Blue Bird [are] idle due to [a] lack of drivers. There is always a request for more drivers. How many are born in Surabaya? Let's say one hundred. This means that this employment as driver is given to people from outside.

If you walk in the city, it should be clean by sunrise, no litter. Normally by six o'clock the city is already clean. Gutters: clean. Gardens: water[ed]. You know how many work on that part? Almost ten thousand [people]. They are paid the minimum wage, 2.6 million [rupiah]. That is the minimum wage. They start normally from after the morning prayer, at half past four. They are finished by six, seven at the latest. They should be finished by the latest, because the traffic is coming up. They should be home. Between eleven and twelve they come back to maintain. Between four and five, again they come back to maintain their work.

*Q: What is the main economic engine of Surabaya?*

We have industry, but not much. No agriculture. No mining. So basically it is service industry. We have five-star hotel, we have *losmen* [cheap guesthouses]. Surabaya tries to be a cheap city, not an expensive city. [An international publication in] 2009, 2010 mentions Surabaya as the most competitive cheap city in the world.<sup>27</sup> Number one.

*Q: When you compare Surabaya to Jakarta, every year more kampungs have disappeared in Jakarta, and more skyscrapers have appeared. I can imagine that the government policy to protect the kampungs in Surabaya has met with a lot of opposition from the real-estate sector.*

Not really. Because they have plenty of land. Like I said, they can build to the west and there they have been supported by the infrastructure. When they accepted my proposal to gear the city development to the west, Sukotjo [built] the infrastructure. If you want to invest you can invest.

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<sup>27</sup> I have not found the publication that Silas had in mind.

*Q: One or two years ago there was the plan to extend the toll road into the city center. Who stopped this plan? Bu Risma?*

Not only, but she is in the forefront of the fight against [this plan]. We know that the developer is not really doing business. He just wanted to have a certain kind of benefit by having the project down there. They planned only to build to Wonokromo. They cannot build all the way from Wonokromo to Perak.<sup>28</sup> It is too dense. It is impossible. So, rather than having a kind of unfinished monument, we opted to have this tramway, railways, mass transport. We have to fight for it and then at the end of the day the central government agrees and now [President] Jokowi in fact asks: "How much do you need? You don't have to borrow." So now it is a national project [built] in Surabaya. But we kind of compromise [with the developer], that there would be a road between Waru Aloha to Wonokromo to Perak. But it doesn't have to go through the middle of the city; we reroute the plan. So it is a kind of solution; they get the cream of pride that they are still there, but we get our solution that it doesn't have to be a toll-road in the middle of the city. So everybody is happy.

*Q: Would the connection between the city and ITS change without Johan Silas?*

Definitely NO. My involvement [in the] Surabaya government, or the central government or ITS is in phasing-out phase.<sup>29</sup>

### **Mayor Purnomo Kasidi**

*Q: You are very close to Sukotjo, you are very close to Bu Risma, have you been close to other mayors?*

And to Purnomo Kasidi, in between.<sup>30</sup> He is a physician; he is a military doctor. He is with the paratroops. He had never been to Surabaya. Later he was head of the military department, [the result of his having to care for] one important person. A victim. In a fight in [East] Timor. "X" [anonymous] was safe, but he was very badly [wounded], and he was lying there and somebody had to look after him.<sup>31</sup> And the only person who happened to be there is Purnomo Kasidi. He is a doctor and he looks after "X" and he did two things: he survived; he was healthy again. And the news never leaked. It was never in the press. So Suharto was very pleased with [the doctor] and said, "Okay, you can become the next mayor of Surabaya."

And [Purnomo Kasidi] was given three months time to visit cities, but not Surabaya. So when he arrived here after two weeks, he settles down, [then] he told one of his staff: "I want to meet Johan Silas." "Okay," I said, "why not, by all means." So I was asked to visit him in his residential house, at night, after dinner. But he didn't talk about ..., not like Sukotjo, "I am a fighter, I need ..." He just talked about religion, about people, religions. He said: "Okay, I thank you for your visit and we are

<sup>28</sup> Wonokromo is an urban area just south of the city center; Perak is the harbor at the north end of the city. Waru Aloha, mentioned later in the interview, is a junction farther south, actually beyond the municipal boundary.

<sup>29</sup> This answer comes from email correspondence of June 26, 2016.

<sup>30</sup> Purnomo Kasidi was mayor for two terms, from 1984–94.

<sup>31</sup> Name of the treated person and some details have been removed, because this information was told to me off the record.

going to see [each other] again.” *Then* he said: “I need your assistance in doing development of Surabaya.” So from then on, I was very, very close. As close as with Sukotjo. I know his children, I know the wife, I know the children, they know my children, and I have been with him for many years, for ten years.

I have prepared some of his speeches. [Purnomo:] “I want you to prepare my speech for this ceremony or for that ceremony.” When he traveled abroad, mostly he took me along. Almost like Sukotjo, [but] slightly different. Sukotjo just take what I advised him to do, because there is nobody else [to advise him]. But with Purnomo, he always asks his staff. And then he asks what is my solution. And most of the time he took my advice. So that shows how close I was.

*Q: He was mayor in which period?*

’84–’94, ten years. Anybody can be mayor, you don’t even need to be an expert in the field. You don’t need to have experience in the field. You don’t have to be in position and commanding. You even don’t need to know the city. But he did [a] very good [job] in preparing the basic infrastructure of Surabaya. Because, ’84 [was] still a difficult time for Indonesia. Surabaya didn’t have money.

*Q: You said you don’t need any training. The case of Purnomo Kasidi makes this quite clear, but the fact that Bu Risma did have a lot of training ...*

Again, he is locally trained, and he used local staff, local knowledge. But, I mean, everybody can do that. Nothing special. You don’t need to go to IHS [Institute for Housing and Urban Development Studies, Rotterdam], or to Cambridge, or to London DPU [Development Planning Unit, University College London]. No!

## Comparing Regimes

*Q: Sukotjo and Purnomo Kasidi were mayor in the New Order, Risma in the post-Suharto era; do you see a difference in local governance between these two regimes?<sup>32</sup>*

Although Sukotjo and Purnomo Kasidi both are from the army, they have different and unique conditions to run the city. Sukotjo belong to the freedom fighter and Purnomo Kasidi [was] a medic or flying doctor in the Green Beret battalion. He was assigned to be Mayor of Surabaya with blessing of Suharto, thus both have free hand in running the city not enjoyed by most other heads of local government with military background. So they do not really represent the Orde Baru period.<sup>33</sup> Risma is also unique, being a woman with courage much stronger than most man heads of local government. Again, Risma cannot be generalized as a typical leader [of her time].

To me Risma is unique and special. I had the privilege to experience closely the transformation from an undergrad student, to a bureaucrat, to a politician. The character of [her being] hardheaded, [unafraid of] hard work, honest, and courageous remain [throughout] her career. One incident that I never forget was during my four-and-a-half years going on and off to rebuild Aceh and Nias, I brought a traditionally

<sup>32</sup> This entire section, bar one paragraph, comes from email correspondence of June 26, 2016.

<sup>33</sup> During the Orde Baru, it was common to appoint (former) soldiers as mayors. Nevertheless, Sukotjo and Purnomo Kasidi’s positions were unusually strong, even for mayors with military experience, because of their unique backgrounds.

woven cloth of Aceh as souvenir that I personally gave to her. A few days later I saw the cloth among many souvenirs that she [had] received, [but was not allowed to keep, because this was] prohibited by law.

I think this additional information on Risma might be of interest.<sup>34</sup> When election for a new mayor for Surabaya has to be conducted in 2010, initially there were four pairs of candidates. My group felt that the four pairs will never be able to develop Surabaya properly. At the last minute we push Risma (never in her wildest dreams [had she thought of this]) to be the fifth candidate, [with] Bambang [Dwi Hartono] as her vice that [she] reluctantly accepts, as PDI-P does not have eligible candidates. [She won the election by a narrow margin and after a recount.] A few months later a move was [initiated] in the council to impeach Risma for her policy on billboard advertisement. Almost all political parties in the council support the impeachment process, only later revoked by the party leader in Jakarta. Another impeachment process was introduced because she rejected the inner city toll road. Again the political parties in Jakarta rejected the move from Surabaya, due to the large demonstrations to support Risma. I think these two political [incidents] did build her capacity to deal with political issues in the years to come and she has really no problem with the council [to] implement her wildest ideas for Surabaya.

*Q: Are there any differences in the way they attracted investors to Surabaya?*

Once a business entity made available a sum of 100 million to Sukotjo, which he can pocket easily. He instead called me and asked what he should [do] with the fund, and we finally agree to build a cultural center, Mitra. Another time the governor of East Jawa, Sunandar, introduced a businessman from Kediri, the son of a businessman that provided logistics to the freedom fighters under the command of Sunandar and Sukotjo was under his command. That's how a big real estate [development] was built in Surabaya, PT Sinar Galaxy.

A group made available a sum of 2.5 billion Rupiahs [to Purnomo Kasidi in the] late eighties. He [also] called and asked what he should do instead of pocketing the fund. We again decided to rebuild a slum area with two blocks of cheap rental flats, to continue the success of community-based flats that were built in Dupak. At one time Purnomo received an unofficial note (*kattebelletje*) from the palace to grant a part of the plant nursery garden [of Surabaya] to be developed as a shop house complex, [and] he reluctantly agreed although I did oppose strongly. That's the only disagreement that we had. Later, when Ciputra group wanted to get a foothold in Surabaya through Governor Basofi Sudirman, Purnomo just ignored [the request] and [Ciputra] was allocated a site for housing development close to the border [with] Gresik. Only ... late in his tenure did Purnomo [have] a closer relation with Ciputra.

I told Risma that Surabaya got less and less of the share of national tax collected in Surabaya. Central government considers Surabaya rich and [therefore it] should get less [money], so that other less-developed areas in Indonesia can be served. I have raised this issue to my friend Professor Emil Salim, as he is at that time the chair of the advisory board to the president, [but] with no result. [When] Risma went to meet the director general of tax sharing, [she] got [an] increase in the share of tax collected

<sup>34</sup> This paragraph comes from an email Silas sent to me on his own initiative on June 28, 2016.

in Surabaya. I think she is more powerful due also to many recognitions that she received from the international community.

Surabaya can do more [than Jakarta] as it relies heavily on local resources. Most of the idea of [the] smart city of Surabaya was conceived by [Risma], worked out by ITS, and most of the IT parts are also made in Surabaya. This is the way to save the budget—by not having to hire expensive consultants or buy expensive IT equipment imported from abroad. When Risma was interviewed for the Adipura, one interesting question was how is it that she has rich innovation in developing Surabaya? Her reply was simple: that most of the fund was saved from the existing budget, such as clearing the river that the provincial government must do and use the mud to backfill land designated for garden.

### Youth and Colonial Times

*Q: Can you tell a little about your family?*

Why do you need that? I have five children, and we have very nice grandchildren. But it has nothing to do with my career.

*Q: You were born in Samarinda on May 24, 1936. Did you live in or near a kampung in Samarinda?*

No. My grandfather was a captain of the *Chinezen* [Chinese] and I am *gelijkgesteld*, so European status.<sup>35</sup> But that has nothing to do [with my career]. Really, there is no influence whatsoever.

*Q: Is it okay if I ask one question about it?*

Okay, but not necessarily to be written. I don't like too much about my personal being.

*Q: You mention the word "gelijkgesteld" with some irony.*

Not necessarily, it is just there. It is part of my legal papers. It has nothing to do with what I have become, with what Johan Silas is.

[My father] ran the enterprise of my grandfather. He has a palm oil factory, he has a cinema. He is in charge of running all these enterprises. Basically, he just [does] the work for my grandfather. My father was killed in 1943 by the Japs, the Japanese army, because he was in the *stadswacht* [civic guard]. *Hij was een onderluitenant tot ziekteverpleging* [he was a sub-lieutenant in the medical corps]. He was interned for about two years and then they moved him to Balikpapan and some time when the Japanese were losing the war they killed all.

*Q: Did they kill him, because he was gelijkgesteld with the Dutch?*

<sup>35</sup> The late-colonial society was divided into three legally distinct ethnic categories. The Chinese segment belonged to the so-called category of *Vreemde Oosterlingen* and was administered by its own leaders, who were given titles derived from military ranks: lieutenant, captain, and major. Individual indigenous and Chinese residents could be transferred to the category of Europeans when they were *gelijkgesteld* [put on the same footing] by law with Europeans.

I don't think so, because there were others that were also being killed without being *gelijkgesteld*. You know, [Samarinda] is a small city where you can be a prominent person, although it is nothing special. But as I said, my grandfather was the *Kapitein der Chinezen* [Captain of the Chinese]. So we were quite prominent.

My grandfather was the first person in Samarinda with electric light, *electriciteit*. Electric [battery] cells. The first person. And everybody came there in the evening to see this electric light.

*Q: You were born in 1936; do you have any memories about the colonial times related to the city?*

Not about the Dutch people. I don't recall any meeting with any Dutch people. The city of Samarinda is just almost like any small city. I remember very little from my kindergarten years. I do remember during the Japanese time, there were some Japanese teachers in the school, but not much actually.

*Q: You don't remember much of the revolution in Samarinda?*

There is not much revolution in Samarinda. They do have people working against the colonial government, but not really fighting like in Surabaya, for instance. We met some people who were against the Dutch government, and the Allied forces in Samarinda [were] Australian. But then, when the Dutch arrived, they run the city.

My mother left earlier than me, '47, and then my other brothers and sisters. I was there because I was one of the [grandchildren] that my grandmother love very much. So I spent most of my childhood in Samarinda with my grandmother, until she was sick. She had to go to Surabaya, but they did not manage to treat her and she died in Surabaya. Then my grandfather returned to Samarinda, I stayed until he died. And then he was buried here [in Surabaya] with my grandmother. So I moved to Surabaya when they moved the coffin of my grandfather to Surabaya. The day I don't remember, but the date I do remember, that was January 23, 1950; there were still Dutch *mariniers* [marines] in Surabaya. The other reason [why I moved to Surabaya was that] my mother, after her father died, wanted to stay with her brother and sisters. She was born here in Surabaya. So she moved back to Surabaya, because she still has her relatives here.

*Q: Is there anything Indonesian cities of today can learn from cities in colonial times, and what are important things that should be done differently to the way they were in colonial times?*

Basically, as I can remember, during the colonial time the city was quite well run. You got everything. Food was available. Traffic is good.

Some time after [Independence], the condition is going down. [The new city administrators] were not trained to take over. And, of course, the role of the military was very strong—they ran the economic enterprises, the social administration, the city, and so on. The military is not always trained; [the soldiers] are not [all] from a military academy like Nasution. They are mostly people [sent] to fight and then they become mayor. [This was] '49 to early 1950s. It was a little bit chaotic at the time. We have some people who were formally working for the city government, but not really capable of running a city properly. Not only in Surabaya. Until '65. That was when Suharto took over and things [became] organized again ... until that time people just run the city as it is without clearly [seeing] what they wanted to achieve.

## Disseminating Knowledge

Q: *You do a lot with your students?*

Yes!

Q: *Do you see them as students who have to learn something or as collaborators in your activities?*

Both. The general rule is that students should at least spend one-third of their time to learn from the field. And basically we are not doing something that everybody already knows. We always try to find new grounds.

Q: *Can you tell a little about your style of teaching?*

I cannot sit in front of a class and then just talk or use my pointer. I always prepare my PowerPoint. And then, I like to walk. I am a kind of a storyteller. And I hate using a microphone. In a small class, we sit like in a seminar. The bigger class, then I walk; even in seminar.

If you look at history, there are many people that are very, very well known, very clever, but poorly trained. Bill Gates [is] very rich, [but] he didn't finish his undergraduate. Or Einstein, he was rejected when he applied for [admission to university]. If you ask a student: "What does a professor teach you?" the reply might be, "They explain something that you already know or sometimes [the professor] doesn't know." If you write something, especially now, when your writing is published, it is already out of date if you are genuine to yourself. So that is why I always prepare my lecture. I just don't repeat my lectures. And I try to find, what is the new topic? So you can ask my wife, that every time in the evening I have to sit down to check in the computer: What is new? Every morning I listen to BBC.

I do research if I want to do an article, I don't just sit down. Now it is easier, because I can check in the computer. In the old time I have to read all the books. My wife is always saying that she was not allowed to move any books before I finished my writing.

Q: *I found something in *Kampung Surabaya Menuju Metropolitan* that really surprises me. One of [your] articles begins with a reference to Dom Helder Camara, saying: "If you look after the poor people you are a saint, but if you ask why are there poor people you are a communist."<sup>36</sup> I thought it is a courageous thing to publish such an article in 1990, simply for using the word communism without condemning communism.*

You need to know my style of writing. The book was actually a collection of my articles. I used to have columns in *Surabaya Post*. I think at the time [there were] only two newspapers that were really independent: *Kompas* to some extent and *Surabaya Post*. I am quite happy that I am very close to the owner. In the beginning, I [rejected the offer] when they asked me [to write a column]. Pak Azis said: "You have to write, because you know a lot of the city. People have the right to know what you know." But I said: "I am not trained how to write. I am an architect." In fact, my Bahasa Indonesia has the lowest grade compared to my other subjects. But he said, "No, you have to write." So he assigned one of his journalists to train me. So what I did, I sent a

<sup>36</sup> Silas, *Kampung Surabaya Menuju Metropolitan*, 17.

paper, he corrected [and] published it, and then I compare [mine with his, to see] where have I made [errors]? That is how I learnt.

Secondly, this is interesting, if you meet Bu Risma, and when [she's asked], "how do you see Johan Silas," [she may answer] "Well, I learnt a lot from him, he inspired me, but most of all," [she'll say], "you need to make him angry and then he will come up with a lot of good ideas." When I am angry about something, I can write an article [in] an hour. A good article. But if there is nothing, then I [find it] very difficult to write. So there should be something that makes me angry. I do not [always] take into account the boundaries. So there [should be] something that I need to fight for. That is how I wrote my articles. I always [engage with] something that is, in my opinion, serious.

*Q: Do you consider yourself a writer, a teacher, an architect, or an urban planner?*

I am a singer.

*Q: A singer???*

I am a singer. I explain what people are doing. I explain what the city is about. But I don't make it happen. I don't make people do what they do. I am not a song. I am a singer of them. That's how I see my position.