

SITOR SITUMORANG: POET OF LAKE TOBA

Sitor Situmorang

Translated by A. L. Reber

Translator's Note

In the course of a career covering five decades, Sitor Situmorang became one of Indonesia's greatest writers—journalist, translator, essayist, dramatist and prize-winning poet and author of short stories. At the same time he also taught in the National Theater Academy and edited at least four newspapers in the 1950s and 1960s. A strong supporter of President Sukarno, he served the Indonesian government in a variety of posts relating to the arts, as well as acting as chairman of the Nationalist Party's Arts Council (Lembaga Kebudayaan Nasional) from 1959–1965. He was imprisoned under the New Order from 1967–1975. After his release, he was awarded the Jakarta Arts Council prize for poetry in 1976 and published further collections of poems and short stories.

This remarkable life, recounted in the autobiography which he began in 1979, spanned some of the most turbulent times in Indonesian history. It begins with the comparatively untouched indigenous culture of Sumatra's inland Batak villages, moves through the imposition of the Dutch colonial regime in the region to the eventual growth of Indonesian nationalism and the revolution after the Japanese occupation during World War II that established Indonesia as an independent state. The compression of these events into the space of a single lifetime and the cataclysmic rate of change that they engendered are foreshadowed in the first chapters of the autobiography translated here. This is the story not only of the ordinary tribulations of youth but also of a child growing up in three cultures simultaneously—a life told by the man who lived it, with a poet's gift to describe it.

I am grateful to Pak Sitor Situmorang for permission to translate his autobiography and for reading and commenting on the translation of these chapters. Some of the changes he made in the original text are printed in footnotes.

Balige

I feel like nothing's changed
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I feel like nothing's changed
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Sitor Situmorang Man of Letters of the '45 Generation: Poet of Lake Toba²

Prologue

A man may have many reasons, methods, and aims for writing an autobiography. I began this book in 1979 when I was fifty-five, without any idea when it would end.

Like most people, at various stages of my life, I sometimes meant to keep a diary—in fact, each time, I ran aground at the point of actually beginning. Later I became aware that many of my poems had an autobiographical basis, a sort of “daily jotting” of observations of my internal state. Without confusing the composition of poetry with a real diary, as if both had the same value, I finally concluded that as they communicated a poetical attitude, lyrics cannot be seen as expressing the personal history of any man: A Poet and Poetry form a certain concept of culture, while a person, who is completely cut off from the creation of literature each time he ceases to write, continues to live as an private individual influenced and forged by the dynamics of society.

I want to portray the story of a man named Sitor Situmorang who is cited as and who works as a poet. In this autobiography, and through it, I also want to unravel the “narrative of his life,” as one case among countless others.

My ambition is not that of a novelist, whose talent creates the “character” of a human being, whole and complete in and of itself. On the contrary, I want as far as possible to capture, through the prism of my own true, personal life story, most of the aspects of what is called life—that derive from a certain natural and social environment, a certain era, later a career—that are in fact the channel of growth, having the quality of history.

¹ Sitor Situmorang, *Angin Danau: Kumpulan Puisi Sitor Situmorang* (Jakarta: Penerbit Sinar Harapan, 1982), p. 27. Translated by A. L. Reber.

² From *Sitor Situmorang Seorang Sastrawan 45: Penyair Danau Toba*. (Jakarta: Sinar Harapan, 1981), pp. 9–52.

The conditions and dynamics of this human social history [are] the growth of an Indonesian man who lives as a product of national history in an international context, a man who was born a member of a community still completely in a tribal stage—if you will forgive this “theory of evolution” jargon—of development, then was “put into orbit” by the currents of sudden modernization of an impinging internationalization.

As a work of literature and the result of an act of creation, its method fuses a linear chronological method with a circular and cyclic consciousness, the product of imagination.

Honesty regarding the material of experience is limited by all sorts of factors, among them indifference (forgetfulness) or reluctance (censorship). Despite this, a human being, as a creature that possesses not only mind but also wisdom, is inclined to mull over experiences to obtain a wholeness of viewpoint and attitude and as a literary support to enrich the inner life.

There is geography. The village of my birth lies in a tripartite valley, one of three at the foot of Mount Pusuk Buhit’s western slope, on the high plateau of Sumatra—a “continent” in Batak mythology, separated from Samosir Island in the middle of Lake Toba. These three valleys were the “ancestral lands” of the Batak ethnic group and culture, that received their *adat*, their “way of life,” their knowledge, and their laws from the hands of the gods of Pusuk Buhit’s sacred summit, about twenty-five generations ago, in the mythological age.

I am a member of a *marga* [or patrilineal clan], the Situmorang *marga*, that eight generations ago established a branch there, associated with the clans that had been settled in the area for twenty-three generations.

Situmorang was first the name of an ancestor who lived eighteen generations ago, then it became the *marga* name of his descendants, then it scattered. At its beginning, the genealogy [*silsilah*] still indicates the names of historical ancestors, before moving to the realm of myth.

The series of names in the genealogy are preserved and passed on by the descendants. My genealogical line is as follows, beginning from the top, eighteen generations ago: Lontung, begat Situmorang, an eldest son, who begat Suhut ni Huta, who begat Panoparaja, who begat Parhujobung, who begat Datu Tanduk, who begat Tuan Sipallat, who begat Si Marsaitan, who begat Sondiraja, who begat Guru Sojuangon who begat Ompu Gumorok, who begat Somatangga, who begat Gulontam, who begat Biahat, who begat Tuan Singa, who begat Ompu Raja Doli, who begat Ompu Babiati, who begat Raja Usu (Sitor Situmorang), whose eldest son is Gulontam (the nineteenth generation).

My mother originated from the Simbolon *marga*. In the Batak genealogy, the personal name and *marga* of origin of women are rarely mentioned. There are exceptions. This book begins with the story of a Mother who is always cited in the Situmorang genealogy. Female children were given in marriage to become part of another *marga* [their husbands’] insuring the continuation of that clan.

The Batak genealogy was a male descent line. People who did not have sons, for whatever reason, were not obliged to keep a genealogy—in fact had no right to make one and did not have their names inserted in that genealogy, with the result that they were classified as extinct.

1. Family Tree of Si Ulubalang Soba

In the Urat region of Pulau Samosir, our ancestor Tuan Sipallat lived happily with his wife from the Manurung clan, which held sway over the Sibisa highlands on the west side of Lake Toba at the foot of Mt. Simanukmanuk. Tuan Sipallat was the third son of Ompu Tuan Situmorang, a personal name that later became the *marga* name of his descendants.

Tuan Sipallat lived in the village of Suhut ni Huta.

At one point war broke out with a neighboring *marga*. Tuan Sipallat invited his six brothers to lead their group against the enemy. But not a single one of the brothers stirred himself to advance to the battlefield.

Tuan Sipallat alone faced the enemy. He lost the fight, was captured and his head was severed and buried by his enemies at the foundation stone of the steps to the house of the head of the triumphant lineage. Si Boru Sodalahi, his widow, not long afterwards caused a commotion in the state with actions that contravened the customary law and status of the *marga* and brought disgrace on her people. She fell in love with the head of the lineage (*suku*) who had decapitated her beloved, and then married him.

To defeat in battle was added this second shame. The *marga* united and prepared to await the right time to redeem its honor.

Si Boru Sangkar Sodalahi dearly loved her new husband. Daily she carried on with her weaving, more industriously than usual, making ever more beautiful ritual cloths [*ulos* or blessing shawls]. She had her husband help prepare the rarest dyes from the natural products of the surrounding area, to the point that he too was busy far into the night, working for love of this pretty woman, the former wife of his enemy. When at night he was tired, he stretched out on her lap to receive her caresses and gentle blandishments as his reward. One night he was invited by his wife to rest his head on her lap and enjoy the tender touch of her soft hand. He then slept soundly.

His wife said: "Are you asleep already, my love? You seem so tired that there is no chance for you to talk to me," while she stroked her husband's hair with her hand.

Her husband snored—Si Boru Sangkar Sodalahi touched his neck with natural desire. She turned her head while reaching for something under the sleeping mat. The village was quiet. In the dim glow of the lamp, Si Boru Sangkar Sodalahi took an unsheathed sword from under the mat. The glow bounced off the blade of the sharp sword. Si Boru Sangkar Sodalahi raised the sword, observing her husband's neck intently. As quick as lightning, the sword swung, cleanly cutting the lineage leader's neck. The head was detached, blood gushed red in all directions. Si Boru Sangkar Sodalahi then stood, lifting a blessing shawl with the "pattern of life" design from the heirloom chest. While unfolding the wide, beautiful cloth, she looked at the severed head lying there. Then with quick steps she left the house and went into the darkness.

From under the stone at the base of the stairs, she dug up the skull buried there, the skull of her first husband. While reciting a prayer, she wrapped the skull in the blessing shawl in her hand, then slung it over her shoulder. She also wept silently.

She then reentered the house, got a piece of matting and some string. She wrapped the head of her second husband in the mat. Quickly she went out in the direction of Suhut ni Huta, the home of her first husband's *marga*, that had called down a curse upon her.

On arriving at Suhut ni Huta, she knocked on the gate of the village pallisade. The watchmen awoke and lit a torch, puzzled at who could be traveling so late at night and what that traveler's intentions might be.

Si Boru Sangkar Sodalahi lifted her face, making herself known without a word, in the light of the torch.

All at once the two watchmen screamed, their surprise mixed with anger: "How do you dare to show your face here, accursed woman? It is not enough that you prostitute yourself? And throw disgrace on us? Go away, before we kill you, although the law of war forbids the murder of a woman!"

Si Boru Sangkar Sodalahi calmly listened to all this abuse, then said: "I have come to bring you something!"

They answered: "We do not need anything from you. Wait, until we come to your place to get what we need—your head and that of your husband!"

Si Boru Sangkar Sodalahi said: "I am only a woman. Open the gate, let me come in. I carry something that I wish to deliver that is most important for you. When I have given it to you, do what you want with me. I must and will speak with the *marga* tonight, to hand over something of great value to your descendants! Don't be afraid! As you see, I am alone and I will not leave before I am permitted to enter, even if I must wait until morning when you will no longer be able to deny me entrance! So why not now?"

The watchmen awakened the *adat* chief (*wali-adat*), to confer. It was decided to permit the woman to enter and deliver what she carried. The gate was opened for Si Boru Sangkar Sodalahi. She was taken to the *adat* house where men were waiting and a torch had been lighted.

On arriving there, she was invited to convey the matter [to the *marga*]. While standing, Si Boru Sangkar Sodalahi said: "Tonight I bring back your ancestor, returned home to this house, to discharge the moral obligation that fell upon all your heads!"

She then removed the [cloth] sling and displayed the skull of her ex-husband to those present, saying: "This is the revered, whose honor I have redeemed!" Then—while opening the [matting] package that she had laid down—"Witness now the ransom that I bring to you, the token of my inner sincerity concerning all my transgressions against the souls of the ancestors. You are now witnesses whether I am a traitor or a wife loyal unto death! Witness who has taken revenge on your behalf."

Those present were incapable of answering her, moved to tears as they looked at Si Boru Sangkar Sodalahi, and at the skull on top of the blessing shawl.

The *adat* chief finally said: "Surely you have given certain proof of your loyalty! You have redeemed our honor and your own. Tell us, what is it that you want us to do?"

Si Boru Sangkar Sodalahi said: "There is nothing that I want for myself alone, because whatever happens it is not proper that I be forgiven. I have only one request—for the sake of the law of life—the law of our ancestors—I ask that the child in my womb be accepted by the *marga* and be treated after it is born as its own child. This is my sole wish, so that I may follow my own destiny. So that your heart is at peace and the vengeance and hatred are erased for ever!"

Hearing this the *adat* chief said: "Forgive us all! You are truly brave, a woman with a hero's soul. Stay with the *marga*! From now on, your place in the *marga* is restored! From

now on, you are truly our hero for all ages. We welcome you again to the *marga's* circle, witnessed by the Great Creator and the departed spirits of the ancestors, and I declare that truly, we will accept the child that you carry in your womb, whether male or female, as our own flesh and blood because it is the fruit of the whispering of the spirits of our ancestors."

Not long afterwards an *adat* ceremony was performed to proclaim and confirm the binding nature of this declaration. Si Boru Sangkar Sodalahi gave birth to a son. The child was given the name Si Marsaitan.

Si Boru Sangkar Sodalahi, noted in the genealogy as a principal ancestor, with the title Si Ulubalang Soba, occupies the highest place among the eternally-living gods, and continues to regulate the fate of her descendants in this middle world forever.

I am a twelfth generation descendant of Si Marsaitan.

2. From Harianboho to Batavia

I was born on 2 October 1924, in the village of Harianboho, a small valley at the foot of Mount Pusuk Buhit on the west side of Lake Toba, facing Samosir. I grew up there until 1931 when I was old enough to enter the Dutch-language elementary school in Balige, far-away on the southern part of Lake Toba.

I attended school there until Class 5, then moved to Sibolga on the west coast of Sumatra, following the transfer of my eldest brother, who became an official in the [Dutch provincial] capital of Tapanuli Residency. There I finished the two final years of elementary school, then entered the lower middle school (SMP) at Tarutung in the mountains.

During the seven years of elementary school, in addition to the three years of study in the SMP, I lived in three small cities that differed from and were far away from one another. So I was in the care of my parents and the village of my birth only until the age of about six, because I followed the education that was in effect during the colonial period.

My childhood years in my isolated village were enveloped in the atmosphere of the old customary law and the ancestral culture. Father was an *adat* chief (*kepala adat*) according to the *marga* system of the Situmorang clan.

The territory of my ancestors' clan for seven generations was named Lintong and was actually even further west, located on the high plateau (2000 meters above sea level).

My parents had settled in Harianboho Valley only in 1908. In that year of 1908, at the end of the war against the Dutch in the Lintong region, Father signed a "peace agreement" with them, a year after Si Singamangaraja XII, his brother-in-law [and the region's principal resistance leader], was killed in action by a Dutch bullet in June 1907.

Father was appointed as a "*kepala negeri*" or territorial chief, with the stipulation that he leave the Lintong area which was full of memories of the years of war. He was ordered to settle at Harianboho Valley, on the edge of the lake, with a status that was half independent as an *adat* chief, half official in the administration of the colonial government that later expanded over the whole region around Lake Toba—the so-called Tanah Batak, or Batakland.

Father began with nothing, in the material sense. The total destruction of Lintong, time after time, from 1889³ until 1907 by Dutch military operations, had completely destroyed the family property, along with the property of the people in general.

Father, long afterwards, in 1918, was baptised by a minister [*pendeta*] and became a Christian together with all the family. Father, however, still remained an *adat* functionary, strongly conscious of the traditions of his forefathers up to the time of his death in 1963, at the age of 113 years.⁴ Mother and we children, nine brothers and sisters, were given over to the church and the government for our education. What instinct told him that “a new age had come?”

Father followed the tenets of traditional, indigenous Batak beliefs, that revered divine revelations of the supernatural powers of gods of a nameless religion, according to rituals that were binding in the life of the individual as protection for his group in this world and the hereafter.

Father was seventy-four years old when I was born. My mother was his second wife. His first wife had died during the war, leaving behind a son. Father married the first time also at a rather advanced age, when he was over forty. At that time, this meant [going] to the west, to Barus and to Singkil. The west coast of Sumatra, especially the region of the Simpang-Kanan [River]. That was the *rantau* world, even the foreign world. While trading, he met all sorts of teachers in the field of a spiritual knowledge that was more or less compatible with his own indigenous beliefs. [He studied] the science of war, especially the *pen-cak*,⁵ of the coastal region [*pesisir*] that is called “*ilmu sambut*.” He associated with Muslims, gaining a superficial knowledge of the Islamic religion.

Father’s knowledge was learned by heart, in accordance with oral tradition. He was illiterate until the end of his life. His permanent God was Mulajadi Na Bolon (the Great Creator), his prayers were directed to the pantheon of ancestors: the Holy Mountain, Pusuk Buhit. When he was baptised by the pastor, he was given a new name but he never used it, instead continuing to be called Ompu Babiati.

I never knew my grandparents on my father’s side. Both died before I was born—Grandmother in a Dutch detention camp after the war. Long afterward, her bones were dug up and returned and stored in the *adat* house in Harianboho awaiting the moment when they would be “raised” via the *adat* ceremony in order to be entombed in the sarcophagus.

The genealogy of Ompu Babiati, like the genealogy of each Batak clan, embraces both myth and history, gods and historical ancestors. There are also branches resulting from out-migration that become hazy. In our own clan’s genealogy are noted branches that became Acehnese, settling in the interior of Meulaboh, becoming Muslim and using Acehnese names: the brothers, Tengku Ben, Tengku Imun, Tengku Sagala. Perhaps, also there are Acehnese who were adopted into our clan. Tengku Ben and Tengku Sagala are noted as Acehnese heroes who were killed with Si Singamangaraja XII in 1907 resisting the Dutch, while Tuan Nagari, the eldest son of Si Singamangaraja is recorded in history as leading opposition in the Singkil-Meulaboh region.

There also existed a special tradition, linking Si Singamangaraja from generation to generation with the Situmorang clan, especially the Ompu Babiati branch that was centered in

³ Corrected by the author from the printed text which says 1898.

⁴ Corrected by the author from the printed text which says 123 years.

⁵ A form of martial arts.

Urat-Suhut ni Huta on Samosir Island and then at Lintong on the high plateau to the west. Urat and Lintong were places where wives were given by the Situmorang *marga* to the descendants of Si Singamangaraja, on the basis of both mystic belief and political expediency. Si Singamangaraja and Ompu Babiāt descended via two genealogical lines from the two first ancestors of the Batak people, namely Sumba and Lontung, the two lines of descent for all the *margas* that now exist. Lontung, *marga* Situmorang, was the wife-giver to Si Singamangaraja, descended, father to son, from Sumba.

In the period 1883-1907,⁶ during the war against the Dutch, Si Singamangaraja was in the territory of the Situmorang clan, namely in Lintong, then in Pearaja. The majority of the princes and princesses born in that time were placed in the guardianship of Ompu Babiāt. Such a condition and connection were fully understood by the Dutch and were converted into a war strategy, based on the ethnological studies of their scholars.

According to magico-religious beliefs, Ompu Babiāt acted as intermediary for Si Singamangaraja's prayers to his own ancestors, and on the other hand Si Singamangaraja considered Ompu Babiāt as the "Visible God," in the requisite private and family spirit prayers based on that belief.

Later on, this tradition at unexpected moments made me face the problems and difficulties of "*adat* Batak," as a nameless religion.

I was the fifth child according to the male sequence. I was given the name Raja Usu, taking an ancestral name. But that name was eventually changed to Sitor. I do not remember any more precisely when and why, but I do recall that from the first class in elementary school, my name was listed in the book as Raja Usu alias Sitor Situmorang.

Based on the divine inspiration of a dream, shortly before giving birth, Mother asked that a cricket be found for her to eat. At the age of about two or three years I was entrusted to the care of another branch of the *marga* in a certain village far away and I lived there for a year or more.

At the time of my childhood, from 1924 to 1931, the village community of Harianboho Valley was still a closed [society]; people lived by farming—trading took place through a barter system within the valley. The colonial government tried to implement a money economy by introducing a system of taxes and corvee labor.

Random patrols of Dutch military police (*marechaussee*) still came to my village, bearing rows of unsheathed, single-edged sabres. I was certainly not aware of their connection with the rebellions of Indonesian people in other places. The captive status of Si Singamangaraja XII's family,⁷ who stayed in a prison camp, Tarutung, only finally terminated in 1934. Members of the Ompu Babiāt family itself had been released earlier from the camp.

As a small child, I had very little contact with Father and Mother. After the age of two, a village child associated mostly with peers: herding; fishing in the river and lake; setting snares; pilfering people's fruit; milling around at *adat* ceremonies—ceremonies of religious sacrifice to the gods that usually occurred after the harvest and took place at the edge of the lake complete with palm frond decorations. The offerings of food for the gods were thrown into the lake once the prayers were finished, becoming the object of competition between young and old, especially between the children and adolescents, accompanied by *adat* squabbles among all those in the water.

⁶ Corrected by the author from the printed text which says 1894-1907.

⁷ Corrected by the author from the printed text which says merely Si Singamangaraja XII.

In the valley and its environs were twelve types of sacred objects in the form of coral hills, springs, trees that were all addressed in prayers. The most important was Boru Saniang Naga who dwelt in the Lake, the goddess guarantor of health and prosperity, the controller of wind and waves.

The newly registered Christian congregation had not yet reached 10 percent of the total population, with a religious teacher doubling as a school teacher with some twenty pupils who were not all organized into classes. Nevertheless, the clanging of the church bell, on Sundays and upon the death of a member of the congregation, already contributed to fixing the rhythm of life.

Adat, which the new religion labeled paganism and wickedness, still had strong power in the people's souls.

Father himself persisted in carrying out the essential rituals of his indigenous beliefs. For each of my brothers who went away to or came home from school in some faraway place, Father would hold a feast, all of us eating together from one large plate filled with yellow rice and fish decorated with a concoction of aromatic leaves, betel leaves. After the prayers, he picked up rice and the tender flesh of the fish, and placed them before each child for the ritual meal. The *datu* was also sometimes summoned to prepare a talisman, in the form of a piece of tin slipped on a three-colored string of red, white and black, which was tied to one's waist as immunization against sickness and evil spirits in the [*rantau*] lands beyond the Batak homeland.

The communal dinner concluded with taking turns drinking from a white cup filled with lime juice. The children were then ready to depart for distant lands.

As far as I remember, my Mother was never present at these ceremonies; I do not know if this was because she was busy or because that is what the *adat* required. The same was true for my sisters. It is clear they never had the chance to go to school outside the village. They were educated only in Harianboho, for three years at the Batak-language elementary school there.

We nine brothers and sisters, born of the same mother, were three girls and six boys. We boys all went far away to school.

In July 1931, I was taken to Balige by my father to go to school together with my older brothers who were already in school there and to lodge at the house of my eldest brother who was an official in the office of the Dutch *controleur* [district officer] there. The six-hour journey by boat to the South crossed the waters on the west side of the Lake. For me, this was the first time I had been out of the Valley and my first experience with the size of the Lake. Balige was also my first city.

The Dutch language school there was set up in 1925, at the same time as the opening of the Trans-Sumatra Medan-Padang highway that passed by the southern edge of the lake. Balige is the center of a wide Valley that includes the Uluan territory in the east, the headwaters of the Asahan River. Densely populated, its inhabitants were most loyal supporters and guardians of the memory of Si Singamangaraja. This was a center of the pacification activities that were launched via Christianization and Dutch-language education for the children of the "*adat* chiefs."

When Harianboho and the Gunung Pusuk Buhit complex were the mythological center of the earth, the Toba-Balige region was the old center of the Batak world and at the same time the dynamic center for the development of a new age.

The schools became the sources for a cadre of administrators for the big plantation economy that at that point was beginning to flourish at Deli on the east coast of Sumatra.

The school complex was located two kilometers outside of the city. The students who did not live in the dormitory [*asrama*] walked both ways to school every day whatever the weather. The teaching staff were Bataks who had graduated from teachers' training school in Java. The exception was the head teacher himself, a Minangkabau, who had the status of a European. He had studied in the Netherlands and married a woman from Surinam.

A total of about three hundred students were divided into seven classes. I had no trouble getting used to the ordered atmosphere of the school. Still, under the routine currents of the school flowed a feeling of being in a foreign country.

Balige became my country. The world opened up for me on the benches of the school. Immersed in an atmosphere very different from the environment and society of the valley of my birth. In Balige I was introduced to the new era. A school that was regulated and used a foreign language as well: a city that, although small, was visited and crossed by life from a country and world faraway.

Here I experienced a variety of sensations for the first time: going to the movies, a cowboy film with Tom Mix (the impression has not been erased: Tom Mix fording a swift river on horseback). Here I drank ice for the first time, in a technicolor of syrups, green, red and yellow. Four-wheeled trucks moved to and from distant lands.

All these and other things became part of the daily life here. The bicycle repair shop, the garage, the one and only gasoline pump (I still like the smell of gasoline), the dentist, the photographer. I first heard the radio here—one owned by a businessman. When a special celebration was held for the betrothal in the Dutch Queen's family in 1936, the radio was turned on in front of his shop so that the public could hear.

In Balige there was also a newspaper: *Bendera Kita* [Our Flag]. There was a hospital with its own doctors, and education from the mission for the nurses. There was a football field where local matches were arranged. There was a tennis club. All this provided entertainment, as did the movie theater. "Opera Batak," a new-style theater group, stopped by, as did the circus from Malaya: The Great Circus of Shanghai, with elephants, tigers, large horses and trapeze acrobats.

At the same time, Balige also gave me my deepest experience of traditional culture. Balige was joined to the indigenous villages, where the old ways continued. There I listened to the old legends narrated by an ancient master storyteller who was well-known at the different sorts of ritual ceremonies that took place at night.

On nights of the full moon, Balige the "city" was swallowed up again by the indigenous Batak world that surrounded it. Although unpopular with the church at that time, the *margas* still regularly arranged to perform the obligatory rites in their entirety, as if times had not changed. The *Datu* followed their duty as rainmakers (*pawang hujan*), as augurers, dancing with their magic staffs, *tunggalpanaluan*, accompanied by the music of gong and drum, conducting the massive ritual dances, staging the dramas of the creation and renewal of earth and heaven—the times when gods and ancestors mixed again with humankind in the annual ceremony. The world of my Father when I was still named Raja Usu of Harian-boho.

The wind was not as savage in the Balige area as on the west side of the Lake, at Bakkara and Harianboho, which were regularly attacked by a kind of typhoon. The atmosphere of

the harvest in the extensive *padi* fields, the rice barns, in the months of July and August contained the fervor for life of the poor farming people. There I began to feel close to the land, at a sensitive age becoming aware of the natural environment, with the help of knowledge learned at school—basic geography.

As the area north of the Lake was dominated by a cluster of high, steep mountains that guarded the kingdom, Pusuk Buhit, so the plateau valley of Toba-Balige was surrounded by the rows of mountains that rose on the east, Habinsaran—the place the sun rose—the stream of Asahan, gateway to the unknown world in times past.

Asahan-Habinsaran, with the waterfalls of Siguragura and Siarimo, marked the borders of the known world. Beyond them lay a mysterious, outside world, as if beyond this point the Batakland was viewed for centuries as an enigmatic world populated by lineages with conflicting customs, a tantalizing *adat* culture, whose origins were bound to myth and legend.

These legends and myths were pondered over by the storytellers who, like puppet masters [*dalang*], told of the creation of earth and sky by Si Boru Deak Parujar, a beautiful epic about the world's first human settlement, Si Anjur, at the foot of Pusuk Buhit.

The Balige I knew was a world that believed in the invisible and the supernatural and at the same time in the reality of life that changed on the initiative of man. When I left after five years of school there, the chiefs' sons and daughters had demonstrated their ability to move with the times. They took over various types of new enterprises and professions formerly carried out by Chinese immigrants, such as supervisors and teachers, the exception being the preparation of Chinese food. The hallmark of the times, urbanization, I also experienced there, together with adolescent naughtiness. Balige also had a prison complex, located adjacent to the children's playing field. There for the first time I heard the lonely screams of the people called detainees or convicts.

3. Adolescence

In 1936, I moved to a school in Sibolga, on Sumatra's West Coast, following my oldest brother who went there as a government employee. I finished the two final years of the seven-year elementary school system in Sibolga. Then, in 1938 as the outbreak of World War II approached, I entered the Dutch-language middle school at Tarutung, the capital of the subdivision [*onderafdeeling*] of Batakland, in the interior of the Barisan mountain range between Sibolga and Balige.

I spent three years in Tarutung and finished middle school in 1941. In that year the war spread to the Pacific. At that time Japan entered the arena of the World War. In December 1941, I was already in Batavia, the capital of the Netherlands Indies, to continue my studies at the SMA or higher middle school. For all Sumatra, only one SMA-level school existed, in the city of Medan, and it was intended only for Dutch children and, as a privilege, for the children of indigenous *rajas* and sultans.

My two years in Sibolga were a time of transition to adulthood. It was also a time of transition in the surroundings and society. Sibolga was a coastal region that had been Muslim for centuries, and together with other areas in west Sumatra had been touched by world history in ages past although it did not flourish. Batak elements from the mountains, for the most part Christian, had entered the region over several generations. The atmosphere of the ocean shore and of the port city germinated seeds of cosmopolitan consciousness and

awareness of the world of international trade. The foreign world, that was scarcely heard of in the mountains of the interior.

The mixture of ethnic groups, the variety of languages and dialects and the beauty of the great Bay of Tapanuli, I experienced as a stimulating widening of my horizons. I did not long suffer any profound sense of separation from the Balige region.

From the age of twelve to fourteen in Sibolga, I absorbed the air of the wide ocean. Harianboho, the valley of my birth, was vaguely remembered, without, as formerly, giving rise to homesickness. My thoughts were directed to new horizons.

My lessons at school opened vistas of a wished-for world of building the new on top of the old. The Christian liturgy and Batak *adat* rituals were merely conditions for fulfilling routine spirituality and were followed without any consciousness of an ongoing process of history.

Sibolga and later Tarutung had central electricity and also piped water.

Balige, Tarutung and Sibolga carved out the "personal careers" of many children of my generation that in definitive ways had emerged from closed mountain valleys.

The only conflict remaining in my memory that was connected with the old beliefs was a trivial event during my first days after entering elementary school in Balige. From Harianboho, I had worn silver bracelets on my wrist and ankle. The other children laughed at me because of this, something that was a source of pride in my village. On the first school vacation, I conveyed this reaction to Mother. Without comment, Mother herself agreed to strip off all my bracelets. Some of them had to be sawn off, because I had grown and they had become too tight. A feeling of betraying my race, of giving in to the prejudice of other people entered my heart from that moment, and Mother didn't say anything. Neither did Father. I adapted, as I later did to many matters that stripped my sense of self, by accepting everything that was new. But I knew and was active in the traditional village world in Balige. In Harianboho, I had always maintained a distance from the life of the farmer, although according to the *marga* system and blood ties, my family and I myself were part and parcel of it.

Father's position as an *adat* chief, erected a wall that was later perfected by education outside the Batak homelands (*rantau*). Tending the animals and going to the rice fields were merely pastimes for me, not a necessity as they were for other children.

In Balige, I lived in a village [*banjar*] on the edge of a town of the Pardede *marga*. For the five years that I lived there, I became a "Pardede child [*anak Pardede*]." I joined in all their joys and sorrows; I participated in their rituals. The rhythm of traditional life—birth ceremonies, marriages, funerals. I joined the work of the farmer in the rice field, becoming intimately involved in its rhythm.

In Sibolga, all these activities were cut off. I no longer heard the cock crow in the morning awakening people from sleep. There were no wet rice fields, only rubber plantations. People lived on land that was not *marga* land. The sirens of ocean-going ships conjured up lands and continents faraway.

The Koranic recitations and prayers of the Sufi brotherhoods expressing a fullness of religious experience made an impression on daily life that earlier had been invoked only by the singing in church. Everyone was an immigrant, settled not in villages, but in traditionless urban quarters.

The first mosque that I saw was the mosque in Sibolga. The Chinese were present as a large section of the town's community, the Dutch as its rulers. Sibolga was the seat of the Resident [a high-ranking Dutch administrative official] and the center of large European firms that ran the import-export business—with their own European life-style and their own special residential areas.

The Dutch settlement was located in a separate area that was heavily guarded, a garden district that took up almost half the city's not very extensive land on the right side of the river that divided the town. But like first tasting the savor of the world, before experiencing the wider world of my later days, I left Sibolga without any feeling of being tied to it.

On entering the middle school, escorted again by Father who made a special journey from Hariamboho, I began a new stage of life in Tarutung.

Tarutung, the capital of the subdivision [*onderafdeeling*] of the Batakland, was located in the Silindung Valley—ten kilometers long and two kilometers wide, 1150 meters⁸ above sea level, flanked by the rim of the high plains of the Barisan Mountains in the interior between Sibolga and Balige.

The Silindung Valley was the launching place of the new era for the Bataklands. There the missionary Nommensen set up the first church in the middle of the nineteenth century, before he went to the Toba-Balige area at the end of the century. The first schools, providing education for the pastors and the religious teachers, were also erected there. It was also the base for Dutch power.

The valley's inhabitants still followed the *marga* system, adapted to the usages of the church: the worship of the departed souls of the ancestors with its attendant rituals and art had been forbidden and wiped out. In the whole valley, not a single house with traditional architecture remained.

The city of Tarutung, situated on the slope of the hill and facing toward the east and the river that divided fertile wet rice fields, was the model and the center of the Batak church and was also the center of the Dutch administration—under the banner of the Pax-Neerlandica that fluttered on the top of the hill, at the residence of the Assistant-Resident.

On the hill adjacent to it, was the main church complex and the house of the Pastor (*tuan pendeta*), a German, the Ephorus of the Batak church. The majority of ministers at that time were Germans, evangelistic missionaries of the Rhenish Mission. The church and ethnic group were regarded as the same then, although about 25 percent of the people still held onto the old *adat* beliefs, like Father and part of my family, especially in the Samosir region.

The barracks of the Dutch army garrison were also at Tarutung. Si Singamangaraja XII and two of his sons who had been killed in the war were buried in the barracks' compound, without any of the markers appropriate to *adat* beliefs. Was he not a symbol of the old world, the world of magic that had been exterminated? The family was also not able to go there to carry out the proper rituals because this would arouse the spirit of opposition to the colonizers, like that alive among the Parhudamdam,⁹ a messianic politico-religious section of the Parmalim sect, which aimed at holy war against the Dutch and was forbidden because it made a cult of Si Singamangaraja, "the descendant of Batara Guru who lives eternally" and who at a certain time will appear again in a new incarnation.

⁸ Corrected by the author from the printed text which says 150 meters.

⁹ Perhudamdam in the original printed text.

It was planned that I would lodge in the house of Raja Buntal, the oldest son of Si Singamangaraja, who lived in Tarutung. He was chairman of the Adat Council (Dewan Adat), advisor to a Dutch entrepreneur. Before his captive status was officially ended in 1934, he and his brothers had been sent to school in Java, "exiled" in the view of the Bataks, who regarded him as "crown prince" because they believed he possessed supernatural powers inherited from Si Singamangaraja. I myself chose to live in the school dormitory.

On my first day in the house of Raja Buntal, together with Father, I sank back again into the atmosphere of the "eternal grieving"—as Father told about the time of the war against the Dutch, full of suffering and sacrifice, in his conversations with Raja Buntal, who with his mother, Boru Sagala, Si Singamangaraja's widow, was full of questions for Father about the conditions during his childhood.

I wanted to be free of the memories of that time past. I had physically and spiritually prepared myself for a different kind of life. My three years in Tarutung, from the age of fourteen to the age of sixteen, formed what I later considered the happiest time of my life—free from responsibility except for studying in the best of circumstances. I did not need to be too diligent to finish school. Body, heart, and mind blossomed in the best of climates of the time.

Dutch education was absorbed as something natural. Social interaction in the school and dormitory formed an environment that fulfilled all the needs of adolescence, creating spiritual ties beyond the village and *marga*.

Thoughts of "becoming something later" did not encounter any obstacles whatsoever, it seems. Father and the whole family were prepared to sacrifice for me to get the highest possible level of education, as a pillar of hope for the nine brothers and sisters, and as a ladder, a means of achieving the highest "rank" that could be striven for.

I myself, when I dreamed then about a "career," wanted to become a journalist and also wished to plunge into politics; I wanted later to enter the Law College in Batavia. In my opinion, all the leaders of nationalist movements at that time except Soekarno were law graduates.

All my older brothers followed in the steps of my eldest brother and entered government bureaus, not continuing with school. The sisters stayed in the village. Even if there was the desire, there was not enough money to send all of us to school. All the funds were set aside for me—circumstances resulted in the choice falling on me as the "family project."

The feeling of becoming an elite fostered in the hearts of about three hundred pupils suited the needs of the colonial power and the objective conditions of that time. Both the standard of living and the standard of education towered far above the surrounding real world. A small island, sheltered in the middle of the ocean of backwardness, one new generation being prepared for situations undreamed of by its ancestors: the modern world. All the teachers were Dutch. All the lessons were in a foreign language, and were centered on Western life. The map of the Netherlands and the history of the "Dutch homeland" were better known than the history of our own country. We were taught to love the Queen and the House of Orange far away on the continent of Europe, like the Queen in a fairytale replacing the old legends.

In September 1939, when I was in Class II, the war broke out in Europe. The German, Hitler, conquered a large part of Europe. The Netherlands, as a neutral country, tried to save itself from the danger of war. In the Netherlands Indies preparations were made to face the possibility of a spread of hostilities. The imperialist nations were divided into two blocs:

the Allies on one side and the Fascists on the other, including the Japanese empire that for many years had fought for but never succeeded in subjugating the continent of China.

The Dutch Indies-Indonesia, overflowing with natural resources, became an object of the struggle. Japan, in particular, had long since considered the possession of a colony proper to its position—the same as the English and French and especially a small country like Holland.

World events reached us vaguely through the Dutch-language newspapers, which were full of war news. The adventurous and heroic aspects appealed to adolescent fantasies, especially the Nazi-German propaganda pictures, without any real understanding of what was at stake.

In May 1940, Germany attacked and occupied the Netherlands; the government and the Queen narrowly escaped, fleeing to London. The Indies in Asia, Surinam in another part of the world, these were Dutch territories that were left intact, and, according to the pronouncements of the Dutch authorities, were expected to remain as colonies for several centuries more.

Solidarity with Holland, encouraged at school, faced growing nationalist sentiment, which had secretly entered adolescent hearts, filtering in from the centers of the movement in Java and the large cities of Sumatra.

One day a strike occurred in the dormitory as a result of bad food, something repeatedly protested but not corrected by the school authorities. Those students considered to be the leaders were immediately arrested by the Dutch political police according to the martial law then in effect. They were expelled. At that time, something historic also happened in church circles, meaning in the ethnic [Batak] community as well. The Ephorus, a German, was arrested by the Dutch as an enemy alien, and a Batak pastor, Sirait, was chosen as successor by the Synod meeting in Tarutung, winning over another candidate, a Dutch minister.

The form of local patriotism, Batak “nationalism,” in the church had been directly tied to “Soekarno’s” Indonesian nationalism in that era. There was no more doubt that the church and school were receptacles of a secularism aimed toward nationalism: one people, one nation, one language. Democracy, which became the standard of the Allies opposing fascism was also the standard of the nationalist freedom movement for independence from foreign colonial domination.

The state of Dutch power, in a city like Tarutung, did not seem the least bit shaky. School went on as usual. The time arrived for me to advance to the final class, Class III, in the middle of 1940. The Pacific War that was expected to erupt, had not yet broken out. However, one day people knew that the owner of the only Japanese store, Kakitani, had “disappeared,” returning home on furlough to the land of his ancestors, while his store which served student customers was run for him by his employees.

Sitting in the highest class, especially the math and science stream, carried a particular cachet, like the fruition of elite status, that was proud of itself and was a source of pride as the future hope for the surrounding region. The presence of three hundred middle school pupils was a mark of status for the city of Tarutung itself. The students on the whole already reflected the elements of a new society. In addition to the children of *adat* chiefs, the children of government employees, ministers, or teachers formed the majority. There were also children of businessmen, who generally had the most money. The prestige of the *adat* chiefs and their descendants, who with few exceptions were classified as having the least money, had already shrunk greatly in this circle.

The German and Dutch missions, working with the colonial authorities, had succeeded already in clearing the way for a "middle class," a group that took the bourgeois life-style of the West as an example, a model of development for the new group of entrepreneurs. Nevertheless, the cadre of candidates for the civil service was still narrowly limited to the "descendants" of the indigenous aristocracy, connected with the continuing strength of the "adat" factor, which was exploited by the administration for purposes of stability. Among the *adat* chiefs in my region, Father was of "the less prosperous" group. The main reason for this was the war that had continued from 1883¹⁰ to 1907. During this time the ancestral territory of Lintong, the center of Si Singamangaraja's resistance, had time after time been attacked and devastated, to the point that its primitive economic life could not be protected.

I became more aware of these sorts of conditions in family discussions of how to make it possible, with relatively limited funds, for me to continue school "later in Java." Father, like many other *adat* chiefs, in material matters was comparatively much better off than the ordinary farmers who made up his people. *Adat* chiefs were usually the owners of extensive wet rice fields and many animals—water buffaloes, cows, and horses—and also possessed gold heirlooms, the surplus wealth of the ancestors. Father owned, in total, the absolute minimum compared with the usual possessions of an *adat* chief. His income from agricultural produce was more than sufficient to fulfill *adat* obligations so that the surplus could be sold for cash. Once a year the *adat* chief was also given "beloning" or repayment for his administrative duties, averaging 300-500 guilders annually, depending on his performance in "collecting taxes" and "arranging corvée labor [*rodi*]." Father was not very energetic in these matters. He was an *adat* chief of the old school, meaning that he was already in office before the colonial takeover and did not consider himself an "instrument of the government," but rather the "father" [*bapak*] of his community—the community of poor farmers, occupants of the valleys that had been self-sufficient in former times, before their isolation was shattered by development.

I noted several events during my adolescence which were reflections of my very ambivalent world. After being promoted to Class III, during the vacation I was ordered to come to "present" myself before the Dutch *Controleur* in Pangururan, to "chat." This official suggested that after graduating I enter the OSVIA, a special and elite school in Bandung for the education and training of candidates for "*wedana* and *bupati*," [high indigenous administrative officials in the Dutch colonial service]. I expressed my desire to enter the Law College and that because of this I intended to go to the SMA (higher middle school) in Batavia as preparation, without stating my ambition later to "enter politics" as a journalist.

He appeared disappointed.

At the same time I heard also the story of a conflict between Father and the authorities. The administration intended to begin collecting new taxes in Father's territory, namely the "*bunga kayu*" [wood tax], a levy on the jungle products collected by the inhabitants, including those collected by Father for his own needs. Father did not understand and refused. The forest had been the possession of the *marga* from time immemorial. Father himself owned several hundred half-wild water buffalo that lived in the forest. In fact, herds of deer living there, some of them tamed, were also considered an ancestral inheritance. The *Controleur* explained the legal angle, namely the principle of the crown's domain in Dutch Indies law, which said that all empty land and jungle became "the possession of the Queen, meaning the possession of the state." Father still refused. The *Controleur* tried to threaten Father in a

¹⁰ Corrected by the author from the original printed text which says 1884.

polite way, suggesting that Father would face difficulties, possibly be discharged, if he persisted in "not wishing to understand the wishes of the Queen and Governor-General in Batavia" who had "appointed him as chief of the area" and empowered him with insignia of office—the use of the Queen's seal and the gold trimmed black velvet cap.

Father felt offended. He snatched off the cap of his office and threw it on the Controleur's desk. "Take it back! I became *adat* chief of my people not because of any Dutch appointment! Before there were any Dutch, my ancestors were rajas in this land."

He left angrily. He was not fired. The administration tried diplomacy. As a special policy, Father, "as an old *adat* chief," was given rights over the forest and communal land that were strictly limited, and also restricted in time to "his lifetime only."

Inside the fortress of *adat* Father could always obstruct such colonial paternalism with minimal conflict. It was not so with missionary paternalism—"Mr. Preacher (*tuan pendeta*)."
If the Controleurs acted with rational policies, that also could be considered in a rational manner; the connection with the church, especially with the foreign missionaries, was full of unending tension between two systems of belief: Christian and *adat*. As I have said, Father spent the whole of his life in the world of his *adat*, the nameless religion.

I myself no longer experienced to the full the essence of the old *adat* beliefs, except its rituals as the usual way of safeguarding ethnic identity. On the other hand, the usages of the church had a routine character that was less beautiful for me than *adat* customs and manners.

When there were important events, like baptisms, marriages or deaths in the family circle, generally the foreign pastor came personally to lead the ceremonies as a sign of respect for Father's status. His attitude always made obvious his low opinion of Batak culture that was connected directly to the old beliefs. When he was so kind as to speak with the "Western educated children" like me, the discussion contained insinuations about the "dangers of education," meaning education outside the direct supervision of a religious teacher and minister, "in Java, in the big city." He spoke in beautiful Batak, like that used in the Holy Bible, and clearly avoided the use of Dutch, the language of secularism and intellectualism and the dangers they threatened. Nommensen and the pioneer ministers in the mid-nineteenth century more than the worldly administrators, the Dutchmen themselves, came with all the prejudices of middle class Europe toward the indigenous culture, with its superior means of livelihood.

Repeatedly Father was expelled from the church, then received back without himself wanting to be "rehabilitated." Apart from the methods of modern education and medicine, which were accepted by the people as progressive, the church created an ambivalent atmosphere by the prejudice of its ministers with their foreign culture.

Adolescence was a stage of silent struggle between denial and unquestioning acceptance of things outside the perimeter of tradition and the ties of blood. In fact, for me, in Tarutung, everything was resolved without crisis. Knowledge and intellectual development came like a splash of rain that was awaited and fell at the appointed moment, protecting a basic loyalty toward "Father."

The director of the school, named De Booy, was an example I wanted to emulate, a balance to the spiritual arrogance of the ministers. The behavior of DeBooy, of all the teachers, seemed to stress that we were capable of achieving whatever they had achieved and more.

In Class III, I confronted my ties with Harianboho, with its megalithic culture, the all-encompassing world of the village, as a world I had already left behind, with beautiful memories soaring above its superstition, its poverty, above the remains of the *adat* culture of a hunting tribe that carried the skulls of its ancestors everywhere it went, in war and in migration, covered in the brush of prehistory—in fact as a potential way of containing all the ideas of highest humanity within the totality of my comprehension.

Throughout my final class year, my thoughts were directed toward Batavia. A feeling of adulthood also grew. I fell in love, my heart set from afar on a pretty girl in Class I, a Batak girl who had been sent to Tarutung, “to the land of her ancestors,” from Batavia by her family because people said that she was too inclined to have boyfriends, and then was kept back a class. All that news increased her attraction in my eyes. Her style, her smile, her glance, her easy movements. When, by chance we met in passing, my heart was in tumult but I did not dare to get to know her well. Simultaneously, I was also attracted to a woman who was the *nyai* [concubine] of a Dutchman who lived in a house separated from the school by an iron fence. That young Sundanese woman who was the *nyai* aroused the tempestuous appetites of my youth. But I had no real experience of having a sweetheart, except dates during vacations with a distant cousin, where sexual experimentation was limited to fondling.

In Tarutung, there was a private library that besides adventure books also had illustrated pornographic books that originated from a Dutchman’s library and were lent out on the sly.

Children of my age in the village were, of course, already married.

In a city like Tarutung, having a girlfriend at school meant sociable walks together—these half adult boys and girls. The most daring stayed over Saturday night, especially if there was a full moon, not at their parents’ homes but at the houses of villagers at the edge of town. Masturbation was popular in the dormitory. The *nyai* on the other side of the barbed wire fence was never a real option.

A Dutch girl, the daughter of one of the teachers, became a student in our school. Because the Netherlands was occupied by Germany, she could not be sent there as usual. After finishing elementary school, she studied under the guidance of her father, then took the written exam. This girl was an exotic element in the world of my imagination; I think the same was also true for the other students. She had the same exotic quality as the Hollywood film stars in the town’s only cinema, the most important impetus in changing attitudes. Greta Garbo, as she appeared in the film *Matahari*, became a standard of ideal femininity, beyond the everyday world of the solid and healthy girls from the mountains, who for us were still bounded by the system of *adat* rules.

During my years in middle school, three of my elder brothers in turn married girls chosen by Father and Mother—choices that were determined by the geopolitics of *marga* marriage alliances to produce renewed and strengthened family ties according to *adat* exogamy. Father and Mother fortified their valley with the valleys of families that gave wives to their sons, daughters of other *adat* chiefs who were richer than our family. Father’s and Mother’s capital was the great prestige of our ancestral line.

Their educated sons, who were all guaranteed careers as government employees, candidates for the colonial elite (*priyayi*), were desirable sons-in-law. Three of my elder brothers subsequently became sub-provincial administrators (*bupati*) in the Indonesian Republic. Two of my older sisters, who had no chance to complete the three-year village elementary

school, married in the local community and followed fully their careers as semiliterate, traditional village farmers' wives. In the same way that my eldest brother really played the role of father for us younger ones, his wife acted as mother for us from the time we were little. Such was the pattern of my family life at the moment that I "felt adult" and would shortly go to faraway Java. That I would graduate I never doubted. My marks were always in the highest group and indeed it finally turned out that I was freed from the necessity of taking the final examination and was able to go directly on to school in Batavia.

In the middle of 1941, in July, I left for Java drunk with dreams of a world of increasingly unlimited possibilities, without any premonition that the World War would spread and drag in Indonesia itself. The Sumatran students in Java came mostly from Minangkabau, Palembang, and North Sumatra (especially Tapanuli) particularly from the 1930s on—when secondary education in Sumatra, as a seedbed for schools in Java, namely Batavia, Bandung, Yogyakarta, and other cities, began to produce graduates on an annual basis. The centralization of educational opportunity in Java resulted in a welding process toward Indonesia's unification and unity that was actually not in the long-term interests of the colonizers. But all sectors of the Netherlands-Indies administration needed cadres with a Dutch education.

During the long vacation a stream of students went by ship via three "sea" migration routes: Medan-Singapore-Batavia; Padang-Bengkulu-Batavia; Palembang-Tanjung Karang-Batavia. From Batavia, they spread out again all over Java. With a few exceptions, students generally went deck class and also got a discount for the Java-Sumatra round trip journey.

Studying in Java henceforth meant more students living there, increasingly separated from their region of origin and after graduation rarely returning home.

The first trip to Java, I chose the route via Padang, intending to come home during the next vacation via Singapore. But there was also another consideration. I hoped that I would meet "her," because I heard she would go that same route to Batavia after her year of repentance in "the land of her ancestors." It turned out that she was not a passenger on the ship I was on.

Seasickness, resulting from the ocean waves, added to my disappointment. There were also few other acquaintances or classmates. Simultaneously, I became aware that I rarely made friends because of a basic desire to be by myself. I remember only one person that I ever considered a friend. A Chinese boy named Tj. S. I., the son of the owner of a small shop (*warung*) when I was in elementary school in Balige, but we later separated because I moved to Sibolga in 1936. Exactly forty-three years later in 1979, I went to Balige and looked for his old house, but it was already gone. His father was long dead, the mother was left, already enfeebled, and had opened a spice shop in the back of their former place. The old mother was determined to wait for the end of her life there. She had already become Batak in lifestyle and wanted to be buried later there beside her husband. All her children had gone away. Tj. S. I., in Medan, had become a lawyer.

The largest number of children on the ship [from Padang] were Minangkabau, in the same way that the Tapanuli children must have been the dominant group coming from Belawan. The age when the spirit of Young Sumatra (Jong Sumatra) had a political character had already given way to sentimental regional feelings, expressed in songs of their respective regions sung by the students from the several different areas.

In Batavia, I lodged for fifteen guilders in the Bungar district, the Defensive Line of Van Den Bosch, where the Eurasian homes bordered on the indigenous settlement (*kampung*) of Kemayoran.

I was clearly in the most strategic location for all sorts of activities. There was a direct tram to school in Salemba, with no need to transfer. It was near the commercial centers, Pasar Baru and Noordwijk, and most important, close to Pasar Senen, the center of university and secondary student life, the place for shopping and making dates, and Waterloop-lein, now Banteng, the sports center was only five minutes' walk away.

The Second World War that had begun September 1939 in Europe still scarcely seemed real, after almost two years duration, when I moved to Batavia. The "kingdom across the sea"—as the Dutch then called Indonesia—felt that it would go on for centuries longer, consistent with the hope and certainty expressed by Netherlands statesmen even after their government had gone into exile in London.

Batavia, called Betawi and Jakarta by the nationalists, was the center of colonial trade and the seat of the Dutch Governor-General who governed as Representative of the Queen over her subjects.

Batavia, Betawi, and Jakarta were three aspects of one world that was divided in layers and structured in the ascending levels of a pyramid. The top of the pyramid consisted of the elite administrators and the business world of the Dutch, with a group of indigenous Indonesian (*pribumi*) elite. The whole life and arrangement of the city operated according to the pattern of these racial groupings and layerings.

In the classroom, students in Dutch schools occupied the peak of the pyramid. In daily life, the student community split in two—the Dutch went home and lived in the Menteng area, the others went into the Chinese or Indonesian urban village (*kampung*) areas in the same city, along racial and sometimes along indigenous ethnic group lines. At that time Kernolong in the Kwitang area became a center of concentration of Batak in-migration.

In school I lived in "Batavia," and outside I increasingly got acquainted with "Jakarta." Batavia-Jakarta was the center of political activity for the nationalists.

The first weeks in school, I became aware of a certain change in myself.