

Joan Hardjono and Charles Warner, eds., *In Love with a Nation: Molly Bondan and Indonesia*. Sydney, Australia: Southwood Press, PTY, Ltd., in association with Charles Warner, P.O. Box 194, Picton, NSW 2571, Australia, 1995. 256 pp.

Tom Atkinson

Editorial Note: Tom Atkinson first encountered Indonesia in 1945–56 as a British soldier, during which time he was co-editor of an underground newsletter supportive of the nascent Republic of Indonesia. After the withdrawal of the British armed forces from Indonesia, he became European representative of the Republic's agency, Antara, and later worked in Indonesia's London Embassy. From 1952 to 1962, he returned to Indonesia, where he served in the Republic's Ministry of Foreign Affairs. There, amongst other duties, he helped write speeches in English and together with his wife, Rene, often worked with Molly Bondan and came to know her well. He is currently Managing Director of Luath Press in Scotland.

Like so many others who spent time in Indonesia, I owe a great deal to Molly Bondan. Her friendship, guidance, patience, and hospitality seemed boundless, and I mourn her loss.

In Love with a Nation recounts, mainly in her own words, her long association with Indonesia and Indonesians. From before the Declaration of Independence to her death in 1990, Molly lived, and finally died, serving the cause and the ideals she held so dear.

The title of the book appears to have been chosen by the editors, Molly's brother Charles Warner, and her friend, Joan Hardjono. It is a very correct title, though, because Molly did genuinely and deeply, although not uncritically, love the Indonesian nation, but did not always love the Indonesian State or its organs and policies.

Her account of the events of 1965 and 1966 is simple and clear, although still debatable. However, there is simply no mention of the horrors which her beloved Indonesian nation inflicted upon itself in those years. It is certainly not that she was unaware of them, for she had no hesitation in speaking of them, but they do not appear in this volume.

Of course, Molly quite clearly did not set out to produce a history of the Republic, but instead, forsaking for once her usual modesty and determination to be unobtrusive, she has given us a personal odyssey, her own journey on a life devoted selflessly to service.

It is unfashionable today, and probably not politically correct, to be selfless and idealistic and to devote a life of hard work and some sacrifice to the furtherance of A Good Cause. It somehow seems old-fashioned, even reprehensible, to forsake the obvious attractions of a comfortable life-style for the satisfaction of pursuing ideals.

Perhaps the most interesting part of Molly's odyssey is to trace her development from being a child in a family environment of liberalism and social conscience to the young woman of 1947, who, with tiny baby and a new husband, unhesitatingly went off to live and work in a society and environment totally foreign and unknown. The early chapters of *In Love with a Nation*, telling of Molly's family and the pressures which shaped her, explain much of why the anti-colonial struggle attracted so many idealists from the colonial powers. The intellectual ferment of the early decades of this century, which spread far beyond the boundaries of the intelligentsia, opened up the minds and hearts of many who saw in colonialism an evil which had to be combatted. It was a simple world of black and white, good and evil, and none the worse for that.

It was that ferment which produced Molly Bondan. She represented what was perhaps a simplistic view of the world, but her very simplicity, with its accompanying simplicity of life, her lack of cynicism, her idealism and enviable capacity for plain hard work, produced a woman who, without trying to do so, did in fact have great and beneficial effects, effects which are still discernible in Indonesia, and of course in Australia.

But this review should not be an obituary for Molly. The major problem with the book lies in the editing. Joan Hardjono and Charles Warner have done a remarkable job in stitching into a coherent whole a very heterogeneous mass of material, much of which was never meant to form part of a biography. It reads well and coherently, but the reader can never be sure where Molly ends and the editors begin. Often this is not important, but there are times when it would be an advantage to know when and why certain items were written. Reverting to the events of 1965 and 1966, the superficiality of the treatment seems out of character with Molly Bondan. After all, the events of those years were by far the most important for Molly's beloved Indonesian nation since 1945, and yet they are glossed over without any real attempt at explanation or analysis. Is there an editorial hand at work here?

Much of Molly's writing in this book falls in that dead ground between journalism and the academic. It is somewhat more than journalism, that first draft of history, but certainly does not aspire to the rigours of the academic. How could it do so, since she was immersed so completely in her life and times? She could never be remote and objective where her beloved adopted nation was concerned.

Perhaps particularly with Indonesia, the past is indeed a different country. It is hard to recognise in that great throbbing metropolis, Jakarta, the simple, small friendly place that Molly evokes from the 1950s. Then, if you needed to see the Foreign Minister or the Prime Minister or even the President, you simply went along and knocked on his door, and he called you by your first name and inquired about your family. The changes, both good and bad, left Molly behind—Molly and others of her generation. The frontispiece of *In Love with a Nation* catches this perfectly. Taken in 1990, it shows Molly, at night, working away at her old manual typewriter, wearing one of the simple cotton dresses she somehow found time to make. It is absolutely typical of her.

She accepted the world of word processors and air conditioners and strict office hours, but it was another world, and she refused to be part of it, but she still continued to produce more work than any ten of the more affluent young modernisers who learned the elements of their professions from her.

The last part of the book, which is a collection of random items on a large number of subjects, is in some ways the most interesting. Many of them are texts for radio talks, and in them the Molly we knew—and loved—shines through. Opinionated, didactic, well-informed, ever ready to talk and teach, the reader can be transported again to those hot Jakarta nights in that simple Kebajoran house with Molly and Bondan, where talk ranged free and wide. They are summed up in one of Molly's statements: "After all, Indonesia is entertaining." She was, and is.

In Love with a Nation shows that Molly Bondan never lost touch with reality. She recognised that the generation of herself and Bondan, and those before, had accomplished the historic task of making Indonesia free, but a major task had to be handed on to others, the task of making Indonesians also free.