A Certain Age

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CHAPTER FOUR

THE CLASSROOM

Wherever I go they ask me: “Spell your name.”
—Bertolt Brecht, “Sonnet in Emigration”

THE ROAD TO SCHOOL

School was rarely remembered without recalling distance — even the lowest types of schools and the lowest schools’ lowest grades invoked distance:

Mrs. TRIMURTI: When I was very small, I went first to school close to my house. It was an elementary school. Just opposite the house. As close as that house over there, you see?¹

There always also seemed to be a dusty, hot, and long road leading to the school. This is often the first, and sometimes ultimate, thing to be recalled: “Yes, that going to school, on foot, the same road every day.”²

Mr. SARLI: Six kilometers. Every day. It was far. When it was hot or when it rained, I went to school. When it rained too much, I just hid for a while at the roadside.³

Children mostly went in groups, and, sometimes, with their guardians. The most privileged of the children traveled a road to school from a very early age:

Princess NOEROEL: Nanny went with us. She waited for us and, after school, she took us back.⁴
THE FINAL CLASS OF THE HBS FIVE-YEAR SENIOR HIGH SCHOOL AT
A DANCE CELEBRATING GRADUATION, CA. 1938. KONINKLIJK INSTITUUT
VOOR TAAL-, LAND- EN VOLKENKUNDE, LEIDEN
Dr. ONG: Even the kindergarten as I recall was not very near our house. It was quite a distance to go, especially for a small child.5

It had been a journey with a clear aim. There had been a point distinctly at the journey’s end — or so it seemed and so it is recalled. The exertion fitted the journey:

Professor SOEMITRO: Sometimes I went to school without breakfast. Just a cup of something to drink. Parents made us even believe that it was better to go without breakfast; that it would make us stronger for school.6

The road, of course, was a dangerous place. The danger of and the anxiety about the road to school, however, was particularly that it might be blocked. Moving on the road to school was an adventure, thrilling and scary largely because it might at a moment be taken away. It was the possibility, first of all, that the journey might be cut short before the goal was reached that made the journey anxious.

Mrs. MIRIAM: I never got as far [as my brother did], because at one moment the funds were finished, or something else happened, I do not recall what. I never got there.7

Mr. SOEDARPO: My elder brother and sister got to attend ELS [Europeesche Lagere School], European grade school. But then our father died, and Soebadio [the brother], my sister, and I could not go to the Dutch school anymore. So we just went to HIS [Hollandsch-Inlandsche School], the Dutch-native grade school; never to ELS.8

Mrs. MUNARDJO: Of course, I liked school. But I did not get further than half of the MULO [Meer Uitgebreid Lager Onderwijs], junior high. We tried to keep paying for the MULO, but after two years we ran out of money — no more school.9

Even the lowest school had to be paid for. It was commonly called sekolah setalén, “twenty-five-cent school.”10 The next one, the “second-class school,” cost twice as much already, and then the fees (on the road up) would rise steeply.
Princess BROTONIANGRAT: It was merely for the haves. You had not, you could not.\textsuperscript{11}

As this was a colony, and as most of these journeys were being cut short, the dynamics of the adventure, the anxiety and intensity of the journey, surpassed what might have been experienced elsewhere. The modern passions of education culminated here, in this place and at this time.

Mr. ALWIN: Only much later did I understand it: what an immense sacrifice it had been for our parents. Their level of income, of course, was nothing like that of the Dutch families in the colony, but they still wanted their children to get on the Dutch track. When I was about to enter the first grade of school, in 1932, when I was six, my parents moved to a “Western address” of town.\textsuperscript{12}

Mr. MOEDJONO: My grandpa owned a small cigarette factory, and so he could help. This is my history. I went to the Dutch grade school for five years, to an agricultural middle school for three years, and then, it was the end. He died.\textsuperscript{13}

Mrs. SOSRO: I was daughter number three. The other girls went to school, Salirah and Jainah. Myself, I could not go.

OTHER (Mrs. Sosro’s friend): “Don’t!” they said.\textsuperscript{14}

When it came to the road to school, the old people’s memories, as a rule, became especially intense. At these particular moments of recollection, the homes and neighborhoods, villages, towns, cities, parents, grandparents, all that was now gone, became distinctly alive — and, more often than not, distinctly helpless:

Father MANGUNWIJAYA: No! It was a Dutch-native grade school only. Because my father never attained a level on the basis of which his son might be let in — to be educated at a Dutch school. My father got just below that level. I still remember how angry he was that he could not bring me to the European lower school in town.\textsuperscript{15}

Mrs. POLITON: It was simple: “What is your parents’ income? Less than this? You cannot be admitted.” One had to have school money. My parents did put it together. They paid out of the money they got from our orchard.
This interview took place in Mrs. Politon’s house on a Menado street named after a private college she and her husband founded in the 1950s. It has now long been inactive.

Mr. SEKO (Mrs. Politon’s husband): My family did not have an orchard.16

Making it and getting onto the road to school was experienced, and is recalled, much as a compassion for those who “did not make it,” who—in the road language—“were left behind,” who did not manage to move as smoothly and as fast. A vision was born on the road to school of the unschooled, not-yet-schooled, or not-yet-enough-schooled: the common people (often they were named in English to me), the volk (in Dutch), or the rakjat (in Indonesian, now rakyat). The vision born on the road, inevitably and so as to function well, was as forward-looking, as “pregnant with future,” and as straight or softly curved as the road itself.

Mrs. POLITON: The common people, if they went to school at all, got only to a kind of basic school, the people’s school it was called. Three years only.
RM: Common people?
Mrs. POLITON: It was also called Volksschool. The third grade was the end. They would not even think they might go to a better or higher school. Just as far as that. Then they worked, in the fields and such.17

Mr. MULYONO: My school was an ordinary-people school. The pupils were mostly from workers’ families, peasants. It was on the outskirts of town. The school was called Volksschool. It was a school for servants (This was said bitterly.) — Just three years.18

The road to school cut through an increasingly modern colonial landscape—through homes and neighborhoods. To move on the road, a new compass, new musts and must-nots, were needed, and a new perspective. The road to school, of course, had to begin at home. The homes and neighborhoods were the road’s starting points, but the road became the pointer, and soon also the axis of the homes and neighborhoods. Even the homes and the neighborhoods, now, had either to head straight and forward—as the road pointed, where the best possible school was—or to be (seen as) aimless.

*The Classroom*
Professor RESINK: I went to the best school in town, the so-called Christelijke Mulo [Christian Junior High].

Mrs. RAHMIATI: Mine was the second-best school in town.

As one moved on the road to school, one’s home and neighborhood, the walls, the fences, the space, and the sound and feel of it moved, too (moved back); the landscape and the whole land became an attribute of the road, sort of, a roadside land. Moving on the road to school, the feel, touch, smell, and shape of it, explained virtually everything, including, most important, one’s belonging to it all.

RM: You felt exactly like Mr. Purbo?

Mr. ALWIN: Yes, everything was the same, except that I had an advantage, because my elder brother had already been admitted to the school, before me. So that nobody was surprised when I applied. He opened the door.

Mrs. DAMAIS: In the past, the system was like that: the European grade school was for the Dutch and for some Eurasians—and some of the well-off people from other groups could also be admitted. For instance, I was put in the Dutch school, because my father was a teacher. And there were some other Indonesian children from families of higher officials as well.

There are not many reports of the frightening ghosts on this road, nor in the trees, streams, and dark spots along it. Not that the specters had disappeared. But now, ahead, in this road space of “the preliminary and provisional,” if one only kept on looking ahead and kept on moving, there was a promise.

Mr. ALWIN: It was in Brastagi in the hills above Medan [East Sumatra], and only now can I appreciate that I was able to enter that European grade school. It is not easy to understand how my parents could achieve it. This was something completely new. It was called “planters’ school,” and it was for the families of the big planters in the area. I was extremely lucky, as I said, that I had such progressive parents. So I got into the “planters school.”

The road to school offered a new space of transparency, of straightforward (or soft-curved) correctness, promise of safety, and even power. It was
exclusive and inclusive at the same time—this is what progress implied. Ambitions and dreams of advancement and even of freedom were to be given to one in this space as naturally as a bit of (or much) embarrassment.

RM: Do you mean to tell me that you felt more comfortable in the Dutch school than at home? Was it that skill to switch easily?
Professor KOENTJARANINGRAT: Yes, easily, I think so. But also—and I am a little embarrassed to tell you this: I was from that class where your chances were to go to school. My parents were of that class. Otherwise there was a limited admission, sorry to say.26

The road to school is recalled as intimacy, a sense of home and neighborhood corrected and constantly upgraded as one moved on the road, and as the road progressed. The prestige and wealth of home and neighborhood, everything that could be gathered, went with the travelers. Siblings and cousins went as if in one boat, in the same direction, as far as possible. Boys and girls from the same place tended to go at least part of the way together. The “same place,” the home, the starting point, besides, was being progressively redefined, “corrected” by the perspective of the road.

Air Marshal DHANI: I went to school in Gondang [Central Java], which was five kilometers from Klaten. My cousins lived there, and I went with friends.27

RM: So you were not alone in school?
Mr. WOWOR: I was the only one among my brothers who went there. But many other relatives went. And some more distant relatives lived there. With them I went to school.28

Air Marshal DHANI: Then, I went to AMS [Algemeene Middlebare School, senior high] in Yogyakarta. We had an extended family system for this. There was an uncle and I stayed with him, rent and board.

RM: Sort of family?
Air Marshal DHANI: Yes. There was a garden pavilion in the back of his house, with two rooms. I got one room and another relative of my uncle, Haryono, he later became army general, you know the name—

RM: Yes.
Air Marshal DHANI: Haryono lived in the other room. He went to the
Togetherness and intimacy are remembered as being upgraded on the road to school. Never too tight, hominess progressively, gradually, and imperceptibly as one moved, was spreading thin to fit the road. The circles of togetherness are recalled as covering an ever wider territory in the new topography. Increasingly, warmth is most intensely defined by the road:

Mr. DAINO: My father died when I was still little.
RM: Very little?
Mr. DAINO: Second year of grade school. My uncle took over, because he had money and he could pay for school.
RM: You moved to your uncle’s house?
Mr. DAINO: Yes, and my mother, from our town, moved with me.30

One almost never hears about some sharp line dividing the intimacy of the home and the road to school. The power of the road seems to blur the line. Enframed by the new horizon, where the road aims, the thin and loose warmth of the road is being recalled as growing inward.

Mrs. TORAR: When I was a girl, yes! We had forty people in our house at one time.
RM: It was a big house.
Mrs. TORAR: It did not matter so much, Mr. Rudolf. My father was a teacher, and he did it for education. Everybody at the time wanted their children to go to a good school, and so they sent their children to my father. There were sixteen children, and my father had children of his own—many children; at that moment seven were still at home. The children of my father’s brothers and sisters lived in the house, the children of one of my maternal aunts—three had already been married, but six of them were still small; they were in the house as well. My mother told me that there were forty people in the house. And there was no additional income to pay for them. There was little money in the house because my father helped so many children.31

However curved a road to school might be, as long as one kept on moving, the new space was meaningfully, that is geometrically, indeed linearly,
defined. The one who touched the road became animated by the drive to get to the school at the end of the road, there, where it touched the new horizon. One’s life, including one’s sense of warmth, security, and shelter, was newly projected — again streamlined. One learned to dwell on the road.

Mr. SUTIKNO: I was in the sixth year of grade school. The school was in Semarang and my parents lived in Kudus.32

Progressively, gradually and imperceptibly, dwelling began to appear as safe, and as homey, as close as it happened to be to the road, as much one managed to pack oneself with the road’s energy.

RM: You speak so nicely about that kind of life. But were not all these students just a tiny elite? They did not seem to know very much about ordinary people’s lives. They lived — where did these students actually live?

Professor RESINK: Some lived with their relatives if they had any near their school. But as they made it to a higher education and a bigger town, and Jakarta, most of them lived in pensions for students and in student dormitories.33

The increasing traffic-hominess made the passing feel increasingly natural. One walked, drove, covered distances and territories, and felt, increasingly, as if this were one’s rite de passage — as if this were the same thing as growing up.

Mr. ASRUL: My elder brother went to school in Jakarta. He stayed in a kind of boarding place, Dutch internaat. The name was Jan Pieterszoon Coen [the founder of Batavia in 1619]; today there is a military-police garrison there. It was an internaat and it was rather exclusive. Mostly Dutch students lived there, and a very select group of Indonesian students, because it was very expensive.34

Of course, these were still children or almost children, and, sometimes, crying is recalled.

Professor SOEMARDJAN: After I finished my elementary, I got to go to another town, Madiun [East Java], to a boarding school. It was a
long journey. One had to go by train, and my mother also went to the station. When the train began to move, she cried. I did not cry.

RM: You could not, because you were a man.

Professor SOEMARDJAN: Yes, I was a man. But the first night at the boarding school I cried. I did not confess it to anybody, but I cried, I cried all the time.35

The road to school, however, as soon as one got over this (or as much as one dared not to confess it), was judged by its instrumentality: how well it was constructed and paved and curved. There was a road skill to be learned; the road’s tricky sections or bumps were there to be negotiated and overcome. Actually, it gave the road its infectious and syncopated (modern, exciting) rhythm.

Mr. ROSIHAN: I went with Usmar Ismail, my classmate from Padang [West Sumatra], who was accepted to the same school in Yogyakarta. First, we traveled to Bandung and stayed at Usmar’s uncle’s one night. Next morning we took a train across Java to Yogyakarta.

RM: It is a long trip.

Mr. ROSIHAN: We started at about eight or nine in the morning and we arrived at six in the evening. In Yogya, at the station, we were approached by people who were looking for boys like us to board with them. I was in fact to stay in a dormitory, called Boedi Oetomo, but I went instead with a Catholic teacher, one of the people waiting at the station: “Why don’t you come to my house? You pay twelve guilders only.”

RM: Did not it bother you that he was a Christian?

Mr. ROSIHAN: Oh, no! It did not even enter my mind. I didn’t care. So we went, and there were already four boys staying with the priest, two from Medan [North Sumatra] and two from Palembang [South Sumatra].

RM: All Muslims?

Mr. ROSIHAN: All Muslims.

RM: Did not your father tell you what kind of lodging you should choose?

Mr. ROSIHAN: No, no, no.

RM: You were free —?

Mr. ROSIHAN: Free. I was on my own: “You find your way.” He gave me money: “You find your way.”36

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There were to be haltings on such a long and adventurous road, and I could still feel the enormous energy that had been invested to overcome each one of them. The old people who had made it, as well as the dropouts, had invested their lives in the sequence of the stumbles being overcome. They were still, in fact, investing as they recalled it for me. Possibly nowhere could I hear it so naked, so clear, and so eagerly conveyed as in a post-colony. Here the stopover memories and stopover lives, stopover ambitions, affections, and warmth—and even the stopover mothers and the stopover fathers—seemed most at home.

Mr. ROSIHAN: Doctor Tjan Tjoe Siem was a teacher of Javanese. He studied at the University of Leiden and was known as Professor Tjan. He was a friend of several Dutch scholars of the time. And he became my father. He said: “You come to live with me.” He was not married. He was still young, about thirty, I think.

RM: Did you say he became your father?

Mr. ROSIHAN: Yes. He was the one who taught me to read, with passion you know. He had a big library, and I read everything that was there. He also taught me Arabic. In the afternoons he taught me Arabic, from Dutch and German textbooks. Each Sunday we went to the movies.

RM: He liked movies?

Mr. ROSIHAN: He liked movies, but only in the daytime. In the evening, you had to study.

RM: How long did you stay with Tjan Tjoe Siem?

Mr. ROSIHAN: Till the end. Till the end of the Dutch era that is. When Japan invaded in 1942, I moved to Jakarta.37

Since pre-Dutch and precolonial times, young men in the islands would leave their homes and travel to learn. Religious schools, Islamic and Buddhist especially, had always been on the road. Students moved from teacher to teacher, and often also the words in various Indonesian languages for traveler and student are identical. Since ancient times, the farther the journey, so it was perceived, the sublimer the learning.

One new quality in traveling to the modern school had been the extent to which speed, the surface of the road, and the vehicles used on the road played a part in the sublimity of the adventure—the faster the road, the sublimer the learning. Surface especially still holds the memory.

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Mr. HARDYO: As I advanced to the Dutch-native grade school, I had to travel nineteen kilometers. I used a buggy.38

Professor RESINK: I went in a small carriage drawn by a pony.
RM: Who was driving?
Professor RESINK: Our coachman, of course.39

The more of preparation, of checking the brakes, the tires (or the horseshoes at a time before tires), the more new space appeared to open ahead and the more a road to school appeared time fitting and soul fulfilling. The more the road appeared to be technologically grounded, the more — measurably more — long distance it seemed destined to be.

Mr. ROSIHAN: First, I went to school in our old buggy, with two horses.
First we had two horses, and later just one. I do not know what happened to the horse. Maybe he got old.40

Next, a bicycle connected with the road to school, and more correctly than with any other road of the colony. School and bicycle became twins; school made bicycle a serious commonplace.

Mrs. SOELISTINA: When I went to school, I went on bicycle.
RM: Because the school was so far from your home?
Mrs. SOELISTINA: Oh, just a kilometer or so.
RM: But still you went on bicycle?
Mrs. SOELISTINA: Yes, of course.41

As the road became a space, covering a territory and networking the colony, increasing numbers of students went to school, farther on, by bus and by train.

Mrs. HARTINI: I went to school in Madiun and I lived in an uncle’s house.
Every weekend I went home, when I wanted: there was a bus.42

Railway stations, especially, became some of the grandest sites of colonial architecture and of newly created space.43 The stations, the points of departures and stopovers, the arrows, are recalled best in the mode and spirit of a road to school. They marked, and still do, the journey’s progress, bigger

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and grander in memory, modern and ever more modern as the train with
the student, from a stop nearest home, puffed through the track landscape,
approaching a bigger town, the better school.

Mr. KARKONO: I was born in the provinces and went to school in town.
I took the train every day.
RM: To Surakarta?
Mr. KARKONO: I lived in the area of Sragen, near Surakarta. I got up
at half past four in the morning. I boarded the train at six. I was in
Surakarta at seven. The train departed back at two.44

Modern affections were being built on the way to school, on the train; often
affections for life, and thus it is fondly recalled—togetherness from station
to station.

Mr. SOEDARPO: In Pangkalanbrandan [East Sumatra], it was always fun.
The train was a daily experience. And it was something new. The nice
part of it was, and I recall this very well, how the train would fill up
with friends as it got closer to the city. Early in the morning we went
to school by the Medan Trein [Medan Train]. My mother would prepare
fried rice, and we would eat it on board. The train had carriages of
three classes; the third class we called “cattle class.” Nothing is without
a problem, of course. Each class was still separated—a section for
women and another one for men. So, our sister, who went to school in
Medan too, had to go not with us, but in the women’s compartment.45

The road to school could be explained and argued geometrically, linearly, in
pure reason, arithmetically; even, as common sense, indeed a commonplace,
it was progressive. From the road, best of all, and soon only from the road,
was one able to explain, and argue for, the way in which life should be lived
in the colonial and modern time and space.

RM: So you went to a Dutch school?
Colonel SIMBOLON: Yes, but only because my father, who was born in
1884, was so very progressive. So I went to a Dutch school, the Dutch
grade school.46

* * *

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Mr. ALWIN: Teachers were so much respected in Kota Gedang! It was said that that place was the most advanced in West Sumatra; that in the whole colony there were few places like that. It was said that there were the most progressive and most courageous people there.\(^\text{47}\)

Moving on the road to school, one was empowered by the road to see correctly and safely forward, backward, and all around—to see, among other things, those who were left behind and off the road as *doenia kampoeng*, “the world of simple neighborhoods,” of *orang desa*, “the villagers,” or, indeed, of *inlanders*, “the natives.”\(^\text{48}\) Those appeared as *koeno*, “ancient, dated, old-fashioned,” or even more fittingly—in the frequently used term as the culture of the road set in—*bodoh*, “stupid, unschooled.” One had to move forward.

Mr. SEDA: It was as it had to be. My family understood it early on: education was a motor of progress. I was given school as a good inheritance from my father, my uncle, and my whole family. This was the best inheritance that could be—not that stuff stored in a treasure box; not there but in the brain. So I was being pushed, and very much so, to go to school.\(^\text{49}\)

**CHANGING CLOTHES**

School has been recalled as a place, shelter, building, like the German *Bildung*—“*Bildung* has no exact equivalent in English: *Bildung* means picture or image; *bilden* to shape or form, but also to educate; *ungebildet*, uneducated, uncultural”—as a space, where the road to school ended; for a moment.\(^\text{50}\)

Mrs. MIRIAM: It was very safe; the school was very nice. I went back, two years ago, and the school is still there. It is quite run down, but it still functions.

RM: Still a school?

Mrs. MIRIAM: Yes, still a school. So, it was nice. It was a European grade school.\(^\text{51}\)

Mr. ASRUL: For that town at the time it was a very fine building. The building is still there. Next to prison, in fact.\(^\text{52}\)
These are very physical memories of the school at the end (for a while) of the road. The space of the school is recalled as full and filled, divided into segments and thus defined; made unforgettable by the school benches, the blackboard, the teachers’ desk, and, of course, the walls.

Mrs. MASKUN: The benches were of light brown wood.
RM: A good school?
Mrs. MASKUN: Pretty.53

Mr. ROSIHAN: It is still there, still used, but not a senior high anymore.
   It was built of stone, rectangular, and one floor. In front, three classrooms—second, sixth, and third grade; here there was the first grade, fifth, and fourth grade; here, here, and here there were doors, and we sat in the forms, like that. It was a big building; of stone, did I tell you that? On Tanjung Street.
RM: And it is still there.
Mr. ROSIHAN: It is still there. I remember, number 47.54

Mrs. OEI: In the front, there was a map on the left, and the portrait of the [Dutch] Queen on the right.55

Professor SOEMARDJAN: Here — (He is again drawing a sketch for me.) Here is the school: classroom, classroom, classroom, classroom, and classroom. Here it is open: this is the first grade, second, third, fourth, fifth, sixth, seventh. We started here and went up to here. You could walk through here, and here were the classrooms. I went to the first grade here, and I finished here. Thus, it was very neatly organized. We all understood the system — you came from this room, and here there was the seventh grade. Here you go, the seventh grade. And there were forms, of course, and two of us in each form.56

School is remembered physically and accurately. It is recalled as regular, angular, and — more naturally even than a modern home — in numbers.

Mr. GESANG: I went to school for five years. It began when I was seven, and I finished it when I was — eight, nine, ten, eleven, twelve — yes, a little over twelve.57

Professor SOEMITRO: I passed my examination for the HBS [Hoogere
Burgerschool, a five-year high school], and I was number two, almost the best.\textsuperscript{58}

However curved the road they traveled, and from whatever part of the colony they might come, now, in the school, in the formations of the school benches, they faced forward—a little up, too, toward the teacher, the map, the portrait of the (Dutch) Queen, and the blackboard. The symmetry could not be doubted.

Mr. ALWIN: In the first grade, there were \textit{four parallel classes}—\textit{twenty-five students in each, one hundred students total. However, as we advanced, not all of us made it. In the second grade, there were only three parallel classes, in the third grade only two}!\textsuperscript{59}

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The space of school, by the force of its perspective and its forward looking, had the potential to expand endlessly—first into a schoolyard, then, a small step further on, into a sports field.

Mr. HARDYO: There were sports! Very fine sports. It was a Dutch school: good, a very good one. And there were very fine sports.\textsuperscript{60}

The students could play ball, run, and jump in the expanded school space, moved with and by the force of school and the time of school, according to school rules and schedule.\textsuperscript{61} This was a school-sport kind of joy, and it is—it cannot be but—recalled in a proper, neat, accurate, sportily school way, in the language of sport, or, actually, in fragments of it.

Mr. SUWARDI: Not really sports. Not too much of sports. You mean at home?

RM: But you played soccer as a boy?

Mr. SUWARDI: We played, yes, in some vacant place. But there was not any real direction to it.\textsuperscript{62}

Mr. ASRUL: We played soccer in school. Later, in high school, there was a real \textit{soccer craze}, and still later \textit{basketball}. We liked \textit{boxing}, also, but the equipment was too expensive. Girls liked \textit{handball}, for us boys it was \textit{voetbal}, soccer.\textsuperscript{63}
Mrs. SOELISTINA: There were special courts at school for everything, volleyball, basketball, there was a track-and-field course, an approach for long jump, a space for javelin, a cage for discus. Everything was there.64

In the colony, one can see more clearly why some social critics in the West feel so apprehensive about a sports field. Avital Ronell calls the thing “the playing fields,” and her allusion to “killing fields” is only thinly veiled.65 According to Walter Benjamin, similarly, “Kafka’s gestures of horror are well served by the glorious field for play (Spielraum) of which the catastrophe will know nothing.”66

Siegfried Kracauer, writing about Germany at the same time as the colonial sporting was happening in Indonesia, noted that “physical training expropriates people’s energy.”67 It may be the same thing to say that the young people in the colony (and then the same people, only much older, recalling it) overwhelmingly and eagerly accepted the expropriation as an opening of a new space for them, or—if one were to put it even more darkly—as a way of freedom.

RM: Only two Indonesian students were on the soccer team?
Mr. ALWIN: Only two Indonesians, correct. As you ask about it, in fact, I did not think it as anything strange; it was normal. Maybe, because we felt accepted, we felt accepted by the school and the team. I played soccer all the time and very well, so that even the Dutch boys were eager to play with me. I really liked sports, I really liked it. I was on the gymnastics team of my high school, HBS, as well.68

Professor SOEMITRO: I played defense, first in the AMS school and then in Madiun. We called our team SH, Setia Hati [Faithful Heart]. At fourteen I began with tennis, at sixteen or seventeen with track and field.
RM: Busy?
Professor SOEMITRO: There was that Dutch girl. She would come to see me!
RM: A Dutch girl?
Professor SOEMITRO: Everybody was making fun of me: “Hey, there she is again, your fee.” They called her fee; it is a Dutch word, you know, for some kind of a lofty spirit, like elf; sweet. “She is fated to you.” And she heard it, and she laughed.69
By the force of the new school’s perspective, through the schoolyard and the sports fields, ever wider space seemed to open, equally neat and gridlike, extremely playful—nothing in the whole colony seemed to be able to stand in the way of its expansion.

Mr. JUSUF: Sometimes, in the afternoon, we played soccer in the town square.

RM: Just Indonesians?

Mr. JUSUF: Just Indonesians, but in school it was mixed. And I began to play in a Dutch club, too.

RM: What was its name?

Mr. JUSUF: The field is still there, in Jakarta, on Cokroaminoto Street. It was called VIOS. V-I-O-S—[Voorwaarts Is Ons Streven (Forward Is Our Zeal)]

RM: You went on the road with them?

Mr. JUSUF: Yes, for a match. Around Batavia and as far east as Surabaya; also to Bandung.

RM: But what about your patriotism?

Mr. JUSUF: It was a part of it! I wanted to be better than them. I wanted most of all to be selected for the A-team. I even dreamed about playing in the World Cup. I wanted to be the Player of the Year. They were mostly Dutch on the team, of course; one was Chinese, and I was one of three Indonesians!70

It seems that too much already has been said about sports. However, the elderly Indonesians (and not only men as one might expect) kept coming back to sports, again and again as we talked, and this, I feel, has to be recorded in some proportion.

Mr. SOEDARPO: When I moved from my junior to senior high, there was an older fellow who began to coach me. Every day after school I had lunch, rested for a while, and did homework, but by four o’clock I went over to the courts. In 1939 I ran the hurdles. As matter of fact, some of my friends called me “Westerner” and names like that. But I just did not want to lose a fight.

RM: There were competitions?

Mr. SOEDARPO: There were quarterly races in school towns, in Yogyakarta and Surakarta, for instance. There were soccer, basketball,
and track-and-field contests. I was good in the hundred-meter sprint, and I was four times on my school team. In 1939, just when the war in Europe broke out, we were here in Jakarta at the big competition at Gambir Square, during the big annual fair.

RM: Aboe Bakar [Mr. Soedarpo’s classmate] told me that you used to have your own system of body control.

Mr. SOEDARPO: Rhythm. It was all a matter of rhythm. You had to get the feeling like pff, pff, pff — (Mr. Soedarpo got up from his desk and he showed me, while his two secretaries across the large office watched.)

RM: So, how was it? The war was coming, and you were doing sports?

Mr. SOEDARPO: It was not so simple. It was a mixture of several things. In 1936, in Yogyakarta, for instance, we had that Chinese boycott of the Japanese. You see, the Japanese owned one big store in Yogyakarta, Kofuji, and there we bought all the stuff for school, necessities like paper, pens, and all that. It was a good shop. There was also a section in the shop where they restrung our tennis racquets. And it was just the sort of catguts we needed. We thought they were extremely good at it.71

Gradually, in some towns and cities, there were separate schools established for different Indonesian ethnic communities—for the Chinese Indonesians most often. And here, in that “multicultural” mode, true colonial modernity seemed to be best at work. As whoever one might have been born back in one’s home and neighborhood, in the modern school, one became simply the one in the colony who had gotten so far.

Air Marshal DHANI: In our town, there was an HCS, Hollandsch Chineesche School [Dutch-Chinese school], besides a European grade school, another government Dutch-native grade school, and also one Christian and one private Dutch-native grade school. The Dutch-Chinese grade school was also private.

RM: How was it different?

Air Marshal DHANI: It was the same, modern; almost the same; no more different than, for instance, the Catholic school.72

Mrs. OEI: Because he was of Chinese origin, my husband went to a Dutch-Chinese school. But then he continued to the HBS, the Dutch five-year high school, with mainly Dutch students.73

* * *

The Classroom
An Indonesian word, *tjampur* (or *campur, tjampur baur*), meaning “mixing,” “mingling,” “blending,” (nowadays *campur kode*, “code switching,” and also “confusing”), appears frequently in the old people’s modern and colonial school recollections. It seems to be a word that often best expresses school togetherness, the sense of beauty (fissures of the world “glossed over by education,” as Nietzsche has it⁷⁴), or—darkly put again—that kind of freedom.

Mr. *HAMID*: I finished the AMS senior high in 1937.

RM: Were you already conscious at the time of being Indonesian?

Mr. *HAMID*: Sure. When I went to the senior high, among all the mostly Dutch classmates, note this, I felt like someone of Arab origin, like a Muslim, but like an Indonesian as well. As I advanced from grade to grade, I learned ever more that feeling of mixing and blending [*tjampur baur*] in the school. Of course, I was conscious of being Indonesian!

RM: You also attended a Christian school, right?

Mr. *HAMID*: Many Arab Indonesians at that time sent children to Catholic schools, because in Christian schools, especially, there was a separation of boys and girls. There was a Christian HBS senior high in our town, and there was no wrong mixing.⁷⁵

Mr. *JUSUF*: My elementary school was purely native. The one just higher up, the Dutch-native grade school was already mixed—Chinese, Eurasians, Dutch, and us, “the natives.”⁷⁶

Professor *SOEMITRO*: In my class in senior high, there were twenty-two students. Out of the twenty-two, about eight were native. The rest were Eurasians, Chinese, and full-blood Dutch.

RM: How many of the “full-blood” Dutch?

Professor *SOEMITRO*: Very few. Most were of mixed blood. One of them sat with me in the form. We sat in five rows.⁷⁷

There might be only one or two “sons (and daughters) of the land” in a classroom, in a school that stood in that student’s land, and yet the space and the bodies in that space, full of the foreign and very much made of the foreign, were built up, educated, formed, to feel mixed—or, put another way, perhaps, neutral.

Mr. *ALI*: This was ELS, the European grade school.

RM: How many students?
Mr. ALI: I think almost all were Dutch or Eurasians. In the end, in the seventh grade, I remember, there were about twenty-five Dutch pupils, including Eurasians.

RM: How many Indonesians?
Mr. ALI: One or two. No, wait a moment, three. Three natives made it to the final grade.78

RM: How many natives, like you?
Mrs. MIRIAM: I would have to look at the class portrait. I think we were the only Javanese—my brother, my sister, and me. And there were a few children from Menado [Sulawesi].

RM: Did you feel pushed aside?
Mrs. MIRIAM: No, not in class. In school I did not feel it at all.79

RM: You did not feel a difference?
Mr. PURBO: No, not at the time in school. It could not be.
RM: You liked to learn.
Mr. PURBO: Yes, I was very happy. I can still draw an exact plan of the school for you. There were just two Javanese in the class and four Chinese Indonesians. The rest were Dutch.80

RM: Were there many native students in the class?
Mr. ALWIN: Let me see—in the class of twenty-five, I think, three.
RM: It was a very small group, these Indonesians?
Mr. ALWIN: It was small, but we mixed in.
RM: Mixed in.81

These were young people who had already for some time been on the road and were still traveling.

RM: Was there a friendship with the Dutch classmates?
Mr. HAMID: No.
RM: But there was no animosity?
Mr. HAMID: No.
RM: It was a cool relationship?
Mr. HAMID: Normal.82

RM: Mostly Dutch students?
Mrs. TORAR: Almost all.
RM: But they behaved well to you?

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Mrs. TORAR: Yes, they behaved well. It might be because of the environment.  

RM: Was there some connection?  
Mr. EFENDI: Yes, student life. 

Mrs. OEI: I did not feel tension, strangely, not even pressure. Life in school was calm. Calm. Strangely, but I did not feel humiliated there. It was just normal, not much else.

Naturally, one may expect the youth, with their bodies close to, or in the middle of, puberty, to feel their school and to convey their memory of it very much in physical terms. This was a tropical colony, a warm and sensual land, not merely in tourist romantic lore. Also the vast majority of these schools, as a matter of the modern, were coeducational.

RM: Just girls?  
Mr. HOUTEIRO: Mixed. 

Mrs. MIRIAM: There should be no difference between boys and girls in school.

The old men and women, still amazingly graceful and intensely physical as they talked to me and as they moved their hands and eyes, recalled their youth’s school as cozily intimate and prettily warm.

Mr. HARDUYO: Was it intimate? Nice.

The people who had spent years together in the exclusive and crowded space of school, in school forms, remember themselves as klasgenoten, the Dutch word for “classmates.” That word, as neutral as it might be, appeared to stay with the people—sort of affectionately—till their old age. Only sometimes (as a purely modern word), it is translated into postcolonial English:

RM: Was he a friend?  
Mr. PEREIRA: We went to school together. We were—classmates.  
Classmates!

This is not to suggest that physical proximity was not mentioned in school recollections. Dancing—specifically “modern dancing,” twee aan twee, as it
is frequently named in Dutch, “as couples”—is very much recalled. That coming together of the two sexes was clearly a lasting experience—with its prescribed steps and moves, and smiles, something absorbing, fulfilling, and fitting into the world of school. Still, in the memories, it could make a school into a place to dance.

Mr. HAMID: I could not dance because I came from a strict Islamic family. But the others often danced. In the MULO junior high I still did not take part. Only in college did I begin to dance, too.90

Mrs. SOELISTINA: School started at seven in the morning, then came language classes, then mathematics, and so on. In the afternoon gymnastics or so, and in the end, at six or seven in the evening, there might be a les [lesson] that you did not have to take, like dancing.

RM: What dances?

Mrs. SOELISTINA: Modern, waltz, tango, and so on.

RM: There were Dutch boys, too?

Mrs. SOELISTINA: There were a few Dutch boys as well. I remember we danced to “The Blue Danube.” All the girls did. It was an education of the Dutch time.91

As the colonial period was coming to its end, in school and while dancing, the young people progressively and ever more absorbingly became—not exactly close but—“mixed”:

Mrs. MIRIAM: Yes, twee aan twee— that dancing was OK in school. Dutch boys, however, would rarely dance with us. And the Indonesian boys who were there were shy. They could not truly dance. Often I was sad. It was so difficult to dance with them. Some of them did dance, few of them did, but most of them just stood around.

RM: Why was that?

Mrs. MIRIAM: To do school work with us, it was OK; and to talk to us and so on. But to dance! Also, to ask a classmate for a date, it was out of the question.92

The dancing filled in, staked out, and explained much of the school space. For those who experienced the steps, the moves, and that way of the embrace, it staked out and explained the colony.
Mr. ALWIN: In Aceh [North Sumatra] there was very little dancing because it was a very traditional society.

RM: Islam?
Mr. ALWIN: Yes. Only after I got to Medan, big city, it became another matter, in the HBS five-year high school.

RM: There were dances?
Mr. ALWIN: Oh, yes!
RM: With girls?
Mr. ALWIN: Yes.
RM: With the Dutch girls, too?
Mr. ALWIN: Yes. There, suddenly, you did not have that feeling of difference.93

RM: What about dancing?
Mr. ROSIHAN: Yes, that’s it! We never had it in MULO, the junior high. We didn’t have it because it was Padang, West Sumatra; Islam and that sort of thing. In Yogyakarta, however, in senior high, we danced with an encouragement from the school principal.

RM: You danced in the school building?
Mr. ROSIHAN: In the school. Once a month, in the aula, where we also did our gymnastics. Once a month, we danced there.

RM: Teachers were present?
Mr. ROSIHAN: Teachers were present.
RM: They were dancing, too?
Mr. ROSIHAN: No. They would look, observe.
RM: Could one dance also with the Dutch?
Mr. ROSIHAN: Dutch, Chinese, all mixed.
RM: So you might dance with Dutch girls?
Mr. ROSIHAN: Oh, yes.
RM: Was there a piano?
Mr. ROSIHAN: We had a gramophone. The thing was, we started at seven, and we finished around ten. The principal announced that we were to go home. And do you know what he did? He called out our names, not the first name but the second name. He called “Anwar!” “Ja, Meneer” (Yes, sir). It meant that I was to accompany one of the girls who happened to live near where I lived. We took our bicycles and went.
RM: Might it be a Dutch girl?

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Mr. ROSIHAN: Javanese. It might have been a Dutch girl, if she were to live close to my place. But they all lived in the Dutch quarter of town.

RM: Did you ever accompany a Dutch girl?

Mr. ROSIHAN: Oh, no. Usually a Javanese girl, but sometimes from a noble family. Those lived around Pakualaman, a palace. The principal saw to it that the girls were properly brought home. You knocked on the door—(Mr. Rosihan knocked on the wide wooden arm of the sofa we were sitting on.) and there was a servant: “Thank you.” And your girl went inside.94

To set out on the road, one usually changes clothes. Shoes, first of all, were mentioned by the old Indonesians who talked to me. Putting on shoes was repeatedly recalled as the first move, an initiating gesture, on the road to school:

Mr. SOEDARPO: Our mother took care that we went to school in shoes. There is a Dutch word for that special kind of shoes, gympies [sports shoes, sneakers], and we wore those. However, we put them on only when very close to school, and we took them off instantly, after just a kilometer or so, on our way home. Later, sometimes, we wore Dutch leather shoes, if we could afford it.95

Mr. SUTIKNO: When I began to go to the ELS grade school, I wore shoes; I always wore shoes—going to school and coming back from school.96

Shoes were the road to school. Shoes, at the moment one stepped onto the modern road, measured all the significant distances in the colony.

Father MANGUNWIJAYA: We wore shoes to church and to school; not another time. When one was among the people who did not wear many clothes, it was clumsy to wear shoes. One had to wear shoes, of course, but one had to be careful, at the same time, not to distance oneself from the people too much. If one came to a poor quarter of a town or to a village while wearing shoes, people would give a certain look.97

Wearing shoes—perhaps because it had so much to do with directly touching the surface of the road and perhaps because it announced cars98—
is recalled as a momentous gesture, even more than, albeit of the same category, putting on modern clothes.

**Mr. ROESLAN:** For my MULO junior high I dressed the prescribed way—shorts, jacket buttoned up to the neck—but still just sandals, not yet shoes. It was 1920, and I still did not wear shoes. I did not have shoes. Only when I was about to enter the HBS senior high—almost all the students there were full-blood Dutch, not like in MULO, where there were mostly Eurasians—I became nervous. However, when the dancing lessons began at the HBS—my mother had understood what was happening—I was already wearing shoes.99

As in the biblical story, with their modern shoes and clothes on, the young people of the colony might look at themselves, and newly see what it means to be naked.

**Mrs. TRIMURTI:** When I was little, my father became an assistant district chief, and so we came to live in a village. Then I found out how many of the village children were still running around stark naked. Except when they went to school, that is.100

The nakedness, like progress and like fashion—or like the road surface and speed—became a momentous commonplace of modernity.

**Mr. PURBO:** My father was a teacher, and he already dressed in the Western way. He was very modern. He dressed like a European.

**RM:** What was it, jacket, trousers?

**Mr. PURBO:** Jacket, a *petji* —

*Petji*, or in the new spelling *peci* or *pici*, was a rimless cap usually of black velvet—a modern Islamic, and, by the 1920s, thanks to Sukarno in large part, nationalist mode of head wear. The name was derived from the Dutch *petje*, a diminutive for “cap” — in the Netherlands a cap worn mostly by students.

**Mr. PURBO:** — and he wore shoes, the European way.

**RM:** Was there a difference between how your father dressed and how, for instance, the Dutch principal did?
Mr. PURBO: Not at all.
RM: The same?
Mr. PURBO: Jacket buttoned up all the way, and tie. Father took real care not to be inferior. Because of my father I could go to school.101

Mr. ROSIHAN: At senior high we had to dress complete: jacket, tie, and all.
RM: It was expensive?
Mr. ROSIHAN: Expensive! It cost me one gulden fifty just for the laundry each month.102

RM: And you went to school on bicycle?
Mr. EFENDI: On bicycle, in jacket, even when it rained, and in the heat.103

Mr. ASRUL: Especially in college, all students dressed in nearly the same way—jackets, white trousers, shoes, and ties.104

Uniform became another commonplace, a catchword, or, better, password. Like the uniform shape of the classrooms, with the benches, blackboard, maps, and portraits, it became the sum of what colonial modernity had so far achieved. Like the benches, the blackboard, and the maps, and portraits on the wall, like the design of the road, the uniform fashion also aimed at the fullness, the abstract, and the pure—categorically so.

In the specially designated colonial space, and on some specially designated occasions, a special kind of school uniform, even, might be worn.105 In that highly charged space, even the origin, to use Henri Lefebvre’s words, might “fall to the level of folklore,”106 to be made into yet another modern colonial commonplace. Good students—to manifest the road to school and to the new, to categorize the road’s beginning and everything that had been left behind and off the road—might be “ethnic” and wear “costumes.”

Mrs. MASKUN: In the Kartini junior high, we were supposed to wear Javanese dress, sort of—a blouse of batik and a skirt.107

Professor SOEMARDJAN: At home we just wore shorts. We ran around half naked. It was normal. Of course, when I went to the Dutch school, I had to wear my batik—a kain [sarong], sordjan [long-sleeved jacket], and blangkon [headscarf]. The Javanese things, you know, Yogyakarta style.108

* * *

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As one moved toward and through the school, one’s body became flagrant by the way it was clothed. It was another feat of the power of the trivial and superficial. Like the wrong dress, trousers, shoes, tie askew, or like an uncomplete uniform, one’s body and, of course, one’s skin, might become unfitting.

RM: As a child, could you see any difference between your Dutch and Balinese teachers?
Princess MUTER: Of course I could. The Dutch were white, and the Balinese were brown.¹⁰⁹

RM: You made such a face now: like that you definitely did not like it.
Dr. ONG: I didn’t like it. I didn’t like it at all. The kids were big and white and —
RM: They were mostly white kids?
Dr. ONG: Yes, it was an elite school!
RM: They did not like you?
Dr. ONG: I don’t know. I don’t think so. But I didn’t like it. I didn’t like especially to go out of the classroom during recesses — into the yard.
RM: Were you afraid?
Dr. ONG: I was shy.
RM: What was so threatening?
Dr. ONG: I still don’t like to think about it very much. I suppose it was the big bodies. And I felt that they all could jump higher and run faster. I was so small and thin.¹¹⁰

This was not to be felt. Or, perhaps, this was what the school was about. One was to fight it — to get into a school uniform, for instance, to become schooled so that one’s body did not feel so awkwardly, even painfully, naked.

Mr. ROSIHAN: I remember one of my Dutch teachers, a young lady, when I was in the fourth grade. One morning during recess I was sitting in the schoolyard, and she was looking in my direction as she talked with another teacher. They were both looking at me, and I knew that they were talking about me. My lady teacher pointed to me. She was showing her colleague, also a Dutch woman — my legs. All the time I had been aware that they were talking about me, and I knew what they
were talking about. I had—you know, here, here, and here—there were sores on my legs, what do you call it? (Mr. Rosihan pulls up a leg of his trousers and points to a blister on his shin.)

RM: Oh, blisters.

Mr. ROSIHAN: Yes, they talked about it; that I had a kind of skin disease. “You!” (Mr. Rosihan says this suddenly and quite loudly, pointing his index finger straight at me.) It meant, “You are a dirty native!” or “You take your bath in the river and you defecate in it too, this is why you got this.” I can’t forget it; still, to this day. I thought: “God’s grace!” You see, I might have been privileged, but still I was an inlander, a native. Of course it happened because I took my bath in the river. Thus I contracted this. I had put some cream on it, you know, but the blisters were open. They were in several places, and the teachers discussed it. This I remember.

RM: Does it mean that the Dutch teacher never bathed in the river?

Mr. ROSIHAN: I don’t know. Oh, no; of course not.

RM: They had indoor bathrooms, and swimming pools?

Mr. ROSIHAN: Yeah, they had pools.111

Much of such memorable humiliation was brought on the small and thin, brown and river-bathing people of the land. Most exemplarily it happened in school, and thus—correctly and in the enlightened way—it was taken as that it had to be overcome, again by further schooling.112

Mrs. SOELISTINA: In the seventh grade I had a Eurasian teacher, and he liked me. When I came to school, for instance, in shoes that were not perfectly polished, he would say: een mooi vlag op een modderschuit, which means, “a nice flag on a muddy barge.” It was in Dutch.113

Professor Selo Soemardjan, in his adult life a private secretary of the Sultan of Yogyakarta, talked to me about kedjawén, Javanese philosophy and the art of life, when school entered in his reflections:

Professor SOEMARDJAN: There is something I should still tell you—one of the small things you said you want to hear. At home, when you were to pay homage to the elder people or to those socially higher up, you had to get down, to bow, to sit, or to crouch, to place your head

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lower than theirs, to make yourself as little and insignificant as you could. In school, to pay respect to your teachers, you had to stand up. Once I forgot when a Dutch teacher came in. (At this moment I managed to spill some of the tea from my cup that I was supposed to balance on my knees.) Oh, sorry. I still feel the effects of it, and I am eighty-two—it was a lady teacher, white and strong. Her name was Weterling, and she was very big. She told us: “You are not allowed to drink alcohol! Stay away from beer!” We didn’t know what alcohol was, at home. And: “Do not smoke!” This we knew. Once, because it was forbidden, I had a cigarette. A classmate saw me and reported it to the teacher. She called me up to the front of the class: “Did you smoke?” I said: “Yes.” “Lie down on the desk!” I lay down on her desk on my stomach, and she pak . . . pak, pak! Of course it was painful. I still feel it now. But it also helped me avoid smoking. I have never since smoked in my life. And, in fact, I cannot stand beer either. You ask me why? I don’t know, perhaps it is something I learned in the past.

RM: They never beat you at home?
Professor SOEMARDJAN: Sometimes. I was sometimes punished by my mother. But she did not do it with a stick.
RM: Aha.
Professor SOEMARDJAN: In this case, I was beaten with a stick. And that was different.115

CHANGING SOULS

The road to school began before the school age, before an outset of expectation, at a preschool moment—if there was anything like that still left in the colony.

Prince PUGER: Yes, it was voorschool [preschool]—to sing, to make little things, like the simplest embroidery, to put your toys in order, to play like that.116

Mr. SUDARMONO: First, I went to a kindergarten; we called it voorklas [preclass], in Dutch.117

Dr. ONG: It all started in kindergarten.118

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The essentials of “all this”—the experience of school, and the colonial modernity through the school—were often implanted at the edges of memory.

RM: It had to be a shock for such a little boy.
Professor SOEMITRO: For my family, perhaps. But for me? I was no more than five years old.¹¹⁹

Mr. PURBO: It seemed no problem, the early grades—as if without knowing it.¹²⁰

The edges of memory, in the colony, might be around the age of four.

Prince PUGER: This had become customary among the better-off parents in my childhood: when we reached the age of four, we were supposed to move to a Dutch place. It was conceived as a sort of a bridge to the West. I went to the Dutch Resink family. We had to go when we were four, because at the age of five, we were to enter the preschool.

RM: Difficult?
Prince PUGER: Oh, because it happened so early, it did not seem unusual.
RM: You spoke Javanese, I mean, with the Resinks’ servants?
Prince PUGER: Yes, Javanese.
RM: With the Resinks it was Dutch?
Prince PUGER: Yes, and also with my brothers, who were sent there, too. I had to speak Dutch with them. If we slipped into Javanese, Mrs. Resink got angry. Because we were there to learn.
RM: What might a child feel about it—this moving from language to language?
Prince PUGER: Not much, because it happened every day and from the age of four. I just might think, “Well, it is Dutch, what we are learning.” Mrs. Resink hired a person, a juffrouw [miss], to watch over us.
RM: Did not you whisper in Javanese among the brothers?
Prince PUGER: Oh, yes! But if she heard us, she would become upset.
RM: But you whispered.
Prince PUGER: Yes. At the beginning.
RM: Aha, so later, also when you whispered, you whispered in Dutch?
Prince PUGER: Yes.¹²¹

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Even in a classroom, in the back of it, one might still imagine some noise, echoes, words or fragments of words from (further) behind, from home, of mother tongues—unless even a mother already spoke Dutch at home.

Mr. KARTONO: My school was known for excellent teaching of Dutch.
RM: What did you speak at home?
Mr. KARTONO: My parents could speak only Javanese.122

Like one’s upper body, hands and fingers, for table manners, one’s vocal cords, mouth, tongue, and teeth were trained to stretch and relax, to construct sentences, to make one thus think and define oneself as becoming human—“thoroughly kneaded and pliant but also formed.”123

RM: You spoke Dutch to both your Javanese parents? Did not your mother, kindly, let you speak Javanese—to her, at least, once in a while?
Mr. SUTIKNO: No. I had to speak Dutch with both of them. When I was four, they did not tell me: “You will go to Dutch school, and so you have to speak good Dutch.” I did not know at the time that this was a condition and that there were those Dutch admission examinations.
RM: Don’t you think it changed your relation to your father and your mother?
Mr. SUTIKNO: No, not at all.
RM: It was like before?
Mr. SUTIKNO: As before. As far as I remember.
RM: You called your mother moeder [in Dutch]?
Mr. SUTIKNO: When I was at a loss with my Dutch, I could ask a question in Javanese, and my parents would answer me in Dutch.124

There are stories of fathers and mothers in their best clothes but not speaking Dutch, taking their child to the admission test at school and doing everything they could to remain mute, letting their already more advanced offspring speak.125

RM: Your father and your mother, they talked Dutch to each other?
Mr. PURBO: Dutch. Because it was their strategy to get me to a good
school. They tried to teach me Dutch as my mother tongue, not as a second language. When my father brought me to the ELS grade school, the first question we were asked by the principal was: “What is this child’s language at home?” My father answered: “Dutch,” and the second question was: “What language does the child speak with his mother?” And my father answered: “Dutch.” I was accepted.126

Mr. SUDARMONO: At home we spoke Dutch, because I was to go to a Dutch school. So we had to speak Dutch at home.

RM: Both your parents could speak Dutch?

Mr. SUDARMONO: My father could. My mother was learning. She could write a little but she could not speak, almost not at all.127

Mr. SEKO: My mother could not speak Dutch, almost not at all. She tried to sail around it. She might say “opnein” or something like that that sounded Dutch but did not mean anything. We children sometimes would speak Dutch in front of her—it was like a secret language among us. With father we spoke Dutch.128

Only when something clicked really wrong, “between cracks of the modern,”129 the language of the almost forgotten, the off-school, the almost incomprehensible (what should not be called) mother tongue might resound for a moment:

Mr. ALWIN: My parents engineered it so that it would be impossible for me to speak at home anything other than Dutch. Only very rarely, like when my mother got really angry, could I hear her say something in what I knew was Minangkabau [a language of West Sumatra, the mother’s birthplace].

RM: And after she calmed down?

Mr. ALWIN: Back to Dutch.130

The modern, school language, correct, progressive, an awesome thing, mattered especially, of course, as it attached itself to the other correct, progressive, and awesome things of the colony. Modernity was named, and made really what it was by the naming. Modern people of the colony were named and made really what they now were—candidates, students, degree holders, or dropouts. No name—no proof to the contrary, as they should
know: “No proof can possibly exist determining the truth or falsity of the
undecidable statement in the language of the system within which the state-
ment was formulated.”

In the new language and in its spirit, or grammar, people were entered,
first of all, into school books—alphabetically, and, thus, in that new way,
they were entered into books of life.

RM: When were you born?
Mr. HAMID: In 1910. On the books, however, you will find 1912. If I were
born in 1910, I would not be accepted to the Dutch school by the time
we could afford it. I would be off beat again. To get me to school, my
father said that 1912 was my birth year. So, this is my curriculum vitae,
and in all my degrees and other documents, it is 1912.

Correctly written in, the people thus entered might indeed feel as if they
belonged to an awesomely impressive world or, more exactly, universe.

RM: So, you did not suffer by that inlander feeling?
Professor KOENTJARANINGRAT: Actually not. I was being educated
before I began with anything else—initially, in Dutch.

Even the language itself, Dutch, overwhelming the speaking at home,
corrected in school, by its mythical origin elsewhere and by its complete
spirit (its grammar), appeared universal.

Mrs. MIRIAM: After Dutch came other languages. Greek was less difficult
for me than Latin; would you believe it? Reading Tacitus, especially,
it was for me like mathematics. Every word had an exact meaning,
and you had to put the only correct Dutch word in place of it. Tacitus
especially was a real torture for me. And besides, I still had a Javanese
accent!

There did not seem to be much time or space to think—especially for those
who wished to think a lot—about languages or universes perhaps lost.

Mr. HAMID: In AMS senior high, it was called Western-Classical AMS, we
learned Dutch, Latin, English, French, and German.
Mr. SEDA: In Dutch schools, we had to learn four modern languages:
Dutch, English, German, and French.
RM: To read?
Mr. SEDA: In HBS five-year high you had to learn to write it as well, all
four of them. Only in Latin I did not make it. I just could not.136

There was an ultimate modern, abstract, and suggestively universal
quality to the school space, and to school language first of all. There was
a fullness and, as in all good technologies, solid backup built into the sys-
tem—in case a glitch might happen in the main program, or for the use of
those in the colony who had been as yet inadequately trained or were other-
wise still unfit to join in fully. Supporting, fail-safe auxiliary programs had
been developed, through the school space and beyond, and on the school
drive. The backup that was most used was a language called Malay.

_Dienst Maleis_, “service Malay,”137 it was indeed called, by the same Dutch
adjective as the _dienst_ (service) houses and the _dienst_ (service) cars (or like
dienstmeisjes and dienstknechts for the household servants). It was not a lan-
guage “awash in ‘realities’” more than Dutch; it was not vernacular versus
classical.138 Neither did Malay as it related to Dutch fit the linguistic tru-
ism that “all languages are equal.” It grew out of a colonial principle that
languages (like the students of the various ethnic “mixing” in a classroom)
ideally should be not translatable but complementary.139

For centuries, Malay had been a language spoken in an area in and around
the East Coast ports of Sumatra and the Malay peninsula. As modern com-
merce grew, and as the colony developed, however, Malay, as a thin veil
(a plastic wrapping rather) had been thrown over the other languages and
cultures of the Indonesian archipelago. It became all-archipelago—not as
an outgrowth of some ancient tree of languages, of something beyond or
before, but as something perfectly all-colonial.140 The essential principle of
learning the service language was that students were not supposed to learn
it at home but in school—grammarized, dictionarized, ordered—and that
by the learning, they were not to become better native speakers but better
service people: _taalambtenaren_, as it was called in Dutch, the modern land’s
“language officials.”

RM: There was Javanese around the house and then Dutch in your school.
What about Malay?
Father MANGUNWIJAYA: Malay was coming. In the seventh grade, we got the first opportunity to learn Malay. But it was still merely optional, after all the other classes, at two in the afternoon. I forgot who taught it, because Malay was not very popular among the students. Dutch was.

RM: Even among the Indonesian students?
Father MANGUNWIJAYA: Yes.
RM: Why?
Father MANGUNWIJAYA: Because Malay was the language of the low-level offices and, except that, of the street. The hawkers used it, and other street people. It was inferior.
RM: Do you recall when you heard Malay for the first time?
Father MANGUNWIJAYA: I think I heard it for the first time, really, at two o’clock in the afternoon, during those after-class lessons.
RM: But what about before, in the market?
Father MANGUNWIJAYA: On the street, I spoke mostly Javanese. It was a small town and there were not many strangers. And later, in school, the mood was not very favorable to Malay lessons. At two o’clock in the afternoon we all wanted to play, fly kites, go to the river—and we were supposed to study Malay! I went largely because my father ordered me: “You have to go to the Malay class!”

I may be getting a little ahead of myself, but I think it should be noted here that Father Mangunwijaya after 1945 became one of the most celebrated writers in Indonesian, which is slightly modified—grammarized, dictionarized, ordered, schooled, and nationalized—Malay.

Air Marshal DHANI: In school, to friends, we talked in Javanese, but as we advanced, it was more and more in Dutch. I did not understand Indonesian language almost at all. Almost not at all. Indonesian language was then called Maleis.

Maleis is in Dutch; in Malay or Indonesian it would be Melajoe or Melayu.

RM: You could not speak it?
Air Marshal DHANI: No, and I did not understand it. We knew Javanese, low, medium, and high, all that we knew. And then Dutch.
This was changing as the colony moved forward, through, and to its end. The Malay grammars and dictionaries (Malay-Dutch dictionaries almost exclusively) became increasingly available — as schoolbooks.

RM: Teachers taught in Javanese in your school?
Mr. SARLI: Yes, because it was the lowest, people’s, three-year school. But there was already a little of Malay.143

RM: You were not taught Dutch at all?
Mr. PEREIRA: No, at that low level school. Just a little of Malay.144

Mr. GESANG: I was child number five and so I went only to a people’s school: three years, no more. We did not learn any language; all was in Javanese.
RM: No Malay?
Mr. GESANG: Yes, in fact, a little. Today it is Indonesian.145

In the first years of the twentieth century, “standard Malay” was ushered into the modern colonial official existence. In 1908, a government publishing house was founded with a dual, Dutch-Malay, name and mission — Volkslectuur (People’s Reading)-Balai Poestaka (House of Books). Books useful for modern readers were being published from that point and till the end of the colonial era,146 some explicitly in the form of textbooks, others of a textbook spirit. Libraries in many places through the colony, and also circulating libraries, were established.147

Mr. ALI: In our town, we had a bibliotheek.
RM: Balai Poestaka?
Mr. ALI: Yes, it was a wonderful library.
RM: Malay books, too?
Mr. ALI: Most of the books were in Dutch. There might have been some books in Malay. I liked Karl May, Winnetou,148 and Dutch novels, books like that.
RM: Dutch books?
Mr. ALI: There was not much choice. Every week I finished one book.
RM: Everybody could go there?
Mr. ALI: All of my schoolmates, yes.149
As colonialism matured and aged, through the 1920s and 1930s, increasingly good care was being taken of service Malay. Even affection and warmth were injected into the working of this language as a part of contemporary life—children’s books, calendars, and novels were published in Malay by the Dutch government publishing house, in growing numbers. Much of the care, of course, had to be applied toward making the Malay as dissimilar as possible to how the hawkers cried: impure, messy, not belonging to the classroom, street language dangerous to the colonial modern, foreign to it, what became often to be called “Chinese Malay” to make the point.150

RM: You were born to Sikka [language of Flores]?
Mrs. HOUTEIRO: Yes.
RM: Then you had to learn Dutch?
Mrs. HOUTEIRO: In school, Malay. And after three years of Malay we got Dutch.
RM: How did you like it?
Mrs. HOUTEIRO: I was happy. We learned Dutch from Malay. Still today, I sometimes slip from Malay [meaning Indonesian] to Dutch. And then right up I am embarrassed; as if I did not have my own language. When I get excited, I sometimes become embarrassed like that. My friends laugh. But for them it is also like that—except that they think that it is nothing strange, that it is normal.151

The modern school suggested a wholesome space, a veritable “metaphysical fantasy of completion,”152 in multiple, complementary languages, and as rich as the immense repertoire of the Western civilization that had been placed at its disposal. The modern and colonial school offered a texture as dense and as complex as any correct textbook could withstand. And this became the quality of the textbooks—like the grids of all modern urban planning and building, the schoolbooks and the power in them could endlessly expand.153

Mrs. MIRIAM: We had also kunstgeschiedenis, history of art, and there we learned about various styles—Doric and Ionic in Greece, and all the other styles there were. We had to know all the details about them, and then, of course, we learned about the Gothic period, the Renaissance and so on. Thus I was brought up on those things and, because of it, I

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also became interested in history and, very much, you see, the history of the East. One of my heroes was Alexander the Great, because he had moved on to the East and because he tried to bridge both cultures, Eastern and Western. And also, I became interested in Persia and the Persian people, because I learned about the Persian wars against the Greeks; and the Persians, they were so sophisticated that even Alexander the Great thought of them highly! And later, I became very interested in the American Indians, in Maya culture.154

A limitless (and well-networked) universe was being learned in school.

Mr. SOEDARPO: We knew that, again and again, we would be tested in Dutch. Incessantly. To be good in Dutch, we had to read Dutch. We had to read the Dutch literature. Then we had other, required or optional, languages. Thus you had to read at least a couple of German and French books. For example, I improved my grade in German by reading that book—I cannot recall the name at the moment—but I got an idea of what life in Germany was like at that time. We got that kind of understanding. And we had to read The Thousand and One Nights, in Dutch. We had to read it—a part of it. And Don Quixote and that stuff. All this was a part of that world, of that must reading.155

The people in the colony were schooled, like good readers, to be absorbed.

Mr. SEDA: Since my youth, I liked to read books on philosophy. I liked Kierkegaard.

RM: Why?

Mr. SEDA: His heroism. I read Thomas Aquinas as well. I read about social evolution, Charles Darwin. I read detective stories, like Father Brown. I have read The Revolt of the Masses—who wrote it? Ortega, right? At one time I liked Schiller very much, too. Thomas Aquinas we read in German.156

Professor SOEMITRO: I read Dutch—Roland Holst, the socialist, and Eddy du Perron’s Het Land van Herkomst [Country of Origin]. Through this book I got to read Malraux. I started to read consciously when I was about fifteen. I have always been attracted to French literature, Cyrano de Bergerac, early on—here is a man who is incorruptible! When I was
in high school I also read Maria Rilke, an Austrian, and Schiller, and some Goethe. It was in 1935 or 1936. You see, I was very continental in my taste. Not so much Anglo-Saxon; rather French-German, that’s for sure.157

The colony was cultivated, well cultivated, meaning extremely cultivated. The world given to the students in the colony was wholesome, rich, bright, and almost fully imported from the outside.

RM: You learned about the world.
Mr. HARDJO: Yes, about Europe: cold countries, snow, and many other things. Like about Wilhelmus van Nassau, and Egmont.158

Mrs. POLITON: I knew much more about the history of the Netherlands than about the history of Indonesia, of course.
RM: You did not think it bizarre?
Mrs. POLITON: It seemed normal, because we lived in these circles.159

Mr. SOEMARTONO: Yes, we learned about the tiniest rivers in Holland, they made us memorize them all: in this district, this little river, in that district, that little river.160

Prince PUGER: We learned a lot, like, you had to hear it already, about all the railway stations between Amsterdam and the Hague.
RM: Did not this feel very strange?
Prince PUGER: We did not have that introspection at the time.161

Mr. OYE: Then, there was aardrijkskunde [geography]. We learned a little about where Jakarta is and where Semarang is: “It is on Java.” But as for the Netherlands, we learned everything — there are no mountains like here, so we learned the names of rivers.162

Besides, or rather above this, the students learned “patriotic history.”

Father MANGUNWIJAYA: Dutch was subject number one. My father taught geography and history. But it was left to the Dutch teachers always to teach vaderlandse geschiedenis [fatherland history]. This was Dutch and Dutch-imperial history, and it was very interesting. I loved it. And I loved geography, too, because wherever I might wish to go, my fantasy would take me there.163

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The magic of the colonial classroom was, as I often heard from the old people, that one might feel safe as long as one got oneself absorbed. There was singing in the schools. *Kun je nog zingen, zing dan mee! (Can You Sing, Then Sing with Me!)* — it was the most popular songbook through the late colonial time.164

RM: You still remember?
Mr. USMAN: Of course I do. (*Mr. Usman is singing.*) *Silent Night, Holy Night,* of course, I still remember it. *We sang it all the time.*165

Mrs. DAMAIS: Yes, we sang *Dutch songs* in school. We had the book, *Zing dan mee!* It was large, like that. (*Mrs. Damais shows me.*) When we were in school, we had to sing. I still sometimes do.166

It is, of course, difficult to debate singing. One has to listen.

Mr. SEKO: The teacher played piano and mandolin. He was a Jew.
Mrs. POLITON: German.
Mr. SEKO: Maybe. He was from somewhere close to Holland.167

Mrs. TOLANG: We still meet [with classmates]. And we sing the songs. (*Mrs. Tolang sings a Dutch song that I do not know. She points to her heart as she sings and then she laughs.*) It is still there. This was what we did.

We learned it in school. It is funny, but the Dutch songs are so full of energy. Just one more? (*Mrs. Tolang sings another Dutch song that I do not know.*) Which one is this? “______ en de Hollanders, Oranje”?
RM: (*I am lamely pretending.*) Yes, yes.
Mrs. TOLANG: You forgot! Or this: *Na na na na na* — 168

Like everything in modern school, music that was learned progressed — in its harmonies, with the school syllabus, toward the more accomplished, increasingly convincing.

Mr. SOEDARMONO: We had a school orchestra.
RM: What kind of?
Mr. SOEDARMONO: Chamber music. We began with Mozart, Tchaikovsky; then Bach, Debussy, and also *pop* — Cole Porter. Each Saturday there were singing lessons, but not from music at first. Later we learned to read music. And then *akkoords* [chords], *quintakkoord,*
sextakkoord, septakkoord, intonation, tempo, and harmony, second voice, third voice— it was a Dutch-native grade school. After this, we got a school choir; we learned it, and it was beautiful. What trio was, when you had to go here with your voice and then there; it had to be this note and not that one. I do not know why, but it came completely naturally to me: there was a tonic and there was a dominant. It was so attractive. I began to play guitar.

RM: And sing to it?

Mr. SOEDARMONO: Yes, sing, too. My older sister was two years ahead of me, and she also played guitar. We went to the same school, and when there was a celebration we played on stage. 169

It was that same moment of celebration as in every school in the world.

RM: Dutch songs?

Mr. SOEDARMONO: Yes, of course, Dutch songs.

RM: Javanese songs, too?

Mr. SOEDARMONO: In this school, yes. Because they taught Javanese in that school, too—children’s songs. 170

Through the absorption, and the singing, a dwelling space was being built for the Indonesians, to last for their whole life or, at least, for a generation. Martin Heidegger’s contention that “language is the ‘house of Being’” certainly found its validation here. 171 Siegfried Kracauer’s descriptions of the modern hotel lobby—abstract and universal—also fit quite well the space carved out by the modern school, and especially in the colony: “the perpetually untenable middle ground between the natural and supernatural [or perhaps rather ‘surreal’],” the ground that “displaces people . . . to a place where they would encounter the void only if they were more than just reference points, the ground, the lobby, the school, powerful and irresistible because it ‘does not refer beyond itself.’” 172

 Discipline, in school memories, is a word often repeated, and most often warmly so. Even when it comes to recalling true hardship, discipline is invoked—related to discipline, the hardship becomes a mode of a positive new order still coming.
Mr. SUWARDI: Strong! There used to be discipline in the school of the past, Mr. Rudolf.
RM: There was physical punishment?
Mr. SUWARDI: Oh no, no, no. Not in my case. The most harsh physical punishment was to make you stand in front of the class till the two-o’clock bell, just that. I had high regard for the Dutch discipline because it meant a good education.
RM: So you were never slapped?
Mr. SUWARDI: No, just made to stand there.173
RM: What did you think about the Dutch? You knew well the refined Javanese culture. Would not you see the Westerners as—uncouth?
Mr. HARDJONEGORO: I learned to respect the Dutch discipline.
RM: How did you learn it?
Mr. HARDJONEGORO: In school. Their discipline of knowledge.
RM: So it began at school?
Mr. HARDJONEGORO: Yes. But also later, my professeurs, like Hans—,
Professor Beerling, like Bernard Campers, like Professor—I hold them all in high esteem—because of the discipline of their scholarship, of their looking at things. When you take the batik and the daggers I made, you can see how I looked back when I was working on them. My work is clean and precise. Things like that. Ask where you wish—mine is the cleanest work, and I think this comes from that time.

Out of the discipline grows Mr. Hardjonegoro’s—the Rimbaudian, the Sartrean, the Lacanian—“Je est un autre.”174

RM: But why not Javanese discipline?
Mr. HARDJONEGORO: In some ways why not? But the Javanese are rather about dreaming, and there is too much feeling in them. I was lucky to come to know Dutch discipline.175

Mr. NARYO: Nobody can deny it: in school during the Dutch time there was discipline. Quality was high because the teacher paid attention. No teacher would just leave his classroom during the school hours. If I wanted something, I had to raise my hand. Today, the pupils——
JAN: But even before the Dutch even came, when people learned to be puppeteers, for example, there was also discipline?
Mr. NARYO: Before the Dutch came? What do I know? I know nothing. I began in the Dutch time — and I know that today there is little discipline. In the Dutch time, there was discipline; for a puppeteer and for everybody.176

RM: Dutch discipline?

Air Marshal DHANI: Yes. But it was something, if I may say so, like learning to fly. We were disciplined by the Dutch to read. Sometimes, they even ordered us to come back in the evening. There were lessons — we could ask, however not yet to seek directly for ourselves. This was what was meant by discipline. In junior high it became a little more free, not very free, but a little more free. In the AMS senior high, teachers could already be asked what was going on, for instance on the outside, in the history class: what was the cause of World War I? Things were becoming more alive, they could be analyzed. So when someone says today that the Indonesians were taught only what had been chewed up first by the Dutch, it makes me uncomfortable. In fact, the Dutch taught me how to analyze; it began in senior high.177

That school-slash-universal discipline, that learning to fly, progressively, gradually, as the school space and time expanded, was to become a way of being for all.

RM: Your father was?

Mr. DARIF: A small merchant, at the roadside. A little more than a hawker.

RM: Aha, and still he wanted you to go to school?

Mr. DARIF: So that I would become a [real] man.

RM: The school was expensive?

Mr. DARIF: Yes. But my father managed to pay it. So that I would become a [real] man.

RM: You said that there were also “progressive” teachers among the Dutch in your school.

Mr. DARIF: Good and progressive.

RM: How were they progressive and good in class?

Mr. DARIF: They said: “You must study well, so that tomorrow you can become [real] men. This is the way, they said, to become free — to become [real] men.”178
The act of being in school as an act of being—and the act of keeping oneself in school and in school ways as an act of growing up and of progressing—was a measurable, quantifiable ritual engendered by perpetual testing:

The very structure of testing tends to overtake the certainty that it establishes.\textsuperscript{179}

The rush for further education surpasses the desire for knowledge . . . so the system protects itself against disintegration.\textsuperscript{180}

One becomes “prepared for the test, even reduced to the test, to the degree that it is an extension of the cognitive horizon.”\textsuperscript{181} The time and space of testing becomes the time and space of being.

Mrs. dAMAIS: Yes, I never remained sitting in one class for more than one year. And each time when I was about to move up, there was testing. After seven years, at the end of the seventh grade, to get to a higher school there was testing, an examination, for either HBS or MULO. And then as you came to HBS, there was an entrance examination. In public school, in every school. We lived in a small town, and so we had to go to the residency capital for testing.\textsuperscript{182} You had to have a certification from your school—the Indonesians like the Dutch. In this, we were all the same: we had to get a certificate. A full certificate.\textsuperscript{183}

The way of being the best became curricular. The higher one might get on the school scale, the freer the discipline, the more school-complex the time and space of being became.\textsuperscript{184} The more they—the time, space, and being—became able to feed on themselves. Especially in the colony, where schools shone especially bright in the less school, more twilight landscape, curricular came close to the absolute—the best of the students might aspire to become teachers.

Mr. HARDJO: My teacher told me: “You do not need to become a servant. Go to the kweekschool [normal school]. Become a teacher!”\textsuperscript{185}

School was that kind of progress that found all the necessary qualities of growth contained in itself. One had to labor hard to succeed—to become ever more of a student:
Mr. DAINO: Actually, in all the excitement, I felt *minder* [inferior]. I felt like that since the grade school—
RM: Because of school?
Mr. DAINO: Yes, because of school. And as I moved up, the feeling developed. It grew. 186

SCHOOL CLUBS AND PRISON CAMPS

Like the schoolyards and the sports fields, there were debate clubs attached to, and expanding, the school space even more, throughout the whole colony. 187

Mrs. MIRIAM: We did not have only dancing. We also had a debate club, and Koko [Mrs. Miriam’s brother] was a member. 188

Mr. SOEDARPO: Batavia-Jakarta at that time was a place where you had things to do. There were new things to learn. We went to debate clubs and we had discussions. 189

Debate clubs, intramural as well as extramural, were exemplary of school space. They highlighted and purified the school-space values. Discipline and ambition, as well as testing, manners, and a sense of mission, of being on the road, could not be pronounced as well in any other part of the school and, by extension, of the colony. In the purest school sense, there could also be freedom (or liberty).

Professor SOEMITRO: I went to the Gymnasium Willem III five-year high.
RM: So again, most of your classmates were Dutch?
Professor SOEMITRO: Some Chinese, some Eurasians, and very few Indonesians, yes.
RM: Did you feel—
Professor SOEMITRO: No! Nobody called me *inlander* or anything like that.

At the time, Mr. Soemitro says, came the famous trial of Sukarno, in 1930, after the Dutch authorities arrested the young and increasingly popular nationalist leader for the first time.
Professor SOEMITRO: “Oh,” one Dutch classmate stood up in the club one evening, “he is a rabble-rouser, opstandig [rebellious].” And I said: “No, he is not. He is fighting for his people.” It was what I said. Sukarno was my first debating theme. “Well,” they said, “but most of your leaders support our state, the princes and so on. They are not ungrateful, and certainly they are not rebels.” And I said: “You bought them, through your commerce.” I had already learned by then about imperialism, as I started reading history in school. So I got them.

RM: The discussion happened in school? Were there Dutch teachers present?

Professor SOEMITRO: In school, in the debate club. And the teachers were there too!190

Professor Soemirto later, among other things, served on the Indonesian Republic delegation to the United Nations in 1947 and was a minister of trade and the economy several times in the 1950s, during President Sukarno’s time. When I spoke to him, he was a top economic advisor to President General Suharto.

Mr. Hamid, of the same age as Professor Soemirto, had been a prominent leader of the nationalist youth before and during the Second World War and later also one of Sukarno’s ministers; he represented Arab Indonesians specifically.

RM: So you began with politics at an early age.

Mr. HAMID: Yes, in the debate club of my AMS senior high.

RM: What were you debating, do you still remember?

Mr. HAMID: Oh, I remember it very well. I was regarded as an extremist. “Hamid is wild,” they said. “During the meetings, he really dares the Dutch.” Only then, in fact, did I realize that I was like this. When I debated I felt the heat of debating, “Hamid goes too far,” they said. And there was a teacher there, his name was ______

RM: He was present at the debating group?

Mr. HAMID: He was there, and he let us talk about politics; whatever we wished. He was assigned by the principal to supervise the club. But he was very progressive, and he gave us full freedom.191

RM: Did you meet often?

Mr. ALI: Once a month.
RM: And the club was in school?
Mr. ALI: Yes.192

Mr. ASRUL: When I was still in grade school, I remember, children
sometimes said very extreme things, and the teacher, full-blood Dutch,
did not cut them off.193

Like an eager and curious student, the debate clubs made the school space
glow.

Mr. ROESLAN: It was 1933. There was the Great Depression in Europe and
also here, and there was a mutiny of the Dutch and Indonesian sailors
on the Dutch war ship, Zeven Provinciën. The principal of school,
Dr. S____ came to our class. We had just had physics. The principal
asked the teacher to wait, and he made an announcement: “Students,
listen to this: The cruiser has just been bombed near Bengkulu [South
Sumatra], and all the mutineers surrendered.” One of the Dutch girls,
Pauline, I knew her well, she was a sweet child, jumped up: “Hurrah,
hurrah, hurrah,” she was so happy. The principal, however, became
quite angry: “You should not shout hurrah, hurrah! They were not
simply mutineers. They were desperate men demanding a better chance
to live. Imagine, officers’ salaries were cut by 5 percent and sailors’ by
25 percent. You must understand, this is not fair!” “It was not simply a
mutiny,” the principal said. I was startled.194

For most — for all, indeed, so well educated the colony wished to be — the
idea of politics and power might have arisen at home, but it was articulated,
it materialized (this was the dynamics), out of the sublimity of the school.
Every idea of change, even the most radical one, if comprehensible, was as
if it first were written on the blackboard.

RM: You heard about the Indonesian Youth Oath of 1928?
Mr. THEODORUS: Yes, we had already learned about it in our volksschool,
but in a secret way. We learned that the youth will make Indonesia free
and that the government would pass from the Dutch to them.195

RM: The secret was shared among the pupils.
Mr. THEODORUS: Yes, it went from child to child. It was not taught in
school in an open way.

RM: Did you know some names of the nationalist leaders?

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Mr. THEODORUS: Just a few. Nothing was clear to us yet. All the names came to us in a secret way. Mostly we overheard our teachers.

Mr. EFENDI: I have a story to tell you. When I entered the TH [Technische Hoogeschool, the Technical Institute in Bandung, West Java, one college, of four existing, in the colony] — Sukarno had already graduated from this school some years earlier, and he became a political person. He was giving all those speeches — that Indonesia would become free. And yet, there were still several of his drawings on display on the wall in the aula of the school, as examples for us, the other students, of how to draw a machine part, and, I think, a bridge. In 1930 he was put in jail, released, arrested again, and sent to exile, in Banda, was it not?

RM: Flores.

Mr. EFENDI: Yes. In the Technische Hoogeschool, the student senate would talk about it. They knew that Sukarno was in exile and that he was against the government. Yet they did not think it right that the drawings be taken from the wall. He was a rebel, but you could see in his drawings —

RM: That he was brilliant?

Mr. EFENDI: — and an alumnus of the school.

RM: That tolerance?

Mr. EFENDI: And after 1945, he became our president.

There were so-called Kartini schools in the colony since the 1910s, bearing the name of a young Javanese woman, a daughter of a regent, who died in 1903, a pioneer of indigenous, and especially women’s, education. Kartini’s birthday, April 21, is still celebrated as a national holiday in Indonesia. On her merits as an educator, she is often seen as the mother of the nation.

RM: There were also Dutch teachers in your Kartini school?

Mrs. SOERONO: The principal of the school was a Dutch lady, and there were four other Dutch teachers, I think.

RM: But there were also Indonesian teachers in the school?

Mrs. SOERONO: There were some.

Mrs. MASKUN: I went to a Kartini school.

RM: What did you learn there?
Mrs. MASKUN: Dutch, Indonesian— it was called Malay at the time—
Javanese, counting, singing—
RM: Teachers were Javanese?
Mrs. MASKUN: All were Javanese, but the principal of the school was a
Dutch lady.
RM: How many years was the Kartini school?
Mrs. MASKUN: I went there for two years. I could not stay longer. My parents asked me to help at home. My mother got sick.199

Mrs. HARTINI: In my Kartini school in Madiun all the teachers were
Dutch. Well, there were two, I think, or three Indonesian teachers, but they were perfectly fluent in Dutch. All our teachers spoke Dutch, all the time.
RM: Did you hear much about Kartini there?
Mrs. HARTINI: Yes, of course. It was in her spirit that we learned Javanese; and batiking. We also learned Javanese script— ha na tja ra ka; and gamelan music and shadow-puppet theater. There were textbooks for all this.
RM: Textbooks?
Mrs. HARTINI: Textbooks.
RM: There were no Dutch students in the Kartini school?
Mrs. HARTINI: Oh, many.
RM: Why would a Dutch girl want to go to a Kartini school?
Mrs. HARTINI: Because Kartini was for all girls. It was a girls’ school. We were all girls. We were all students.
RM: This was that culture?
Mrs. HARTINI: Yes, and we learned Indonesian dances.
RM: Javanese?
Mrs. HARTINI: Javanese.
RM: Not Western dances?
Mrs. HARTINI: Oh no!200

There were, besides the Kartini schools, Taman Siswa schools, in the same realm of school alternative.

Mr. PURBO: Some of my friends say: “We went to a Taman Siswa school and thus we are truly nationalistic.” I can only say to this: “I went to a Dutch school, and I gave proof of my patriotism also.”201

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RM: All teachers in the Taman Siswa school were Indonesians, right? No Dutch.

Mr. KARKONO: They were all Indonesians, mostly Javanese; some were from Sumatra. When I graduated from the school I was sent out, on a mission for Taman Siswa.

RM: As a teacher?

Mr. KARKONO: No, I never made it to become a teacher. But they appreciated what I did. On my eightieth birthday I got a present and a letter of acknowledgment that I was a part of Taman Siswa.

RM: What was the school about, when you went there, in Yogyakarta?

Mr. KARKONO: There was especially much about culture in the school.

RM: What culture?

Mr. KARKONO: Javanese culture mostly. There was a large pendopo [open audience hall] where there was a gamelan and there we learned dance, drama, music, krontjong, and so on.

RM: Krontjong, too?

(Krontjong, we recall, were popular songs, music of the street, not far off from hawkers’ cries.)

Mr. KARKONO: Krontjong, too. We learned to play krontjong.

RM: Was there a radio?

Mr. KARKONO: No. Or, maybe, Ki Hadjar Dewantoro [the Taman Siswa founder and the principal of the Yogyakarta school] had a radio. Yes, we were all quite happy, playing gamelan and krontjong. Actually, I became a krontjong devotee. I even wrote lyrics for krontjong songs—like “Swadeshi.”

RM: Do you still remember the words?

Mr. KARKONO: No, it was in 1936. Swadeshi was a Gandhi movement; like *Ahimsa*, and we all knew about it. They wore clothes in India made of stuff that they were supposed to have woven themselves. Not like the textiles are nowadays.—Now, I recall the first line: “Properly dressed, I look at you, so beautiful and glowing.” It was about a young woman, with her hair let down to her shoulders; she wore batik. She was beautiful and glowing. And so on.
RM: Did you write any other song about politics?
Mr. KARKONO: I wrote a song about Taman Siswa — it was accompanied by gamelan — “Ladrang Taman Siswa.” This I wrote for a Taman Siswa reunion, the fiftieth anniversary, in 1972.
RM: In Yogyakarta, you lived in a Taman Siswa dormitory?
Mr. KARKONO: Yes. We, the older students got permission from Ki Hajar Dewantoro to manage our dormitory ourselves — there were twenty-five of us. It was called Asrama Merdeka [Freedom Dormitory]. Younger students mostly lived in the homes of the teachers. Girls lived in the home of the principal. Mrs. Dewantoro, her name was Wisna Rini, took the girls in.203

Intensely, and perhaps even more purely and devotedly than in the “non-alternative” modern schools in the colony, everything in Taman Siswa is recalled as moving, maturing — and even dying, if enough time is given — in the school space.

RM: Is there anybody, in politics or in life, of whom you think often as being close to you?
Mr. KARKONO: There was a man, and he was also a man of the movement, who accepted me like a son. He was from Taman Siswa; his name was Ki Soetopo Wonobojo. He was from an aristocratic family, and he joined the [nationalist] movement early on. But principally he was of Taman Siswa. I met him in 1932 or 1933. I was about eighteen.
RM: What happened?
Mr. KARKONO: He taught me. In the way of Taman Siswa. He gave me the broad outlines of life, of movement, of nation, of everything. Thus I was allowed to grow up.
RM: How did it happen?
Mr. KARKONO: He liked me. He invited me to his house and we talked. Also, when he died, he was buried at Taman Siswa.
RM: You still feel close to him.
Mr. KARKONO: He left me a dagger, as an heirloom. He did not leave the dagger to his children but to me.
RM: You still have it?
Mr. KARKONO: Once a year I bathe it in a prayer house.

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RM: Will you leave it to your children?
Mr. KARKONO: I do not know.

We were having tea now.

Mr. KARKONO: So, you will write about this?
RM: Yes, it will be about modern people living in a colony.
Mr. KARKONO: Yes, but the Taman Siswa people were not modern. They wanted to carry on with the cultural heritage, with what we got from our ancestors. We wished to apply this to the modern world, to cultivate an education that was appropriate to this society. There were Dutch schools. Taman Siswa was—half of it was—like a Dutch school. But it contained the Javanese, Indonesian culture. Our idea was—

Mr. Karkono used two Dutch words to say this.

Mr. KARKONO:—Nationale Onderwijs [National Education].

The people in the modern colony—working, suffering, and dreaming as much as elsewhere in the world—needed leaders. And the modern and colonial schools provided for leaders—for all leaders—and more totally than elsewhere in the world. It seemed to happen lightly. Particles of school energy and learning spilled, scattered through the colony, made for the articulation of, and indeed substituted for, politics and even revolution. The school energy veiled, and meshed with, the struggle for freedom—and made it learned.

Mr. MAWENGKANG: As a teacher, I planned to enter politics. When I got a teaching job in Makassar [Sulawesi], my attitude toward teaching—how to put it—loosened. Besides teaching, I began to work at a newspaper. I became a correspondent for a newspaper.
RM: It was a way to politics?
Mr. MAWENGKANG: It just went by itself. At the time the only political party in the place was Sarékat Islam [Islamic Union]. No other organization had gathered enough courage yet. So I joined Sarékat

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Islam. Then Sukarno founded PNI [Partai Nasional Indonesia, Indonesian National Party]. So I joined that.

RM: As a member?

Mr. MAWENGKANG: At the moment I joined, I was made a cadre. Because I had been to school and was a teacher, I instantly became a leader. At that time, one did not have to bring anything into the party, but one had to be willing to learn what politics was. We took courses. We learned and thus we grew up with politics. Already in 1927 I got close to Sukarno himself. We often had our meals together. He was a technical college graduate, a civil engineer, but he did eat with us.205

To enter politics, to move on, and to grow up, if only because the Dutch were too powerful to be challenged any other way, was done by learning.

RM: Do you still recall the moment when you entered the movement?

Mrs. LASMIDJAH: It was like: everything is going to make me like that. I read a book by Multatuli.206 And by Hatta—“we have to become free,” it was his thinking.207 I was still young, with a lot of dreams. And our teachers were not always able to keep up with it. Thus, in such situation, I remember, I told myself: “We all have to learn more, we must know how,” and it made me say: “Why not?” Some older friends, better educated than I, founded an organization: all members were to teach: “OK, each of us contribute one gulden, and we buy pens and notebooks.” Then we had a meeting. We did not know what a meeting was and what might be the technique of a meeting. Then they said: “You will be the chair person.” Perhaps because I was so respectful to them.

RM: What did you do?

Mrs. LASMIDJAH: We founded a school. An evening school. The students came to our houses. There were women, many of them widows. We organized lectures—to get together!208

In the 1910s and through the 1930s, as the colony’s masses increasingly suffered, and the colonial system was increasingly shaky—nationalist, anti-colonial, modern, and increasingly sophisticated political parties emerged in the colony.

RM: Because you were a good student?

Mr. KARKONO: I was one of the good students. And in the best school, it
is true. At the time, a group called Indonesia Moeda, Young Indonesia, was founded and in 1931 I joined it. I was still in the first year of senior high. Instantly I became the chairman of the city branch.

RM: Then you entered a political party?

Mr. KARKONO: Parindra [Partai Indonesia Raja, Party of Great Indonesia].

RM: Of Dr. Soetomo.

Mr. KARKONO: Yes, Dr. Soetomo. I joined him in 1935, when I was twenty-one. I became a member of the centrale.

RM: In some photographs from that time the Parindra youth are raising their right arms. It looks like a Nazi salute.

Mr. KARKONO: These were Dr. Soetomo’s youth cadres, Soerja Wirawan [Heroes of the Sun]. They had a salute like this. They were the Parindra youth. They had a uniform, as I remember it, green shirts with red and white ties.

RM: Red and white?

Mr. KARKONO: Yes, nationalist colors. Like the Boy Scouts, except they had long trousers. The Boy Scouts wore shorts.

RM: Boys and girls?

Mr. KARKONO: Yes.209

There were spaces and spots in the colony as exemplary as schools, sports fields, or clubs, and in the same category. They often represented a space and stage as elevated and pure as the modern and schooled men and women of the colony might ever reach. The next stage. The ultimate stage.

Mr. DES ALWI: One day, I swam in the Banda-Neira lagoon. I liked to swim there. It was February, which is during the western monsoon, and there were big waves, but in the lagoon the sea was calm. All of a sudden, a police officer appeared: “Get out of the water!” A Dutch ship was coming, Kapal Putih [White Ship]. We knew the ship; she used to carry internees to and from the Boven Digoel camp. I felt a bit annoyed to be chased away, and so I gathered my clothes but remained in the harbor and watched. I liked ships very much. One day I wanted to become a captain; in a white uniform, you know. The ship landed, several policemen went on board, and they came back with two men really nicely dressed. One of them was wearing glasses, both had white
jackets and white trousers, white shirts but without a tie and with an open collar. There was a hustle in the harbor. The Buginese coolies carried out the two men’s luggage. One of the men, the one without glasses, came to me and addressed me in Dutch. I answered: “Ja meneer” [Yes, sir]. I knew that they were coming from Boven Digoel, from the camp, because their faces were so pale, from malaria, you know.210

This is a story of two prisoners most exemplary of the late colonial times, Mohammad Hatta (with the glasses) and Soetan Sjahrir, the top leaders of the nationalist movement who ten years later, in 1945, would become the first vice-president and the first prime minister of the Indonesian independent state. The moment is described by then a boy who later became an adopted son of Sjahrir. The internment camp on the Upper (Boven) Digoel River in New Guinea, where the two just came from, was the most notorious, and exemplary, part of the Dutch colonial “Tropical Siberia.” Hatta and Sjahrir were being moved to a new place, Banda-Neira, the capital of Banda archipelago, still quite isolated, but halfway closer to the center of modern colonial civilization in Java. After one year at Digoel, the two men were allowed to a softer place of exile, less malaric and less lonesome, because they were “academicians.” This was the official explanation: Hatta held a degree of doctorandus; he was a PhD candidate from the Rotterdam School of Commerce. Sjahrir, as far as it was known, had enrolled and attended lectures for a year at the venerable University of Leiden.

There is of course nothing new in the connection between modern prisons, internment camps, knowledge, and pedagogy; not just in a colony.212

Mrs. SUKARSIH: Yes, Hatta had a gramophone in the Digoel camp. And yes, we regularly got together in the camp, listening, coming to see Hatta, debating. There were several among us who went to Hatta’s place to take lessons. He taught us.213

It was the greatness of the camp, truly a myth of the camp, that made the space outside the camp—along the road to the camp, like the space away from school—appear and feel like as yet at large, on the lam, as yet not en-camped. In contrast to not-yet-like-that towns and neighborhoods in the colony, made of “workers, petite bourgeoisie, officials, etc., etc.,”214 the
camp at Boven Digoel was made of “cadres,” political activists, who had passed the courses and the tests. (Indeed, a serious attempt was made, in that select place, to plant the first seed of a future Indonesian “communist society.”215)

RM: What was most difficult in Digoel?
Mrs. SUKARSIH: There was not enough food. There was not enough happiness. Things were lacking.

Mrs. Sukarsih was in her mid eighties when I met her. She went to the Digoel camp accompanying her husband, Mr. Moerwoto, an activist for Sukarno, Hatta, and Sjahrir. After seven years in the camp, husband and wife went different ways. He later married another woman.

Mrs. SUKARSIH: In the end, I lost everything, everything that makes one happy.
RM: Tell me more about the camp. How they kept you there?
Mrs. SUKARSIH: There was a camp for the military guards, and it was surrounded by wire. But there was no wire around our camp. We often had picnics, and sometimes went up river, in canoes. We paddled and then we had a lunch up there.

How was it that she joined her husband? Who paid for her trip?

Mrs. SUKARSIH: The government did.
RM: It means that the government wished you to go?
Mrs. SUKARSIH: They asked us: “Do you want to keep the family together? If you do, if you go, the government will pay for the trip.”

They met as high school students in Bandung. Moerwoto was in Pergerakan Banteng, the Wild Buffalo Movement, she in Sadar Istri, the Conscious Woman, which agitated against polygamy and organized “alternative schools.”

Mrs. SUKARSIH: From Bandung we were taken by police. By train, we went to Tanjung Priok [Jakarta harbor], and then by ship to Surabaya, Makassar, Ambon, Banda-Neira, and Digoel.
RM: It was a difficult trip?

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Mrs. Sukarsi: Ordinary. Because we were of the movement, it was relaxed.

RM: When you arrived at Digoel, was there some shelter ready for you?

Mrs. Sukarsi: There were barracks built of logs. Only Hatta had a house built for him beforehand. Because he was a doctorandus.

The other internees had to build their own houses.

Mrs. Sukarsi: We built a house, for the two of us. We had to get the timber ourselves.

RM: There was a kitchen—

Mrs. Sukarsi: Yes, there was a kitchen. A simple one, like the village people in Java usually have. Some friends brought their own chairs and tables on the ship, beds, complete, bedding and kitchenware.

The internees were even allowed to have servants.

Mrs. Sukarsi: Yes, the Kaja-Kaja [name given to Papuans, supposedly meaning “friends”]. From the forest. We had to teach them first.

RM: Like how?

Mrs. Sukarsi: They used not to wear any clothes. Just a strip of something, you know, around here. Fortunately, we had some spare clothing, so we put it on them. And they stank. We had to teach them to wash. We gave them soap and made them put clothes on, trousers, shirts, and skirts. The women had their breasts uncovered.

RM: But they were good people?

Mrs. Sukarsi: Good, yes, good. When they were good, we were also good. But just the look of them! They were often sick, and they often left—many of them, when they were sick, to die in the forest, we were told.

There was in the camp, and maybe essentially more than in the colony at large, an acute sense of civilization, progress, and especially learning—“sublime and grotesque, atrocious and laughable . . . beyond tragedy.”

Mrs. Sukarsi: There was a band and we would sing. There was some pleasure. It was not so difficult.

RM: You were a young woman.
Mrs. SUKARSIH: Yes, there were sports, tennis, badminton—
RM: Was there some dancing in Digoel?
Mrs. SUKARSIH: Oh, yes! There was a band. Sjahrir especially liked to teach us to dance. Waltzes, foxtrots. There was a concert almost every day.
RM: Krontjong?
Mrs. SUKARSIH: Hawaiian.
RM (recalling that white ship in Banda-Neira): Did not you find it strange, maybe even unfair, that Hatta and Sjahrir were allowed to leave Boven Digoel, after just a year or so, for a softer place, while you were made to stay?
Mrs. SUKARSIH: No. It was because they were academicians. It would not be nice to be jealous. And in 1942 [six years later], I was also allowed to go. I returned to Bandung.
RM: Your parents were still alive?
Mrs. SUKARSIH: Yes.
RM: They must have been happy.
Mrs. SUKARSIH: They were happy to see me again, very happy.217

It was chilling perhaps, but a language of freedom, with a modern and colonial sense to it, in which Mrs. Sukarsih let me know about Boven Digoel.

Mrs. SUKARSIH: And we also played theater in the camp.
RM: You played?
Mrs. SUKARSIH: I did not play. I just watched. And there was a debate club, too; and gamelan, the Javanese music, and Sumatran music—

This interview more than others was impressive, powerful by being repetitious, repetitious, repetitious like that life.

Mrs. SUKARSIH: The first thing in the morning, I boiled water for drinking. Then Moerwoto went to the garden. I did not. I was afraid. Bad things might happen if we dared too far from our house, to the edge of the camp where there were no guards. Some Kaja-Kaja people might be after us, after our clothes, or our axes. I was afraid. — But we had to have servants.
RM: Kaja-Kaja men? And women, too?
Mrs. SUKARSIH: Men and women, too. Couples.
RM: So it was not so bad if you did not go too far?
Mrs. SUKARSIH: It was OK. I had servants, one time a couple, and I taught them to read.
RM: In what language?
Mrs. SUKARSIH: Indonesian, of course. At the beginning, they just watched us: nyam nyam, it was their whole language. We taught them Indonesian, and also to boil the water in the morning. They brought it to the house, in front of the door. Like here. (Mrs. Sukarsih points from where we sit, outside, toward the door.) They learned. To boil water and to cook a little. They got trousers and shirts. But when they left, they often did not take it with them.
RM: They had children in the camp, as well?
Mrs. SUKARSIH: We took them into our house only when they had no children. When the woman got pregnant, she went away. They called me *mama komunis* [mammy communist], and the men were *papa komunis*. When *mama komunis* was around, they wore trousers. When *mama komunis* was not, they did not.
RM: There were movies, right?
Mrs. SUKARSIH: Oh, yes. There were not yet talkies in the camp. We had only silent movies, and we were not happy about it. The talkies already existed and we still had only silent movies. Oh, yes, and there was also a gramophone.
RM: Yes, you told me.
Mrs. SUKARSIH: Hatta brought one. And also books, he brought sixteen boxes of books. His house was full of them.218

Mr. Mawengkang was sent to Boven Digoel in 1936, and stayed there until 1943.

RM: Was there a place to stay ready for you in Boven Digoel?
Mr. MAWENGKANG: When we arrived I moved with friends. Later I built a house for myself. I asked for a plot of land, close to the edge of the camp, so I could have a larger garden. I got metal sheeting for the roof from the government. It was a small house, three by four meters.
RM: One room.
Mr. MAWENGKANG: Bedroom and guest room; the kitchen was outside. Three by four.
RM: Was there a window?
Mr. MAWENKANG: Yes.
RM: With glass?
Mr. MAWENKANG: No. We used bark.
RM: Were there lamps?
Mr. MAWENKANG: If there was money for kerosene; otherwise we used candles. We began with candles.
RM: What about water?
Mr. MAWENKANG: We tried to build a house close to the river.

But there were crocodiles in the river.

Mr. MAWENKANG: There were crocodiles. It was risky. Some people did not dare.
RM: Was there anything to read? Books?
Mr. MAWENKANG: Oh, yes.
RM: Newspapers?
Mr. MAWENKANG: Newspapers arrived every six weeks.

There were schools in Boven Digoel. More schools per capita than in the colony outside the camp.\(^{219}\) There were quarters in the camp with names: A, B, C, D, E, and F.

Mr. MAWENKANG: To go outside was always risky. Mostly we stayed in the camp. When we were inside, we could talk with friends, borrow a book here and there, and study. Several friends went outside and never came back. When this happened, we did not know what to do, and the person was probably already dead anyway. (Mr. Mawengkang takes some photographs out of his desk drawer.) Here is a Catholic church. Here is a mosque. This is the doctor’s house. These are some Digoel internees who have just arrived.
RM: You never thought about escape?
Mr. MAWENKANG: We did plan it often, and once I tried. I ran for three days.
RM: Just you?
Mr. MAWENKANG: There were two friends with me.
RM: Did you have a map?
Mr. MAWENKANG: No. We tried to keep close to the river.

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RM: Did you have any weapons?
Mr. MAWENGKANG: Machetes. We always had machetes when we went to the gardens.
RM: You were in the forest for three days? There was no hope?
Mr. MAWENGKANG: The Kaja-Kaja had bows. They could hit you from afar. We had just machetes. Machetes cannot fly.
RM: After three days you went back to the camp?
Mr. MAWENGKANG: Back.

This was, perhaps, as close as one might get to what I call “promenades”: through a test site that might occasionally grow into a wasteland, with all possible unrest “canalized . . . in a manner that leaves untouched the material foundations of society,” with a body “still [perhaps] capable of being sacrificed,” that still, perhaps, “retains and persists in making sense”; in the world of “anguished liberality,” where one is “more or less allowed to run free and expose his wounds.” Run fast and, by all means, along

... high-speed roads and railways, interchanges, airports . . . , or the great commercial centers, or the extended transit camps where the planet’s refugees are parked.

... toward campsites, youth hostels/barracks; camps everywhere, the great camp of territory.

“The precious lesson of the camps and the gulags,” as Paul Virilio wrote, “has not been heeded, because it was erroneously presented not only as an ideological phenomenon, but also as a static one, an enclosure.” Through a “postproletarian park” of sorts, through commonplace, before a revolution could ever be attempted, rebels like Mr. Mawengkang struggled without a map (true, some others had a map—the Bos School Atlas). Along the avenues, paths, and promenades of the highly modern, and professionally designed cities, landscapes, and camps, Mr. Mawengkang and his generation of magnificents moved.